

Innovations

Perceived Obstacles to Effective Feedback in Nigerian Higher Education Institution

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Abstract: *This study explores the perceptions of Nigerian higher education (HE) teachers and undergraduate students of obstacles to effective student feedback to teacher (SFT). Using a purposeful sampling procedure and interview methodology, we obtained rich information from 76 participants comprising 46 Nigerian HE teachers and 30 final year undergraduate students from 6 Nigerian public universities on the perceived four obstacles to effective SFT. Focusing on four dominant themes from the thematic analysis, we analyse the perceived obstacles to effective SFT practice: low awareness of SFT, little emphasis on SFT, lack of student invitation to feedback surveys and difficulty coping with negative feedback from students. The findings of this study support SFT as an essential school improvement tool that can inform teachers about the efficiency of their practices. The study will be useful for HE teachers, HE management, curriculum developers, students, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to promote the quality student feedback.*

Keywords: *Student Feedback, Higher Education, Teaching and Learning, Assessment*

Introduction

Collecting feedback from students has been an established practice at higher education (HE) level in developed and some developing countries for giving information to teachers on their teaching practices and as part of teaching assessment (Denson, Loveday and Johnson 2010; Mandouit 2018). Despite the wide research on the use of student feedback in HE systems, with focus on teacher perceptions of feedback, as well as whether the gathering of feedback leads to improvement (e.g., Mandouit 2018), little is known about the obstacles to the systematic use of student feedback in Nigerian HE contexts. For clarity, we adopt the term student feedback to teacher (SFT) instead of student feedback in order to differentiate the widely researched concept of teachers giving feedback to students. The current study aims to focus more on an aspect of student feedback that, as far as we know, is under-

researched in Nigerian HE contexts. It concerns itself with exploring the perceptions of Nigerian HE teachers and undergraduate students of obstacles to effective SFT.

Feedback is an essential tool for gathering relevant information regarding teaching quality, and teacher or student performances in the HE institutions (Careless and Boud 2018; Sakr and Burghardt2020). Building on Mandouit's (2018) description of effective student feedback, the current study defines SFT as a systematic process of gathering information from students about their views of teacher practices; teacher teaching strengths, weaknesses and the quality of the overall education programme (see Figure 1). SFT enable teachers to understand areas of their teaching skills that require improvements (Evans 2013; Grebennikov and Shah 2013; Schartel 2012). To gather feedback from students, teachers can structure the feedback in form of questionnaires (Hand and Rowe 2001) to allow students to agree or disagree on issues or questions, and share to students either face-to-face or email messages (Gun 2011). As Mandouit (2018: 756) explained: "the most common method for gathering feedback is via student ratings of their level of satisfaction and perceptions of learning gains at the end of a subject."Mandouit further pointed out that "students maybe asked to respond with their level of agreement (*strongly disagree* – *strongly agree*) to various statements, such as, 'I found this subject interesting' and 'The teacher was well prepared for classes'.Delva et al., (2013) asserts that students have to participate actively in the feedback process to evaluate the teaching process in order to suggest possible areas of teaching and learning improvements.This is in line with Laurillard' (2002: 55) argument that "action without feedback is completely unproductive". The SFT can be given in several ways, for example, it could be given voluntarily, anonymously, numerical, verbal, at the middle or end of course or programme.While the current study acknowledges that caution must be taken when analyzing responses of students on feedback surveys due to possible bias (Burke 2009; Eriksson, Boistrupand Thornberg 2018),it argues that SFTis essential for improving teacher practices.

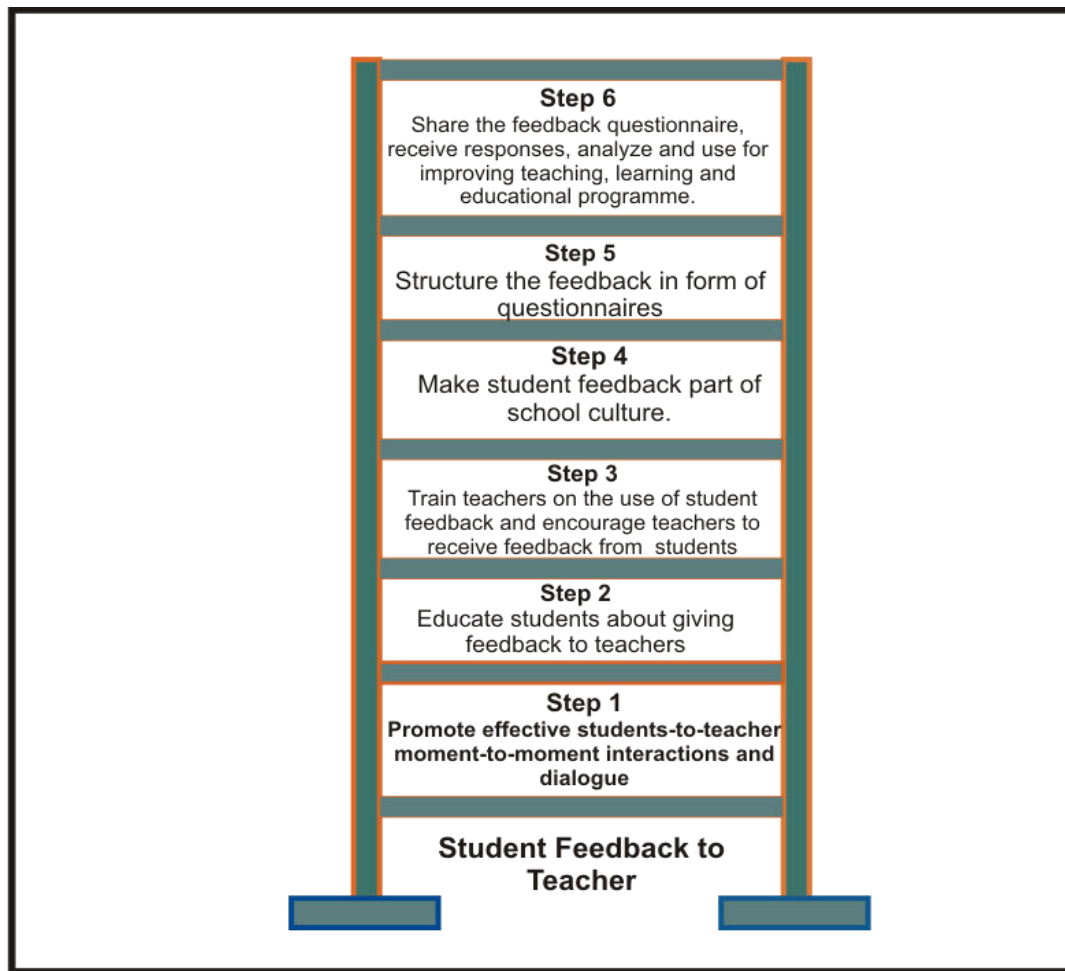


Figure 1: Author illustration of steps in SFT

Usefulness of student feedback

Building on Marsh and Dunkin's (1992) works, SFT can be used to evaluate teachers on their teacher practices, measure teachers' efficiency, offer relevant information for students intending to select courses of study and data for use in studies on teaching improvement. Also, Winstone, Nash, Parker, and Rowntree (2017) found that students who are allowed to provide feedback to the teaching they receive tend to be more motivated, knowing that their voices are heard and that their suggestions or recommendations are useful to their teachers (Seldin 1997). As Seldin (1997: 336) explained, "many teachers think that they are already doing good jobs in the classroom; perceptions that reduce their interest in strengthening their performance". Students may become more committed to acting on feedback surveys if they notice possible improvements based on their previous evaluations and recommendations (Gun 2011; Malecka, Boud, and Careless 2020).

Despite the perceived significance of SFT as a “valuable improvement tool, and a powerful stimulus for teacher reflection” (Mandouit 2018: 755), previous studies have questioned the quality of SFT (e.g., Hattie 2009). Some studies argued that SFT may contain little meaning and criticized students’ ability to provide quality feedback that can help teachers to improve their teacher practices (e.g., Abrami, d’Apollonia and Rosenfield 2007). Although, through SFT, students may be asked to respond to issues that are beyond their capacity or be pushed to make a judgment on issues instead of giving quality suggestions. However, Mandouit (2018: 756) explained that “despite these concerns, there remains a significant amount of literature supporting the use of student feedback as a valuable source of information in which to consider teacher performance and improvement”.

Problems students encounter when giving feedback to teachers

While feedback is essential for providing formative and summative evaluation, and for enhancing teacher practices, research has shown that students encounter some problems during SFT process (e.g., Shute 2008). One of the major problems is a lack of clarity about the goals of the feedback. Poulos and Mahony (2008) explained that the effectiveness of SFT depends on the clarity about its purpose. Therefore, emphasis should be on the design of SFT surveys or questionnaires to ensure clarity. Henderson et al. (2019: 1405) found that successful feedback practices are influenced by the feedback design, capacity of the people involved and the institutional culture. Moreover, to create effective feedback, one needs to consider more than simply how to ‘deliver’ feedback comments. Henderson et al.’s study showed that feedback is influenced by designs. In other words, students may have difficulty responding to feedback surveys that are not appropriately designed. Another problem that students may encounter is providing quality feedback. Students may have communication problems caused by a lack of training on giving feedback to teachers and this may inhibit students from engaging fully in giving quality feedback to their teachers. Although previous studies have questioned the quality of student feedback adding that students’ responses may not be meaningful to teachers (e.g., Abrami, d’Apollonia and Rosenfield 2007), further research is needed to uncover obstacles to effective SFT.

Feedback Collection Challenges

Earlier studies (e.g., Evans 2013; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree and Parker 2017) have identified some difficulties to effective feedback process in HE institutions, however, our focus in this section is particularly, on the problems that teachers encounter when collecting feedback from students. Building on these previous studies, we explain two problems affecting SFT effectiveness: teachers’ time and workload pressure and teacher’s lack of familiarity with the assessment framework and frustration with inconsistent policies (e.g., Conca, Schechter, and Castle 2004). First, teachers face

challenges while preparing SFT questionnaires due to the amount of time they spend on other education-related programmes such as preparing lesson plans and teaching notes, designing class assignments and quizzes, designing mid-semester and end of the semester examinations, student supervisions, conferences and workshops presentations and conducting research studies. Dawson et al., (2018: 25) claim that “in contrast to the effective feedback possibilities expounded in the literature, students generally report in surveys that feedback is done poorly in higher education.” Therefore, teachers’ lack of time and workload pressure may significantly affect the effectiveness of feedback and how teachers apply feedback in Nigerian HE institutions. Second, teacher’s lack of familiarity with the assessment framework and frustration with inconsistent policies account, in part, for the limited discussion of instructional ideas linked to assessment (Conca, Schechter, and Castle 2004). Furthermore, teachers’ low knowledge of gathering student feedback as an improvement tool and performance measure (e.g., Mandouit 2018) may cause student disappointment about the transparency and evenness of the assessment (e.g., Le, Janssen and Wubbels 2018). While previous studies highlighted some of the problems teachers encounter when applying SFT, these studies have not sufficiently made clear the fundamental causes of these problems, particularly, in Nigerian HE contexts, and this requires further research.

Previous studies show that Nigerian HE students have not been consistent with giving feedback to teachers, thus, their opinions do not often count in making decisions that affect them such as teaching improvement, learning quality, course designs and organization, assessment as well as the provision of teaching and learning resources (Agboola and Olajide 2015; Inko-Tariah 2013; Nakpodia 2010). Also, previous studies have shown that in Nigerian HE institutions, engaging students in teaching evaluation process through SFT has not been sufficiently improved and effectively practised (Anani, Badaki, and Kamai 2016; Okogbaa 2016; Okolie, Nwosu and Mlanga 2019). According to Rust, Price, and O’Donovan (2003), to ensure quality teaching, it is essential to effectively monitor and evaluate what students are being taught. “Students who are at the receiving end of what the teachers teach should have a unique position to evaluate what happens in classrooms” (Inko-Tariah 2013: 22).

It is important to note that students’ involvement in evaluating HE teachers’ teaching practices is a practical demonstration of democracy in the HE system (Iyamu and Aduwa-Oglebaen 2005). However, while previous studies have reported the benefits of student feedback (e.g., Beran and Rokosh 2009; Eriksson, Boistrup and Thornberg 2018; Mandouit 2018; Sakrand Burghardt 2020) in international literature, little is known about how obstacles to effective SFT have hindered such benefits of SFT, particularly, in Nigerian HE contexts. Also, while previous studies have acknowledged that SFT has not been effectively practised in Nigerian HE institutions (e.g., Agboola and Olajide

2015;Dabalen and Okogbaa 2016;Inko-Tariah 2013; Nakpodia 2010), little is known about the obstacles to effective SFT in Nigerian contexts. Therefore, the current study focuses more on exploring the perceptions of Nigerian HE teachers and undergraduate students of obstacles to effective SFT. Specifically, the current study answered the following two research questions:

- a. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of the SFT practice in their HEIs?
- b. What obstacles to effective student feedback do teachers and students perceive during the process of SFT?

Methodology

A qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with HE teachers and the undergraduate students meets the requirements, principles and procedures of the HEIs where the current study was conducted. According to Morcom (2014: 21), "qualitative research methodology endeavours to understand the world of the participant by situating the researcher with all their values and assumptions in that world." Ethical guidelines of the HEIs for conducting research were followed. For example, the teachers and students were formally written, informing them about the aim of the study, all participants gave their consent to fully participate. Also, the participants were assured of anonymity such that the interview opinions could not be traced back to them.

Selecting participants

Selecting participants for the current study was in twofold. First, purposeful sampling technique (Palinkas et al. 2015) was used to select six Nigerian public universities (three federal and three state universities within the six geo-political zones of Nigeria; one university from each zone). The motive for selecting only the public universities is on the notion that they have a larger population of students, HE teachers and more programmes of study. The HE teachers were invited through face-to-face invitation, which requested their profiles. This helped to determine their eligibility for participating in the current study. Only lecturers who have used SFT surveys for improving teaching practices or studied and worked partly in developed countries' universities where the use of student feedback is well practised were selected to participate in the study. Through this approach, a total of 46 HE teachers (males = 19, females = 27; ages = 39 to 63 years old; rank = Lecturer 1 to Professor; teaching experience = 6 to 24 years) willingly participated in this study, and their responses were used in the final data set (e.g., Krueger, 2000). The HE teachers taught in the fields of Health Education, Educational Foundations, Physics, Chemistry, Agricultural Economics, Languages and Linguistics, Geography, Vocation and Technical Education, Food Sciences, Animal Sciences, Economics, Biology, Microbiology, Biochemistry, Business Management and Theatre Arts in their respective HEIs.

Second, final year undergraduate students were purposefully selected from the same six Nigerian public universities, and the same afore-mentioned fields of study (e.g., Onwuegbuzie and Collins 2007). The choice of the final year undergraduate students was on the assumption that they had spent more time in HEIs and, therefore, can share substantial information regarding the use of SFT in their HEIs. It is important to learn that failure to include students in this study can limit the study's ability to draw a full picture of the obstacles to effective SFT in Nigerian HEIs. The final year undergraduates were approached by face-to-face contact. The motive for approaching the students individually and by face-to-face contact was to ensure that HE teachers and the school management do not influence the students' decisions to participate in this study. In total, 30 final year undergraduate students (males = 14 females = 16; age = 21 to 28 years old) willingly participated in the current study and their responses were used for the final data set. Overall, the total population of the study is 76, comprising 46 HE teachers and 30 final year undergraduate students. Following the assumptions of Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), the number of participants was considered appropriate for the present study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The HE teachers and the students were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol (e.g., Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2014). The participants were interviewed at their convenience and time by face-to-face approach. All participants spoke in English language, as English is the academic official language in Nigerian. During the interviews with the participants, the main focus included goals of SFT, awareness of SFT, student preparation for SFT, SFT process in their HEIs, giving feedback, responding to feedback surveys and analyzing feedback for assessment of teaching. Along with these main topics, the interviewer asked participants whether they had encountered any difficulty in the process of SFT. For example, some of the questions include: in your own opinion, "Have students been participating in SFT?", "Have teachers been giving feedback surveys to students for responses?", "Have teachers been practicing the SFT practice?", "How often do students give feedback to teachers?", "How do teachers cope with SFT responses?", "Have teachers and students been trained on the use of SFT and how consistent is such training?", "Do you have any problem during the process of SFT? If yes, what are they? Have you perceived some obstacles to effective SFT? If yes, what are?", etcetera. The interviewer adopted probing and follow-up questions (e.g., 'How come?', 'What do you mean?' and 'Tell me more'), encouraging participants to elaborate on certain points, while ensuring that participants adhered to the main theme of the interview (e.g. Eriksson, Boistrup and Thornberg 2018). The interviews lasted an average of 43 minutes, and the entire process of data lasted a period of 5 months.

The transcripts of the interviews were transcribed verbatim (Blair 2015), checked for accuracy, and then coded using NVivo version 12 Plus –(a qualitative analysis programme developed by QSR International Pty). Thematic analysis was employed to analyze data. The researcher applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to qualitative data analysis involving: familiarizing with the data, assigning preliminary codes to the data in order to describe the content, searching for patterns or themes in the codes across the interviews and focus groups, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. Overall, the key research questions were useful in identifying the leading and interesting contexts of discussion (Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2012). Numbers were added to participants for easy identification of their respective illustrative quotes.

Results

The current study explores the perceptions of Nigerian HE teachers and undergraduate students of obstacles to effective SFT. From the thematic analysis, four main themes were identified based on the research questions: low awareness of SFT, little emphasis on SFT, lack of student invitation to feedback surveys and difficulty coping with negative feedback from students

Theme 1: Low awareness of SFT

Reflecting earlier discussion on the formal processes of gathering information from students about their perceptions of teacher practices, teacher effectiveness and the quality of educational programmes (Mandouit 2018; Richardson 2005), the current study's emphasis on SFT raises awareness that gathering valuable information from students about their perceptions of teacher practices, teacher effectiveness and the quality of HE education programme requires high awareness of SFT practice in Nigerian HEIs. Participants felt the need for including feedback activities in HE programmes, courses and most importantly in the HE curriculum in order to make SFT a core part of the teaching and learning process. Majority of the participants commented on their low awareness of SFT for enhancing quality teaching and teacher practices:

I am aware that student feedback to teacher can help teachers to improve their teaching quality and even the quality of higher education learning. I have used it while I was on a fellowship programme at a European university. But I have not gathered students' feedback about my teaching performance since I returned to my university here in Nigeria. This is due to the low awareness of student feedback to teacher and our university system doesn't seem to encourage student feedback to teacher (HE Teacher-13).

This participant's description indicates that some of the HE teachers in the current study are aware of gathering feedback from students for evaluating teaching performance and quality. However, there appears to be little encouragement on SFT practice in Nigerian HEIs as many participants confirm this. This is clearer from the excerpt below:

During my Masters' Degree programme at a European university, a particular professor was consistent in gathering feedback from us about her teaching methods and performance. I used to look forward to her feedback surveys because I was curious to learn why she constantly sought student feedback. She said I want to become a better higher education teacher. Students' evaluation of my teaching quality helps me to an extent to achieve my goals as a university teacher. But as you and I know it...the Nigerian higher education institutions have a low awareness of student feedback to teacher and its usefulness for improving teacher practices (HE Teacher-22).

The narrative of this participant suggests that HE teachers who intend to self-assess themselves on their teaching practices and performance can always get useful feedback from students for improvements. While many of the participants pointed out that Nigerian HE system has not been encouraging SFT practice, the above response shows that participants understand the concept of SFT and are pleased to engage in feedback process if their HEIs can encourage SFT practice. Reflecting on McFadzien' (2015:16) assertion, "teaching in the 21st century has begun to shift from a pedagogy which views the teacher as the bearer of all knowledge to an approach that values reciprocal learning." One of the undergraduate students explains:

A lecturer once asked us to rate her teaching performance after her last class for the semester. It was a bit strange to us and I was confused because we weren't conversant with giving feedback to our lecturers regarding their teaching practices. So, she shared a survey about her teaching, some of us were afraid to give any response because; we didn't want her to feel bad reading our comments about some of her poor practices..., and at the same time, we didn't want her to feel too excited about her teaching styles (Undergraduate Student-17).

This participant's narrative highlights the importance of Nigerian HEIs creating awareness and educating students about giving feedback to teachers and working out effective strategies for implementing SFT without which the students may not effectively contribute to improving teacher practices and the quality of teaching they receive. This corroborates Mandouit's (2018: 756) assertion that "student feedback has also been found to provide valuable information about students' perceptions of assessment and teaching processes". Majority of the students in the current study

appeared to see SFT practice as strange due to low awareness. Such a perspective suggests the need for periodic training of students and teachers on SFT practice. This will help to increase the students' and teachers' awareness of the potential benefits, as well as the challenges of effective SFT practice.

Theme 2: Little emphasis on SFT

Participants explained how little emphasis on SFT by the Nigerian HEIs has become an obstacle to effective SFT. They appeared to agree that their HEIs have focused more on other aspects of education such as student enrolment, course designs, creation of new departments and programmes, accreditation of departments, student examinations and graduations, etc., with less emphasis on gathering information from students about teacher practices and improving the quality of education programmes. One of the participants explains:

Our universities focus on other areas other than student evaluation of teacher practices...there is a little emphasis on student feedback to teacher, particularly in my university. But...what could be more important than understanding the perceptions of students (the major higher education stakeholders) regarding issues that concern them most? (HE Teacher – 33).

This participant's response explains the importance of recognizing students as stakeholders in Nigerian HEIs whose opinions should count on issues that most concern them such as teaching and learning process. This is in line with Nwajiuba et al.'s (2020) suggestion that students are important stakeholders in the HEIs and therefore, should be trained and encouraged to recognize their role in the assessment of teacher practices and education programme. However, a participant narrates:

As a member of the university senate, I realized that we mostly make changes or take decisions that concern our students at the management level without seeking the students' opinions. This happens because there is less emphasis on student feedback (HE Teacher 14).

The value participants placed on SFT was evident from the data. While some argued that their HEIs have placed less value or emphasis on SFT despite the perceived benefits, many affirmed that placing high value and emphasis on SFT could play a positive role in encouraging students to give relevant suggestions that can help to improve not only the teaching quality but other educational programmes:

I've been thinking of this for a very long time...; has it not become obvious that we need to create a mechanism for gathering students' views about how our universities

can improve operations? Can't the students' views be considered even during curriculum reviews and redesign, introducing new courses, activities or programmes? Our universities must realize that students can make meaningful contributions toward improving almost all areas of educational programmes (Undergraduate Student-12).

This participant raises important issues that need further investigations such as; students' ability to make meaningful contributions toward improving the curriculum, introduction of new courses, activities or programmes as well as how to create a mechanism for gathering students' views about how universities can improve their operations. Majority of the participants felt that students tend to understand societal and employers' job demands and could make suggestions for improving the education programmes such that these current demands can be built into new educational programmes, courses, curriculum and activities. This response implies a need for sensitizing curriculum planners about the possible benefits of SFT practice. This corroborates McFadzien's (2015: 17) finding that "by students reflecting on their understanding, they provide feedback for the teacher which can indicate where teaching needs to be focused."

Theme 3: Lack of student invitation to feedback surveys

Participants appeared to agree that the HE teachers in the current do not often invite students to respond to feedback surveys. One of the HE teachers explains:

I've taught for 12 years at my university, I can't recall how often I invite students to evaluate my teaching performance. I doubt if I've ever shared any feedback survey to students to assess my teaching quality. I mean...why being assessed by my students? Do they have the competence to assess my teaching performance? (HE Teacher-5).

This statement explains the perceptions of many Nigerian HE teachers regarding SFT practice. This participant believed that students may not be competent to assess teachers' teaching performance and practices. This response explains Seldin' (1997: 336) assertion that "many teachers think that they are already doing good jobs in the classroom; perceptions that reduce their interest in strengthening their performance". The expression by this participant in the current study indicates that some Nigerian HE teachers may spend their entire years of teaching without gathering students' feedback about their teaching performance because they feel that students lack qualifications to assess them. Although, majority of the participants pointed out that HE teachers who do not receive feedback from students about their teaching practices may be missing important information that can help them to enhance student learning outcomes. Examples of information that teachers can get through SFTs

include; classroom development, degree of equity shown to students, the level of teacher-student rapport and the frequency of adopting student-centred teaching:

[...] I've always wanted to make suggestions on how to improve the teaching I receive from our lecturers, because, many of them are just not good at some areas and therefore need to be told...[Laughs] But, I've never been invited once by any of them and the university management doesn't seem to care (Undergraduate Student-4).

This statement explains the students' interests and willingness to give feedback to teachers about their teaching practice. Participants noted that students who wish to offer useful suggestions for improving teaching practices and school effectiveness may not have such an opportunity if they are not often invited by teachers and the university management who may benefit from their suggestions. Participants pointed out that addressing a lack of student invitation to feedback surveys might entail the establishment of feedback management offices in every Nigerian HEI to facilitate the engagement of students in providing information for improving teacher practices and education quality. The following excerpt explains this idea:

Our universities need to establish feedback management offices that can be empowered to manage the overall process of student feedback practice. The office will be guided by new policies developed by our universitiesassessment of teacher practices and educational programmes (HE Teacher – 9).

Participants suggested that the proposed office could be charged with reaching out to teachers and students within the HEIs and those on internship programmes in industries – for example, the office might be involved through volunteering in training students and teachers in feedback design, response and analysis. However, it is important to acknowledge that SFT may fall below the standard for evaluating the HE teachers' teaching performances or quality. But, to improve teaching, students' inputs can barely be ignored despite any systematic measures applied. This corroborates Seldin's (1997: 344) assertion that "the opinion of those who eat the dinner should be considered if we want to know how it tastes." Participants reflected on the possible consequences of not inviting students to contribute to improving the teachings they receive. One of the students explains:

Yes... many of us have not been invited by many of our lecturers to respond to feedback surveys. The consequence is that we simply accept whatever teachingpractice,styles, performance or quality we receive from our lecturers with no choices(Undergraduate Student - 15).

Drawing on this participant's perspective, it is evident that HE regulatory bodies could build on the perceived benefits of establishing SFT management office. For example, through such efforts, students could be made to understand how important their constructive responses to feedback surveys can help to improve quality teaching and teacher practices and help teachers to be able to interpret, analyze and use students' responses successfully. This corroborates Mandouit's (2018: 766) finding that feedback is useful in assisting teachers to identify misconceptions held by students in the teaching and learning process – information that "enlightened teachers to a range of factors influencing the teaching and learning process, for example, classroom dynamics; learning difficulties; and, amount of assessments on at any time, and supported positive relationships between teachers and students."

Theme 4: Difficulty coping with negative feedback from students

Participants appeared to agree that another obstacle to effective SFT in Nigerian HEIs is difficulty coping with students' negative responses. Participants explained that many students may use the feedback survey opportunity to give negative comments or criticize their teachers and the school management instead of providing constructive feedback. This is clearer from one of the participants:

Sometimes, I feel so hurt and depressed after hearing students' negative comments about me. So, I try to avoid such comments from students and it is a major reason why I do not like to gather information from students about my teaching quality and practices (HE Teacher -39).

This participant's explanation explains why many HE teachers in the current study avoided getting student feedback about their teaching quality and practices. Majority of the participants explained that the teacher avoidance of negative comments, which could cause depression made teachers not to invite students to evaluate their teaching practices. They further pointed out that while this may be a way to stay off hurts associated with negative feedback from students, HE teachers who can keep their ego in check can find students' negative comments useful:

I do not like negative comments about me. And you know... majority of the students may capitalize on their teachers' areas of incompetence to hurt the teachers. Although, another issue is that many of us appear not to put our ego in check (HE Teacher -2).

Another participant explains:

To be very honest, I dislike giving negative information about my lecturers. But, I am also convinced that pointing out important things that my lecturers are not doing well is not a

bad idea too. Our lecturers need to learn how to cope with student feedback whether positive or negative (Undergraduate Student-9).

These participants highlighted an important issue: teachers need to put their ego in check in order to cope with students' negative comments and make appropriate use of such comments for improvements if properly analyzed. However, many participants gave some pointers:

I feel that lecturers and students need continuous training on giving and receiving feedback (HE Teacher-18)

It is worth noting that adequate training of teachers and student on SFT practice can increase students' and HE teachers' feedback orientation. Majority of the participants affirmed that such training can help teachers to design quality feedback surveys, interpret and understand the students' responses and analyze the responses for improving teacher practices. This agrees with Mandouit' (2018: 766) assertion that "professional development is an essential part of the student feedback process." In other words, training teachers and students on giving and receiving feedback can help to change the students' and teachers' mind-set about SFT practice. This will help teachers and students to properly engage in the gathering of feedback to address learners' needs:

Our institutions can start from organizing seminars and workshops periodically specifically on the use of student feedback. This will be helpful (Undergraduate Student-6).

This participant's response helps to illustrate that teachers and students can be encouraged and mentored by sharing feedback problems with experts, and this will be facilitated if the HEIs can establish policies on SFT practice and establish student feedback management offices to engage experts in the field. The participants' views and narratives imply that professional development of teachers can help them to effectively cope with negative comments from SFT. The views of participants agree with Hannafin, Hannafin, and Dalton (1993) that for teachers to effectively use student feedback for assessment, they must be adequately trained to understand how to deal with negative comments and criticisms. Also, the participants' views support Winstone, et al.'s (2017) assertion that when teachers are unable to accept negative feedback, it could be detrimental and can affect teacher-student engagement.

Discussion

This study explored the perceptions of Nigerian HE teachers and the undergraduate students of obstacles to effective SFT practice. We found four major obstacles to effective SFT namely: low awareness of SFT, little emphasis on SFT, lack of student invitation to feedback surveys and difficulty coping with negative feedback from students. First, participants confirmed low awareness of SFT in their HEIs. When teachers and students are not adequately aware of SFT practice, they are unable to contribute fully through feedback assessment tasks. This may lead to the second obstacle, less emphasis on the use of SFT. The findings show that the Nigerian HEIs in the current study placed less emphasis on the use of SFT as a valuable tool for assessing teacher practices and educational programmes. Placing less emphasis on the use of SFT may not allow the HE teachers and the students to understand the potentials of improving teacher practices and through SFT practice.

Participants confirmed that placing a high emphasis on SFT practice in Nigerian HEIs will have a positive impact on teacher practices and help to address students' learning difficulties. This is in agreement with Mandouit' (2018: 766) explanations that engaging in student feedback "can further enhance reflective capacities in teachers; inform teachers about the individual needs of their students; and, open up a dialogue of teaching and learning in the classroom." Also, Evans (2013) explains that engaging students through feedback for teaching assessment should be a fundamental concern of HE systems in order to improve the quality of education. The findings of the current study suggest a need for Nigerian HEIs to promote SFT by placing high emphasis on the potential benefits and establishing SFT management offices that will focus more on evaluating teacher practices and performances through the SFT process. The SFT management office can be managed by professionals in the field of educational evaluation and assessment such that students and teachers can easily receive first-hand information regarding SFT process. Also, the SFT management office can create activities or projects within the HEIs to promote SFT.

The third obstacle, lack of student invitation to feedback surveys confirm that when students are not often invited to share their views about the teaching they receive, it suppresses collective learning in that, students may not be allowed to make teachers understand their learning difficulties and how to respond to students' learning needs. The findings of the current study do not in any way propose that students' views or opinions are the most important for improving quality of education in Nigerian HEIs, rather, it proposes that the students' views, regardless of inaccuracy and irrelevance can open useful dialogue between teachers and students in order to improve teaching and learning for positive outcomes. This supports Levin's (2002) assertion that students need to be allowed to communicate their learning needs and perceptions of the

learning process. Such an invitation to communicate their views about teaching and learning improvements demonstrates democracy in the HE systems.

The fourth obstacle, difficulty coping with negative feedback from students shows that many of the teachers in the current study were uncomfortable with the idea of allowing students to evaluate their teaching practices through feedback surveys or questionnaires. This finding agrees with Basset et al.'s (2010: 59) claim that "there has been a small but very vocal proportion of the teaching profession who have regarded students' evaluation of teaching as a threat, and that has been rather highly publicized in the press". For instance, in the western world, a website known as www.ratemyteachers.com, which anonymously allows students to rate their teachers, generated a major controversy when over 11 million teachers were rated by their students. The controversy arose when teachers began to see students' comments (mostly negative) made to be personal, thereby causing many teachers distress. However, empirical evidence indicates that the chances of improving quality of teaching increases (Hattie and Timperley 2007) when teachers seek: interpretations to student feedback or responses (Alderman, Towers, and Bannah 2012); discussions on specific teaching behaviours that are open to improvement (Carless and Boud 2018), and recommendations for specific behavioural changes (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006). However, evidence in the current study shows that through sufficient training, students can have a quality understanding of how to give useful and constructive feedback to teachers without giving information that may appear to be personal attacks on the teachers.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the progression of knowledge of HE improvements. The findings of the current study can benefit all HE institutions where SFT is not well practised. The findings of the present study call for special attention by educators, policymakers, practitioners, HE teachers, students and HE management to invest in the potentials of SFT for improving schools. The findings also suggest a need for the professional development of teachers and integrating SFT into the HE curriculum such that teachers will be motivated to practice SFT for teaching evaluation. In support of the above view, Mandouit (2018: 767) stated that "support in the form of professional development is a crucial element of this improvement process, and is required for teachers to be comfortable and engaged in the change process, viewing the feedback process as an opportunity for growth." Our study adds to the understanding of teaching improvement discussions as well as obstacles to effective feedback practice in HE systems. Our study is relevant given the literature on engaging students through SFT for evaluating teacher practices and educational programmes for positive learning outcomes (e.g., Eriksson, Boistrup and Thornberg 2020). It has implications for

building stronger relationships between HE teachers and students to ensure that students are offered opportunities to contribute to improving the standard of teaching they receive. The findings of the current study will be useful to HE teachers, HE administrations, curriculum planners and others who are planning initiatives to improve quality of teaching in HE system. Also, it creates awareness of the students' role in evaluating teaching and giving constructive feedback instead of negative comments on teacher practices.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Regardless of the methods adopted in carrying out this study, we acknowledge limitations, which include; the inability to involve HE authorities/ management and curriculum planners in the study. Also, the small sample size constrains the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the generalizability of the research findings should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings of the current study. Our study does not claim to provide an accurate picture, but rather, an interpretative portrayal of the phenomenon studied (e.g., Eriksson, Boistrup&Thornberg, 2018). However, we recommend possible future research on a larger scale to include HE teachers in both public and private HEIs, curriculum planners and HE administrators in Nigerian or different countries. Another limitation is that this study does not provide full information on how HEIs currently promote the use of SFT for improving teacher practices and educational programmes. Future studies can improve by including HE administrators for an in-depth understanding of how SFT is currently promoted by Nigerian HEIs. Regardless of the limitations and cautions regarding the generalizability of the findings, this study contributes to the body of knowledge and has implications for the HE teachers, teacher education and teaching in higher education.

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