Using Effective Feedback in Assignments

Educational situation:

Professor Ahmed assigns to his students an assignment to critique media material and sets the criteria. The students submit the assignment through the Learning Management System (LMS). When the professor reviews the submissions, he notices many issues with the students' writing style and the way they critique. He uploads the grades in the system, so the students receive their grades without understanding the reasons for the deductions or the specific areas that need improvement. They continue with the course, complete it without addressing the weakness in the assignment or engaging in real practice to improve it.

The professor says:

"I am not pleased with the performance level of some students. They fulfil visible requirements like word count, topic selection, references, and so on, but there are issues with how they are writing, connecting paragraphs, and applying critical thinking. Unfortunately, I notice them repeating these mistakes even in the final exam."

One of the students says:

"I don't understand why my grade was deducted. I submitted the assignment that I put a lot of effort into, formatted it well, and used plenty of references. I'm not sure exactly where the issue is. When I asked the professor in his office, he said that I didn't use a "critical approach" in my writing. Yes, I studied this, but I didn't understand what exactly I did wrong or how to fix it. I wish he gave me another chance to improve my performance and truly learn from it."

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The Issue: There is no feedback, or if there is, it is too brief for the student to understand and apply it to become ingrained in him.

Educational Practice: Effective Feedback

Feedback is considered one of the most important practices that develop education, as it has a significant role in motivating the learner and evaluating the learning process. Educational institutions have shifted toward using electronic learning tools to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching process. These tools provide various experiences and interaction among learner, professor, and content. Additionally, these tools offer multiple evaluation methods and feedback that can be provided continuously and instantly in electronic learning environments (Alkhaldi and Alturki, 2018).

In an electronic learning environment, the professor's role is not limited to just giving quantitative grades along with the correct answers to evaluation questions, as this reduces learners' opportunities to learn by experience. One of the professor's most important roles is to guide and mentor the learner by providing feedback, which is "the information given to the learner about their performance, enabling them to control, direct and regulate their learning process" (Alkhaldi and Alturki, 2018, P. 116). Many studies (such as the study by Cardell and Corno (1981)) have found that students' written performance can improve more when feedback focuses on the errors in their assignments. Some studies (Collis and Boer, W., and Slotman, K. (2001)) have shown that assignments with intensive feedback may be more effective in enhancing student performance than exams.

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Implementation Procedures:

It is important for the professor to provide feedback on assignments. This feedback can be more effective when considering:

- Setting clear criteria for assignments on the Learning Management System (LMS).

- Designing rubrics that clarify the evaluation method for each criterion and its grades and sharing them with the students.

- Offering the option for resubmission after the first feedback.

- Providing a written response that outlines the areas of weakness, using quotes from the same assignment (Examples 1 and 2).

- Including guidance and clarification in feedback regarding the method to address the issues and how to improve performance, even if it is brief (Examples 1 and 2).

- Enhancing aspects of excellence and mastery in the feedback to guide the student's focus (Example 3).

- Including suggestions for performance improvement even if the grade is perfect (Example 3).

- Considering kindness and encouragement even in criticism and motivating the student to Improve (Example 4).

- Allowing the student to resubmit the assignment.

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Examples of How to Write Effective Feedback

Example 1: There was a gap and a lack of coherence between the first and second paragraph (clarifying the place and type of issue). There should be a connection between the two ideas, such as talking how one thing leads to another (guiding to the method to address the issue).

Example 2: There was not enough number of references cited in the third paragraph when talking about the relation between this and that (clarifying the place and type of issue). I recommend including a reference, such as a book, theory, or research, to support the idea presented (guiding to the method to address the issue).

Example 3: your performance was impressive, particularly in how you connected the paragraphs by starting each one with a link to the previous paragraph or the main ideas, which is great. Your grade is perfect, but the essay could have been even better with a strong conclusion. I suggest you read more critical essays and see how their conclusions are written.

Example 4: as I mentioned above, the essay has some areas that need improvement. I hope you pay attention to them, and I'm confident that your performance will be much better next time.

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Summary:

Using an effective approach in feedback may take time from the professor, but it leads to greater and more effective benefits for the learner. The learner can apply the professor's requests and clearly identify his areas of weakness and how to improve it. Instead of assigning students four assignments throughout the semester, they can be given just two assignments, ensuring that they apply them and benefit from the feedback in implementing the provided notes.

Resources:

- Alkhaldi, Hessah, and Alturki, Othman. (2018). The Impact of Providing Feedback in Learning Management Systems to Enhance Student Learning Outcomes. The International Journal of Special Education, 7(7), pp. 115-129.
  - Cardelle, M., & Corno, L. (1981). Effects on second language learning of variations in written feedback on homework assignments. Tesol Quarterly, 15(3), 251-261.
  - Collis, B., De Boer, W., & Slotman, K. (2001). Feedback for web-based assignments. Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 17(3), 306-313.
  - Walker, M. (2009). An investigation into written comments on assignments: do students find them usable?. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 34(1), 67-78.