

Villa College

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VC Research Digest provides updates on current and ongoing research projects of Villa College staff and students, and provides fresh research ideas and snippets to help expand the horizon of research and inquiry

EDITORIAL

The Menace of a Heuristic Mind: Averting Spurious Correlation in Research

The application of 'heuristics' is a useful human capability that allows us to solve problems and make judgments quickly and efficiently using a mental shortcut. Heuristics lets us identify physical objects without having to see the whole, and also makes it possible to understand certain abstract concepts without having to run through all possible explanations and permutations. However, in research (particularly in quantitative research) these heuristic shortcuts can lead to disastrous outcomes. Unfortunately, this happens to be a very common problem among researchers.

When a researcher sets out to establish a correlation or causation between a set of variables, it is a common mistake to associate relationships that do not really exist. In other words, we tend to establish 'spurious correlations' between two variables and conclude that there is a relationship (or even a causation), when in actuality, there is none. For example, by using actual data and statistical analysis, it may be possible to 'see' a very close association between the decrease in the number of pirates in the world and global warming; or the amount of ice-cream sold and the rate of coral bleaching; and (very interestingly) a strong inverse relationship between educational attainment and home ownership in the Maldives. While these associations may ostensibly seem real, they are unlikely to be true, valid, or meaningful for any purpose.

It is unlikely that the reduced number of pirates on high seas can have any direct or indirect effect on global warming. But, the direction of data, if plotted on a graph or used to run a correlation, would show a very strong association. Similarly, increase of ice-cream sales and coral bleaching would show a direct association on a regression graph, but it is unlikely to be related, except via a confounding variable – i.e., average daily temperature. And the last example, in which an inverse relationship between educational attainment and home ownership (meaning if you have a higher level of education, you are less likely to own a home in the Maldives, and vice versa) actually comes from an official government publication. When you compare the data and run a regression analysis on these two variables, it is no surprise that it shows a very strong correlation. However, what is more surprising from a research perspective is that anyone would believe that your educational attainment has the potential to destroy your hope of ever owning a home in the Maldives (Hint: Please do not stop learning for the fear of being homeless).

While anyone of us could be dragged into this rabbit hole, the best approach to spot a spurious correlation is to use our common sense to identify 'relationships' that don't make sense. Use your critical faculties to discern actual and false relationships. In addition, it is essential to ensure that proper representative and adequate sampling methods are used to acquire quality data. Also pay attention to control for as many extraneous variables as possible so that the impact of confounding, intervening, moderating or intermediary variables do not spoil your analysis. Being aware of the nature of these variables will go a long way in avoiding the mistake of committing to a spurious correlation.

Dr. Ahmed Shahid
Editor (VC Research Digest)



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The Role of Heutagogy in Accommodating Student Skill Building

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Concept of Heutagogy

The 21st century is adamant in developing self-made individuals who are keen to explore their own potential in all forms. Heutagogy centers around the idea of holism, capacity building through self-perceived knowledge. The pedagogical framework of heutagogy is grounded in humanistic and constructivist principles and suitable for today's educational systems as per Blaschke and Hase (2014, citing Kinshuk and Maina 2015).

Originating from the Greek work 'heuristic', the term heutagogy was discovered as a form of independent teaching that focused centrally on self-learning (Parslow, 2010). It embodies the key principles of self-efficacy and reflection in paving the way towards a more democratic educational process by promoting a sense of social responsibility intertwined with obtaining knowledge (Uday, 2019). This is achieved through the aspect of reflective and double loop learning (Halsall, Powell and Snowden, 2016). Through emphasis on personal values and assumptions, double loop learners develop individual psychological and behavioral outcomes by constant assessment of their beliefs and by finding possible solutions. It is believed that students engage best when they have "opportunities to choose what they will and control how they will do it" (Mithaug et.al., 2002, p. 5).

Student Skill Building

A complex interplay of practice and evidence is needed to self-direct and self-learn that could maximize understandings of a matter via the complexities heutagogy offers. Kurt Fischer's Skill Theory provides a deeper understanding of the matter taking into consideration two aspects; developmental range and webs of developmental that acts as factors for skill building (1980, citing King and VanHecke 2006).

Teachers need to focus less on content and more on the process of teaching, through a method known as 'facilitated learning' where it is argued that experiential

learning or discovery has far more effect on learner than that of received wisdom in passive manner (Smith, 2017). Smith (2017) provides an example of how composing poetry is learned through revision and requisition of knowledge which mentor has provided for the students. Similarly, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) states that learners construct knowledge far better through transformation of experience stemming from feelings and lessons. Akin to Schön's model of Knowledge-on-action, the theory involves action-based reflection and experience-based abstraction (Kolb and Kolb, 2012).

Another way of skill building and development in individuals is through reflective practice. Even Schön's model of Reflective Practice is catalyst to this statement. Canning and Callan (2010) states that through this heutagogic process of reflection, students emerged to be able to confidently voice their opinions and share their learning experiences more transparently. Additionally, flexible curriculum and assessment are also included in the heutagogy's alley of learning. According to Akyıldız (2019) learners should be able to control what they are learning. A heutagogical approach of learning would centre around the elements of flexible curriculum, negotiated assessment, learner-directed learning contracts and learner-directed questions, as put forward by Blaschke (2012).

However, researchers have identified that this method might not prove advantageous at all times. According to Barnett (2007) this could enable students or learners to have an incorrect understanding of things, in what he terms as 'warped' or 'skewed' understanding. Perhaps an alternative would be to use a mixed mode of learning to support different skillsets in students where some may appear more vigilant in attending tasks online while others may have more strengths in face-to-face assignments with colleagues (Canning and Callan, 2010).

To overcome this, collaborative learning can be adopted. Two collaborative strategies that support

heutagogy are solution focused approach and mentor assisted learning as indicated by Snowden and Halsall (2014). Similarly, according to Jenkins and Crawford (2018), a combined effort of teaching role played by two mentors could prove benefits in the sense that they may be empowered together as a unit than a single entity in terms of planning, assessing, and evaluating learner outcomes. As such, a study conducted in an Ecology Course revealed that collaborative efforts between colleagues in improving writing, raised performance in students through reflective questions, engagement and overall efficacy in the learning process (McLaren and Webber, 2009).

Suggested Futures

There is always resistance to abrupt change; it is the way of human nature. However, it is evident that the time is no better than now for evaluating existing policies and reframing them to cater to the ever-changing transformation needs of the 21st century.

As per the UNESCO report on Futures of Learning (Scott, 2015) the effort to change our ideologies from the traditional forms of learning need to be accepted by professionals, organizations, and politicians by bringing changes to the structures and systems outside classrooms which dictate how learning occurs.

Following a heutagogy approach calls for student centric mode of teaching where continual formal and informal evaluation should be assessed with the outcome of corrective actions through consistent reinforcement and repetition. It is crucial that both the force of mentor and mentee align in conjunction with the objective of a nonlinear method of learning, to accommodate the transformational education that the current era seeks in developing self-dependent individuals in the society.

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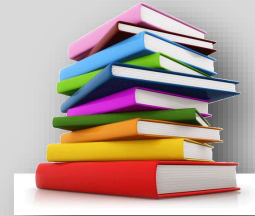
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**A MAN WHO
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THE VALUE OF
LIFE**

CHARLES DARWIN



FROM THE WORLD OF RESEARCH

Restorative Justice: Underlying Mechanisms and Future Directions

by Alana Saulnier and Diane Sivasubramaniam

ABSTRACT

As the popularity of restorative procedures increases, it is important to reflect on what we do and do not know about restorative justice, in order to enhance the effectiveness of restorative practices. In particular, we know little about the mechanisms that encourage success in restorative procedures. This article reviews research examining how, why, and for whom restorative procedures work. We consider how restorative processes differ from more traditional forms of retributive justice, and review the empirical research on factors driving people's perceptions of and responses to restorative justice. Through this overview of the existing knowledge base regarding why and for whom restorative procedures work, we draw attention to gaps in the restorative justice literature. We highlight the need for more focused research in understudied areas—in particular, we discuss the need for further development of experimental methods in restorative justice research—which will enable restorative justice scholars to develop more effective procedures that complement existing legal processes.

Saulnier, A. and Sivasubramaniam, D., 2015. Restorative justice: Underlying mechanisms and future directions. *New Criminal Law Review*, 18 (4), pp.510-536.

Read on... <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nclr.2015.18.4.510>

SCAN ME



Reactive or Proactive: Keeping your cool in a reactive environment

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"In our personal and professional lives, we are constantly hit with one adversity after the other, most of which we have no control over. But the four things we have total control over is how we react, how we adapt, how we breathe, and how we take action" _ Diamond Dallas

Have you had that moment where you noticed a flash of anger or felt on the verge of tears when in a tough predicament? How did you choose to respond? How tough is it for you to regulate your emotional reactions?

We are all guilty of being reactive from time to time, often without even knowing. We all have predictable responses that we learn early in life. Over time these responses became habits, our reactions became automatic, and our buttons were created. We may have learned to react to criticism with anger. So, if anyone on the job gives us a helpful suggestion for improving a project, our button is pushed as we think, "He is always telling me what to do. I can't stand it." A quick, angry response alienates a co-worker and creates stress in the workplace (Jones, 2014). When we are told that we are largely responsible for majority of the situations we find ourselves in, it is hard to accept. To take as well as accept the responsibility for our own circumstances involves a huge paradigm shift (Wear, 2019). The natural reaction is to resist and to argue. But when we finally accept and stop to reflect, we would be able see that, if we can *choose* to be reactive and be controlled by external factors, cannot we also *choose* not to be?

Reactive vs Proactive

Working in an academic institution, especially in a position where you must directly deal with students or other academics, means that you are almost always bombarded with calls from students, academics and other customers frequently wanting quick responses.

As a result, it is quite natural to become very reactive, responding to urgent problems. Our reaction and the language that we use is really a window into our minds where your words would reveal a lot about yourself.

Positive workplace relationships give our work meaning. Through these connections, we impact those around us and our organisations. We must cultivate our self-awareness and self-management skills to foster these kinds of relationships. However, it is challenging to remain receptive when feeling stressed for even the most socially and emotionally intelligent among us (Alikaj, et al., 2021). When a situation or a coworker's behaviour agitates us somehow, our emotions can get the best of us. This behaviour is a natural part of being human, but it can easily cause disruptions in the workplace.

When emotions are high, the key to avoiding conflict is to **act**, not **react**. Reacting is letting your emotions rule you. It's unleashing all the intense feelings you are experiencing at the moment. People may perceive you as out of control, defensive, or aggressive. They might feel defensive in return and move against you or away from you. On the other hand, to act is to be aware of how you are feeling in the moment and choosing to respond in a calm, levelheaded manner. It involves seeking to understand others' needs and expectations by discussing your own needs and concerns in a way that is not controlled by your emotions. Once you share an understanding of each other, it becomes easier to agree on how to best work together (Wear,

2019). In other words, your level of influence goes up when you choose to act instead of reacting, which in turn enables you to gain people's trust, and have people willing to collaborate with you and support you.

Importance of proactivity at workplace

The term 'reactive personality', is used for personalities that are directed by external factors. These personalities are prone to panic, fragile and lack a sense of security. They act according to others' foresight and experience blockings and obstacles in social roles. Individuals with this type of personality pattern continuously experience difficulties and stress in achieving their goals (Yücel, et al., 2010).

Proactive individuals are change-oriented, meaning they tend to change the environment around them to suit their needs instead of simply adjusting or adapting to such an environment. They do so by searching for new and more efficient ways of improving their performance (Mushtaq, et.al., 2017). Proactive personality traits imply motivation and action and define individuals who change their environments (Yücel, et al., 2010).

Practicing proactivity involves taking the time to create an action plan *before* you sense your emotions ramping up. To be more intentional with your behaviour, ask yourself these questions and remember your answers when you start to feel stressed. What situations naturally trigger strong emotional response from you? What are you thinking and feeling in these situations? What is your natural reaction (vocalize your emotions and move to action or shut down and withdraw)? What tends to be the consequence of your reaction? What could be an alternate response that may lead to a better outcome? (Wear, 2019).

Several research has demonstrated that to embrace proactive behaviour; individuals should have personal traits such as tolerance, patience, open-mindedness, flexibility, compassion, understanding and wit as well

as professionalism, motivation, geniality and good communication (Alikaj, et al., 2021; Bakker, et.al, 202; Fuller, et al., 2010; Mushtaq, et. al., 2017). These studies provide managers and employees with a mechanism to enable thriving at the workplace. It also provides a roadmap that employees can follow to develop positive behaviours that will positively influence their position/status at work.

Nevertheless, proactive individuals do not work in a vacuum. While there are individuals who are predisposed to thrive at work, the reality is that they are also influenced by the workplace environment (Mushtaq, et. al., 2017). Based on this perspective, the literature has stressed that the effects of proactive personality depend on how the work is designed and structured. Alikaj, et. al. (2021) sheds light on the question of when proactive employees might be more likely to experience thriving at work. By employing high-involvement HR practices, institutes can enhance the employee's potential to thrive at work and, subsequently, to engage in creative behaviour (Alikaj, et. al.,2021). By adjusting their HR practices to promote job autonomy, training, information sharing, and performance-based rewards, among others, institutions can build a more creative workforce.

Applying Proactivity

How can we apply this thinking at the workplace and in our everyday lives? How can we make the shift from reactivity to proactivity? Here are a few things you can have a go at, suggested by Jones (2014) and Belak (2020):

1. Understand that your buttons are your buttons: Buttons are the things (ideas or subjects) that make you react in a certain way. We all have areas of sensitivity, and we normally know what they are. Most buttons are ours alone, and we can understand what they are and look at why they are there. Perhaps we were made fun of as a kid for some personal characteristic. Try to remain in the present rather than

re-experiencing all the old pain. Take each communication as something new. Try to understand what the person is saying to you instead of simply reacting.

2. Use Conflict as a Natural Resource: People who work together have different perceptions, and it would be unnatural if they did not disagree from time to time. Conflicts are necessary and acts as a first step on the road to improving communication, solving a problem, and even building trust and cooperation. Avoidance or hiding conflict can be much more damaging in the workplace than facing it and dealing with it appropriately.

3. Alter your language: Our language tells us a lot about our level of reactivity or proactivity. Reactive people tend to use "I can't", "If only", "I have to". These phrases are shifting the blame to outside circumstances, getting rid of responsibility. Consciously change these to more positive, empowering phrases. "I can", "I will", "I want to". A simple change in language can make a big difference.

4. Attack the Problem, Not the Person: Detach any feelings about the person and keep an objective eye on the problem presented by them. Try to understand what the actual problem is and generate possibilities for settling it. Instead of attacking the other person, try to see the situation from their point of view. Before jumping to conclusion and making assumptions about other people's behavior, verify by asking or by repeating what you thought you heard. Show respect, try not to interrupt, and avoid using hostile words that inflame.

5. Analyse your past mistakes: Whilst we can control our actions, we cannot always control the consequences. Invariably, we have all made mistakes in our past, however, we cannot change the past. Dwelling on those mistakes is a form of reactive behaviour. Instead, accept that a mistake has been made, take whatever you can learn from them, let

them go, and move on.

6. Focus on the Future: Spending precious time trying to prove or disprove past allegations may not be of value to a continuing relationship at work. Instead of selling your ideas try to engage in a joint problem-solving discussion. Focus on what is important and be sure agreement is reached in dignity and with mutual respect. Any ongoing relationship you have with someone is longitudinal and can be altered to be constructive and improved.

7. Make commitments: Making goals and working towards them can help empower you and reinforce your control over your life. If you achieve what you set out to, you realise that you can be responsible for your circumstances, regardless of the external forces.

How we interpret life events is important. We can choose to act by slowing ourselves down enough to listen to and challenge what we say before we react. In choosing how to act, we disable our buttons and regain control of our lives. Once we are in control, life begins to go better.

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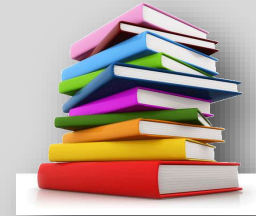
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FROM THE WORLD OF RESEARCH

Models of Elderly Care in Japan and The Netherlands: Social Quality Perspectives

by Rachel Kurian and Chihiro Uchiyama

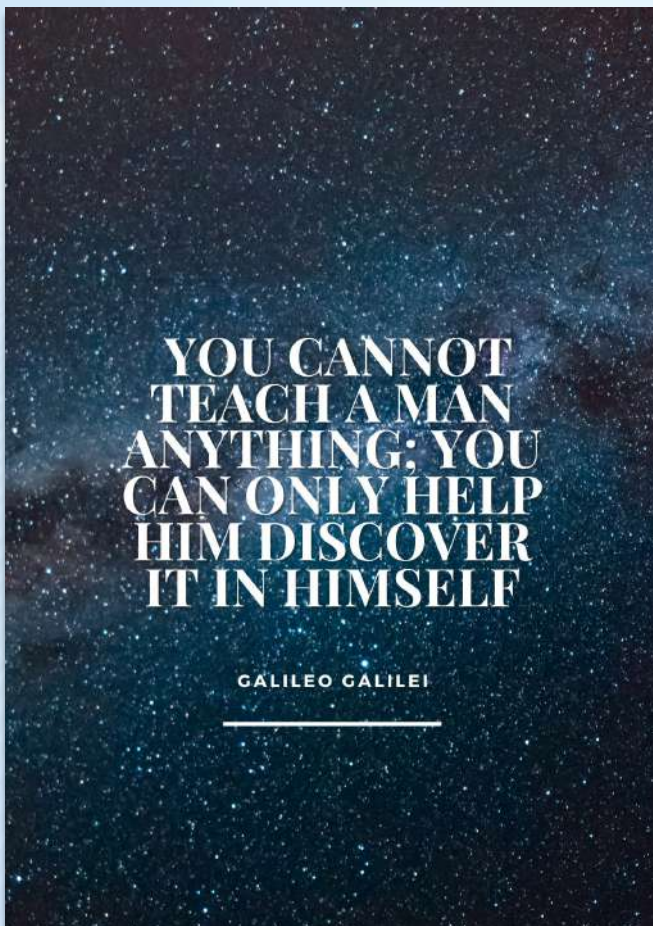
ABSTRACT

This article argues that the social quality approach can be usefully applied to studying “models of elderly care” that enhance the wellbeing of the elderly and empower them to participate in social activities. Examining three cases in Japan and another three cases in The Netherlands, the study identifies actors, institutions and processes that have provided services for the elderly, highlighting the importance of history and culture in influencing the “social” of the elderly. The article deals with a range of opportunities and possibilities for optimizing care for the elderly, both as individuals and as a group, through promoting their social inclusion, social cohesion, socio-economic security and social empowerment. Grounded in community networks, as well as in social and intergenerational interaction, these “models” demonstrate how care-givers, including nurses and family members, are also empowered in these processes. These discussions, reflecting empirical reality and conceptual insights, provide the basis of sustainable welfare policies that improve the social quality of the elderly.

Kurian, R. and Uchiyama, C., 2012. Models of elderly care in Japan and the Netherlands: social quality perspectives. *The International Journal of Social Quality*, 2(1), pp.74-88.

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SCAN ME



Qualitative Data Analysis – Part 1: Basics to Codes and Coding

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In qualitative research, analyzing data can be a time-consuming process. There exists many methods and techniques to analyze data in qualitative research. Coding is one of the most common methods to analyze qualitative data. Coding provides a structural framework to make meaningful interpretations. There will be times when coding is necessary and there will be times when it is not at all important. It all depends on the research questions, research methodology, attitude, and the philosophy of the researcher. Due to nature of fluidity of qualitative research, there is no one single best practice that fits all. Anyone interested in coding and learning to code data needs to understand that there are over 33 coding methods and analytical possibilities (Saldana, 2016). This is the first article of a series of articles that will focus on the role of codes and coding in the qualitative data analytic process.

What is a Code?

In qualitative research, a code is referred to as a single word, phrase, and sometimes a short sentence that captures the understanding and is an attribute for part of qualitative data (Saldana, 2016; Turner, 2021). Data that can be coded are from interview transcripts, observations, field notes, documents, artifacts, emails, text messages, open ended questionnaires, literature, drawings, and graphics. Coding is a cyclic process. The first cycle can vary from a single word to a lengthy paragraph. The second cycle consists of the critical links between data and the explanations. These are important steps in the coding process as it helps the researcher to get familiarized with the data. Hence, to sum up, codes are generated by the researcher to make meaning out his/her data in a way that suits the researcher's study

purpose and research questions.

Difference between codes and themes

Very often students describe their data analysis process as identifying codes for themes. A theme is an outcome of an analytical process resulted from coding and categorizing data (Saldana, 2016) hence a theme is not coded.

Deciding what gets coded

Coding is an analytical cognitive process the qualitative researcher must decide what gets coded in his/her research. As Lofland et al., (2006) states, this decision is based on inspecting the text or transcript line by line and asking questions such as what is this? What is going on? What is the participant saying? How does the context serve to support, impede, or change these actions and statements? In response to this process to explore the text for answers, initial codes are developed. This is just the first step of coding. When the text is analyzed for more structured, selective, and complex, it needs to be built on initial coding to knit together larger chunks by asking question such as what proposition is suggested? How does these reflect participants behavior on the topic or aspects in these instances? These careful thought-out questions facilitate in developing more prominent analysis. Hence, it is important to develop a systematic mechanism to decide what gets coded.

Descriptive and Interpretive Codes

There is no straight forward answer to this. However, it is best to refer to one's research purpose and research questions. Look for patterns, regular or consistent occurrence of actions words that describes

the phenomenon. As qualitative researchers' the understanding is that data that is to be analyzed are lived experiences. Thus, multiple occurrences of a particular word or words in a unified arrangement are indicators of human experiences.

Text segments as descriptive codes. This is the first step of coding. This step involves looking through the interview transcripts and documents to identify the most common elements in these texts. In the case of more than one participant it is useful to do a comparison across participants on the basic descriptions. There will be occurrences where multiple codes with overlaps attached to text segments. These texts are usually non subjective and does not require elaborate code descriptions.

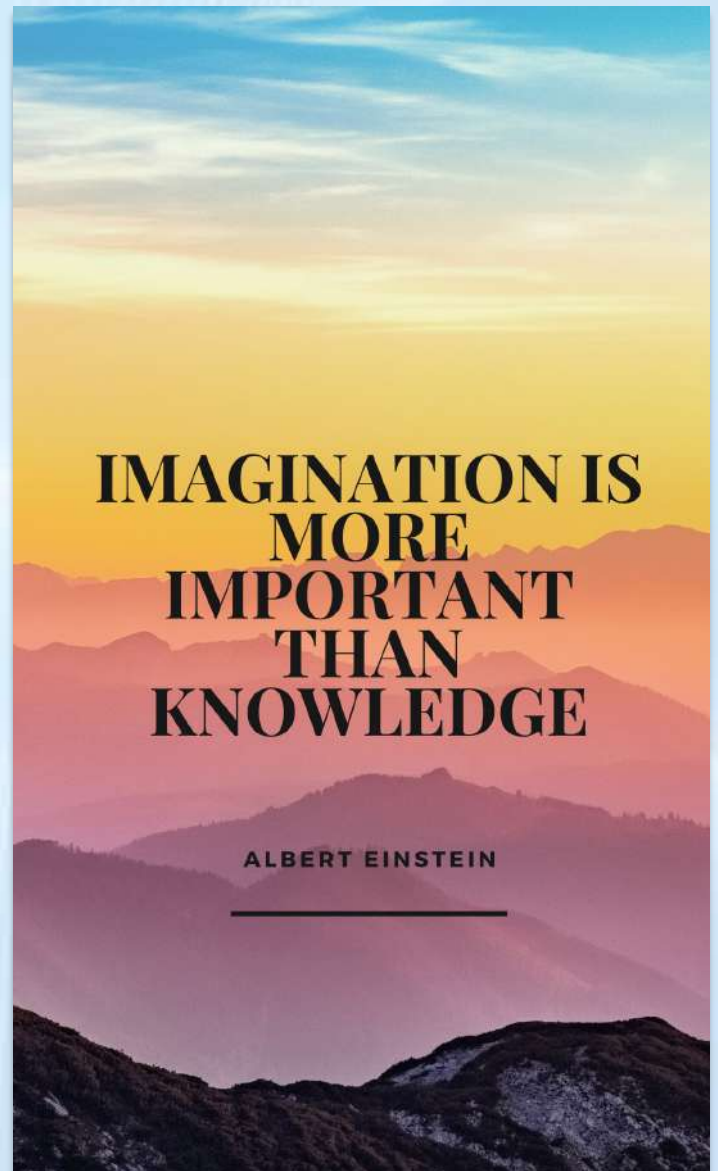
Interpretive coding. This is the second step of coding. Once certain number of codes have been generated, subcodes are grouped under a common theme. Looking deeper into the patterns and generated codes, trends will emerge showing participants feeling, opinions and thoughts, which are otherwise hidden. Such trends will lead to significant interpretations of the participants experiences.

Both descriptive and interpretive coding are useful for data analysis. Descriptive codes alone provide little interpretation as it reflects an already existing real-world group whereas interpretive codes provide more detail on the lived experiences of the participants (Turner, 2021).

Coding is a transformative process in which the raw data are turned into meaningful interpretations. What gets coded depends on the analytical skills of the researcher. Coding is a cyclic process starting with basic level of coding and moving towards in dept structural frameworks. Communicating with data by asking vital questions that reflects the analytical process makes it easier for the researcher to code. The next article will discuss coding process in grounded theory.

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A Case Study on the Role of Feedback in Higher Education: Students' Perspectives

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Research background and problem statement

Feedback is believed to be one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement. In fact, it is a crucial and critical aspect in informing students of their progress in teaching and learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback may take any form and can be either verbal or written or can even be given using gestures and other body language. However, it is also indispensable to note that feedback can either have a positive or negative impact on the students (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Literature has revealed that lecturers who give feedback have based their way of giving feedback provided on how they felt towards feedback they had received while they were studying at school.

A previous study done on feedback showed that the feedback lecturers themselves had received during their school days had impact on how they gave feedback to their students later on in life as lecturers (Cho, 2015). Also, the same study highlighted that teachers had thoughts about how feedback should be given to students, and this has shown that they did not want to give the impression to the students that nothing was correct or either and that everything was okay about the student's work. Such issues on uncertainties towards what students' expectations towards feedback by lecturers, has led to conduct this research on the topic. Moreover, some students' repeated failure in producing quality assignments throughout undergraduate courses calls for conducting studies to determine the students' desired requirements in what they expect as effective feedback. Therefore, this research aims to study the role of feedback in higher education and how

students perceive feedback given to them, to enhance their achievements in the future.

Aims and Objectives

Considering feedback as an important determiner in students' satisfaction and students' retention in college, this study aims to determine how students view feedback they receive from lecturers while studying in higher education programmes. The study also intends to explore and understand what students at this level perceive as effective feedback. An additional aim of the study is also to contribute to literature by focusing on how the quality of students' performance could be enhanced during undergraduate programmes, by using effective feedback.

Research question

The questions that were explored in this study are:

- (1) What is the role of feedback from a students' perspective?
- (2) What do students perceive as 'effective' feedback?
- (3) How can feedback be improved to increase students' academic performance?

Literature Review

A model for Reflective Feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007) has been used as the theoretical model guiding this study. Thus, the idea of effective feedback has been used in this study, as stated in this model. The above mentioned model has been chosen due to its significance in catering to the different learning states of students. The conceptual framework derived from the literature review highlights the importance of both quality and quantity in terms of timeliness and how the feedback

should assist students to feed-forward. The model of effective feedback answers three questions; Feed Up (Where am I going?), Feed Back (How am I going?) and Feed Forward (Where to Next). It is very often that we find feedback which fails to answer all the three questions. We tend to stop only at the spot of the Feed Back, while the other two are equally important aspects that can guide the students to perform better.

Furthermore, the model helps not only the students, but also the teacher to adjust their instruction based on the feedback. Another advantage of the model is the provision for students to engage in self-regulatory learning habits as they are fully informed of their learning through the answers to the three questions. Each of these questions work at the four levels: task, process, self-regulation and self level. While the task level focuses on the learning intent and the requirements of the task, the process level focuses on the processes the learners go through in meeting these strategies, like the chosen strategies, etc. Self-regulatory level focuses on the way the learners adopt learning habits based on information gathered from feedback and the self-level includes the praise to the learner based on accomplishments and targets reached.

Several studies have been done on feedback (Agius & Wilkinson, 2014; Cho, 2015; Emma & Mathew, 2015; Li & Barnard, Skipper & Douglas, 2015; and Skipper & Douglas, 2019), and despite them being conducted at various levels or stages of learning and focused on various aspects, they all emphasised the importance of effective feedback for students' progress in learning.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative case study which aims to determine the role of feedback in higher education by exploring it in students' perspectives. Thus, an in-depth study of the phenomenon was done, focusing on the selected sample. Purposive and convenient sampling were used in the study where the participants were purposively taken from among students who were studying in undergraduate programmes.

Document analysis and semi-structured interviews were the means of data collection used. The sample included 14 students who were studying the same module. The documents analysed included lecturer-marked assignments and rubrics from the selected module. The interview guide includes 12 questions which focused on the analysed documents. Data gathered was then analysed using thematic coding.

Findings

The findings revealed that participants perceived the role of feedback as necessary, and they expected feedback whenever an assessment component is over. This idea is also emphasised in a study by Skipper and Douglas (2015). It is common for students to be unhappy with the feedback they received as highlighted in Emma and Muller (2015) and this aligns with the findings of this study as well. It was also unanimously agreed by all the participants that feedback played a crucial role in the students' academic achievement. This is supported by the works of Agius and Wilkinson (2014) and Hattie and Timperley (2007). As evident from the works of Li and Barnard (2011), the participants of this study also stated that feedback provided should act as an aid to do better in future assignments.

With regard to participants' opinions on effective feedback, they described them as feedback that is *constructive*, one that *feeds-forward* and is *timely*. Timeliness is referred to the duration in which feedback is required to be given for the assignments. According to the assessment policies of the institution, it is stated that students should be provided feedback within two weeks from the due dates of the assignments. The participants, however, accepted that they could be content with a delay in the feedback provided, if the feedback is one that is of quality and feeds forward. The participants deemed it is very important to receive constructive feedback pointing out any weaknesses in the work submitted which is similar to the findings of Li & Barnard (2015).

Participants had also stated how important it was equally to state how their errors could be corrected, apart from just highlighting their errors in general, which is also included as a significant component in giving feedback as stated by Cho (2015).

'wrong citation' vs 'do not use initials in in-text references'

'language issues are there' – 'one of the (means-one out of many) so it is elements'

It was also a concern of the students that they were not given specific feedback regarding academic writing related aspects initially during their undergraduate programmes. Therefore, the need for consistency in marking by all lecturers throughout their undergraduate programmes were considered as important.

Another important point made by the participants was that rubrics provide only general comments rather than personalized or specific comments for the respective student, therefore suggesting to revise and tailor the rubric, catering to individual needs of the students.

Conclusion

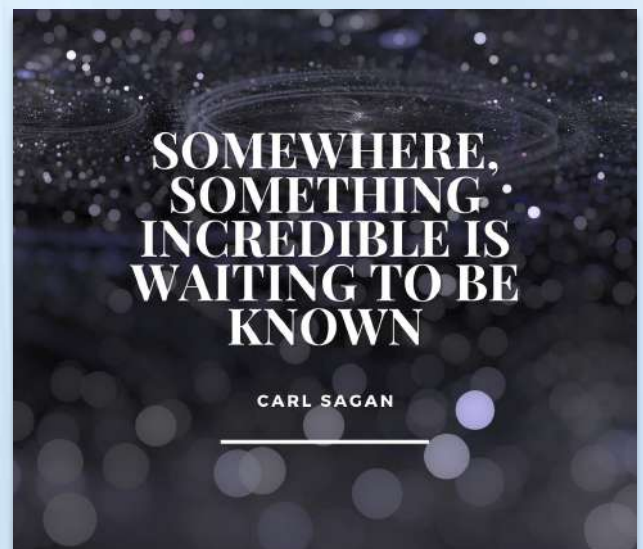
The study concludes that students studying at this level require a more detailed and focused feedback that could feed forward. The students raised their concerns towards some feedback which they received that was of no help in improving themselves academically in the future. There were also the concerns of students who very disappointingly stated that they had not received any specific and detailed feedback regarding academic writing and referencing until they were at a very late stage of their programmes. This calls for the need for such feedback to be provided at the initial stages, preferably in the first semester of their studies, and also for consistent standards to be maintained throughout the institution by all lecturers.

All in all, it was understood that sufficient time should be given between assignments while setting due dates,

so that lectures could provide the expected detailed and timely feedback to students as desired.

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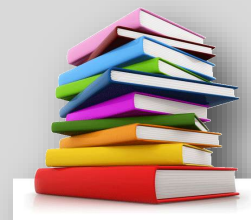
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FROM THE WORLD OF RESEARCH

Vulnerability of Small Island Developing States to Natural Disasters

by *Martin Sjöstedt and Marina Povitkina*

ABSTRACT

Small island developing states (SIDS) have been identified as particularly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change. However, although SIDS have similar geographical features, natural hazards produce different outcomes in different states, indicating variation in vulnerability. The objective of this article is to explore the sources of this variation. With the point of departure in theories about how political institutions affect adaptive capacities, this article sets out to investigate whether government effectiveness has an impact on the vulnerability of SIDS. While claims over the importance of institutions are common in the literature, there is a lack of empirical accounts testing the validity of such claims. This shortcoming is addressed by this study's time-series cross-sectional analysis using data from the International Disaster Risk database and the Quality of Government data set. The results show that government effectiveness has strong and significant effects on the number of people killed and affected by natural disasters.

Sjöstedt, M. and Povitkina, M., 2017. Vulnerability of small island developing states to natural disasters: how much difference can effective governments make?. The Journal of Environment & Development, 26(1), pp.82-105.

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