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Exploring learners‘ experiences of receiving written feedback on written formative assessment: a case study of grade 10 Business Studies classrooms in South Africa

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2021

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/31838

Balele, Raudina Madina (2021) Exploring learners' experiences of receiving written feedback on written formative assessment:a case study of grade 10 Business Studies classrooms in South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/31838>

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, the educational perception of assessment has gone through distinctive reforms across numerous countries – this has been a direct response to rapid changes in curriculum policies. The education perception of assessment has shifted from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered pedagogy, with a primary aim of improving learners' learning and educational outcomes. More specifically in the South African context, assessment is seen as a tool to create an atmosphere for life-long learning, which encourages learners to reflect on their own learning and to make value judgments of their strengths and weaknesses. South African assessment and policy documents emphasize the need for formative assessment (assessment *for* learning), which encourages teacher-learner interactions that involve discussion of goals, strategies, progress, and that develop peer and self-assessment skills that lead learners to becoming autonomous individuals. In this regard, feedback on formative assessment is viewed as an integral part of teaching and learning, as well as one of the strongest educational tools that can be used to improve learners' academic performance.

Although feedback is crucial to the learning process and is essential if learners are to become self-regulating and independent lifelong learners, large volume of literature has revealed that learners are often overlooked as a vital resource to inform feedback practices. While research on teachers' feedback practices is important, it is also important not to lose sight that it is the learners and how they use feedback that ultimately determines its effects on learning. Hence it is of great significance to gain an understanding of learners' experiences of receiving formative feedback on their assessments. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore learners' experiences of receiving written feedback on grade 10 Business Studies written formative assessment in the South African school context. The main objectives of this study were: (1) to explore learners' experiences of receiving written formative feedback on Business Studies written formative assessment, (2) to explore how Business Studies learners use written formative feedback to inform their learning and

(3) to understand why Business Studies learners use written formative feedback the way they do.

Findings from this study revealed that learners tend to not incorporate written feedback in their learning due to the following factors: timing, specificity, valence and clarity of written formative feedback. The findings also revealed that learners tend to focus on the mark achieved and ignore the corresponding written comments, which interferes with self-regulated learning.

The implication of these findings is that feedback practices need to be more inclusive of learners. Understanding learners' experiences of receiving formative feedback is crucial in being able to deliver feedback which motivates and helps them to enhance their own learning. This research suggests that learners should not be overlooked as a vital resource to inform assessment feedback practices. Teachers should engage with learners to find out their assessment feedback needs, so that they can provide them with feedback that they [learners] can comprehend and subsequently utilize to improve their learning and academic competence.

Key words: Formative assessment, formative feedback, timing, specificity, valence, clarity of written feedback, self-regulated learning, Business Studies.