

## A Cross-Country Analysis of Students' Evaluation of University Teaching: Relationship between Faculty Behavior, Student Satisfaction and Teaching Quality

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### Abstract

There is an emergent global consensus that students' evaluation (feedback) of university teaching is fundamentally controversial. Few would argue that a system that tells the "satisfactory" teaching of faculty members could be biased, for example; lenient faculty behavior may get a high percentage of feedback and may compromise quality of teaching. Similarly, strict behavior of faculty may get low percentage of feedback despite good quality of teaching. In this way, there is a possibility of relationship between quality of teaching and positive students' feedback. In order to examine the relationship between faculty behavior, student satisfaction and teaching quality, this study aimed to provide a cross-country analysis. The study employs focus group methodology. Focus group used in this research study has been operated under participant observation method. In each country (Pakistan, Philippines), in depth group interviews were conducted in two separate sessions, including focus group with students and faculty members. Four distinct focus group sessions were conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data. First stage of students' focus group inferred that a majority of the students like lenient teachers and they definitely give positive feedback if a faculty member gives less complicated and not so challenging assignments and other activities. They further stated that if a teacher remained strict throughout the class, students usually give a low score in their evaluation. Therefore, student feedback may not be an accurate reflection of the student satisfaction and is not a good indicator of effective teaching. In the second stage of faculty's focus group, opinion of faculty is consistent with the view of student's focus group discussion about lenient and strict faculty behavior and its relationship with students' satisfaction and teaching quality with few alterations. They further added that scale of students' feedback should be re-validated for more accuracy. Results showed a good consistency for both Pakistani and Philippines sample.

**Keywords:** *faculty behavior, students' satisfaction, students' evaluation, university teaching*

### Background and Literature

Teaching is a complex as well as multi-dimensional activity. At the same time, it is a very important activity in every aspect of life (Khandelwal, 2009). According to (Iqbal, 1996), "Teaching is an arrangement and manipulation of a situation in which there are gaps or obstructions and where an individual tries to overcome the problem from where he learns".

On the other hand, behavior is an observable, identifiable phenomenon (Joyce, 1980). Anything that an organism does, involves action and response to stimulation (UNESCO, 1986). The meaning of behavior is to conduct or carry oneself as to what we do, especially in response to outside stimuli; anything that an organism does that involves action and response to stimulation (UNESCO, 1986).

Spooren, Brockx, and Mortelmans (2013) explained that students are considered important stakeholders in the process of gathering insight into the quality of teaching in a course, as “the opinions of those who eat the dinner should be considered if we want to know how it tastes” (Seldin, 1993). Higher Education Institutions consider that one of the vital means for determining the quality of teaching and learning as to its strengths and weaknesses in a classroom setting is through students’ evaluation of the performance of faculty in various aspects (Laguador, Deligero, et. al., 2015).

Today, faculty is being considered responsible for how well they serve the students. It has gotten to be a frequent practice in universities and colleges that students “grade” the professors who grade them (Germaine & Scandura, 2005). Student feedback about teachers may be used for two purposes. First, this feedback can be used for evaluating teaching effectiveness. Secondly, this might be used for reappointment, promotion and for compensation enhancement decisions (Jackson et al., 1999). So the student feedback can have impact on the teacher career and tenure. Due to this, teacher might strive to influence student evaluation or feedback. This phenomenon used by teachers is known as “marketing education or even seduction” (Simpson & Sigauw, 2000).

Managing a class is mostly conceptualized as controlling the class rather than improving curriculum quality, how a teacher conveys instructions to students and the overall climate of the class (Jones, 1982). It is also important to note that the climate of the classroom influenced by the teacher has a great impact on student’s attitude and motivation towards learning. For a classroom environment which is favorable for learning, professional knowledge of teaching is not enough. Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) have concluded that the teacher behavior is considerably important to build a communicative relationship between students and teacher. In addition to this, teachers’ positive classroom climate practices create an atmosphere which directly shapes motivational behavior causing students to respond positively, help each other, love their own learning environment and establish positive interpersonal relationships with other students (Cuarto & Arenillo, 2015).

In most educational systems, the student-teacher relationship is among the other aspects of classroom relationships that is responsible for the creation of a holistic development of individuals through the aid of different educational processes, influences and objects (Liu, 2017). Teacher control is considered to be the first significant dimension towards

classroom delivery. This includes a teacher's power and management of the class, noise tolerance

during the class, allowing students to take part in group activities, and willingness to allow student role plays. If teacher control is measured on a continuum, the lower end would be known as 'passivity' whereas high end of this continuum is 'strict control'. A teacher with strict control likes to direct class activities at all times (Pettigrew et al., 2013).

Teacher's polite behavior and courteous attitude affect the students. Important qualities of teacher behavior are promptness, sincerity, reliability, frankness, confidence and proficiency. Similarly, frankness of teachers with students and helping students at any rate; lenient treatment; lack of patience; harsh, temperamental and violent attitudes; lack of punctuality; lack of determination; lack of self-confidence; annoyance; perplexity and lack of communications are many of the causes which affect educational accomplishment of the university students (Mehdipour & Balaramulu, 2013).

Most of the students expect high grades with little concentration on studies; they expect that teachers should teach courses easily. Despite the fact that grading leniency diminishes learning; easy courses scored high in student assessments. Thus, if student feedback measures students' convictions about perfection of teaching, then students think that teachers who teach easy courses are amazing teachers. If teaching effectiveness is measured by students' feedback, then it might be perceived that sometimes students put up illogical feedback (Powell, 1977).

### Research Propositions

Students appraised a course to be the most mentally difficult and challenging in which they scored high grades with little concentration and short study times. High student assessments don't show that a teacher is an efficient teacher. Sometimes, the teacher with the highest student feedback may use an average teaching process that requires less involvement by a student and deliver the minimum learning (Brodie, 1998). A similar silly answer was examined by Powell (1977) when he compared lenient and strict grading standards. His students evaluated their own exertion distinctly lower if the teacher used a lenient grading standard. However, he observed that when the teacher used a lenient grading standard, students agreed more strongly that the teacher aroused effort and thinking among them. These findings lead to the conclusion on this first proposition:

**Proposition 1:** A lenient faculty behavior leads towards higher (Positive) students' feedback.

The other side of teacher behavior is something not considered to be pleasant one i.e. a teacher with strict behavior towards students. Rajeev and Raguveer (2007) have characterized a strict teacher as one who does not tolerate and does not allow any kind of misbehavior during the class. A strict teacher is someone who is very rigid about his or her ideas; this results in making no changes in teaching methodologies and approaches towards learning. In addition, a strict teacher does not produce any humor in his class. Dalley-Trim (2007) has mentioned that students' views or

evaluation about teachers mainly depend on a number of factors including how a

teacher engages students in the learning process, based on the students' desires, how the class has been facilitated by the teacher and how the teacher makes the class enjoyable for the students.

A study conducted by Dalley-Trim (2007) revealed that students evaluate a strict teacher as a boring one and ineffective as well. Such teachers are also unable to fulfill the expectations and desires of students. Further added, teachers who are mostly cranky, frowning, and they always yell, mostly get negative feedback from students. In another study, Reich (2014) has mentioned that students dislike those teachers who are termed as "*Nightmare Teachers*". These teachers not only have all the above mentioned characteristics; they also don't respect students, show impatience and are mean in nature.

The above findings from literature lead us to our second proposition:

**Proposition 2:** A strict faculty behavior leads towards lower (Negative) students' feedback.

Every learning institute gives priority and makes efforts for improving teaching and learning quality. This can only be possible through suitable teaching processes, meeting needs for teaching, and anticipating expectations of both clients and stakeholders for learning as well as teaching, and also, providing a conducive learning environment. Quality of teaching and learning is simply the opinion of students which is purely based on their experience as "students or clients" (Suarman, 2015). Marsh and Hocevar (1991) have identified teaching quality as how effectively the teaching staff delivers, teacher and student interaction, transfer of information to students, and facilitating and motivating students during the learning process.

On the other hand, satisfaction is a psychological process when a customer uses a product or service and evaluates it. In academia, students are the clients or customers and their satisfaction is mainly based on their interaction with the teachers. Teachers should exhibit effectiveness and competency when fulfilling their job demands. Moreover, they should have command over teaching content, medium of teaching, teaching methods and pedagogical knowledge. A proficient teacher leads towards students' satisfaction in his/her subject (Guolla, 1999).

Suarman (2015) has concluded that student's satisfaction is entirely based on the quality of teaching i.e., knowledge, learning and satisfaction they gain during the learning process. Additionally, the study also proves that as the quality of teaching improves, the students' satisfaction level relatively increases as well. Students' perception towards teaching quality has a strong influence on their satisfaction. In another study, Kusumandari (2006) has confirmed that quality of the learning process is one of the major factors affecting students' satisfaction. The literature review supports our third proposition as well.

**Proposition 3:** The level of student satisfaction is an indicator of teaching

quality.

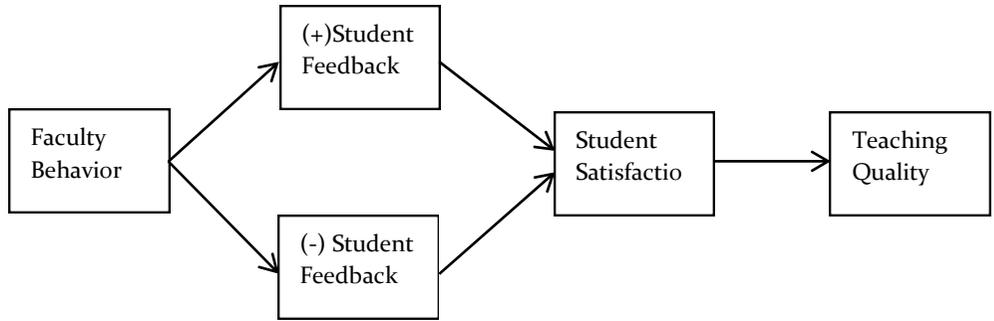


Fig. 1 Conceptual Model

### Research Methodology

This study employs focus group methodology. Focus group is a social science based qualitative research methodology. Using this method, in depth group interviews were accomplished in four separate sessions. Samples were taken from two countries i.e., Pakistan and the Philippines. Two distinct focus group sessions were conducted in each of the two countries to ensure the validity of the collected data. Initially, the plan was to conduct a single focus group including students and faculty members in each country. But, due to the sensitivity of the topic, it was observed that both the groups of students and faculty members would be reserved in the presence of each other while commenting upon the issues like students' feedback and its relationship to faculty behavior. Therefore, four separate focus groups were arranged to ensure the unbiased communication on the agenda. Convenience sampling has been used.

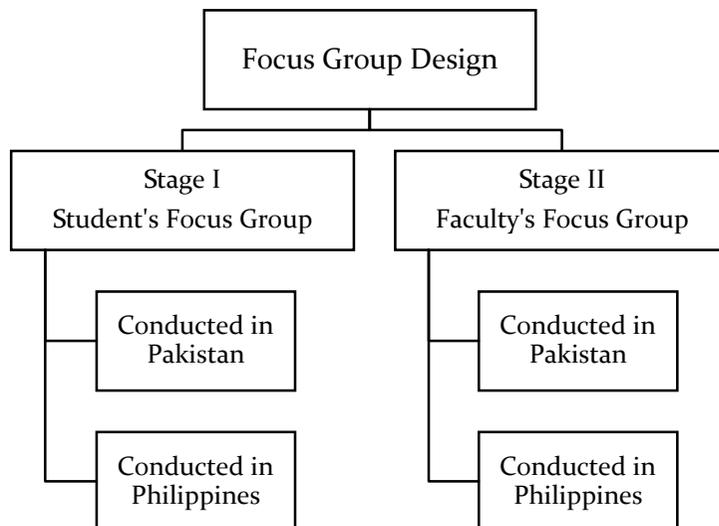


Fig. 2 Multi-Stage Focus Group Design

The focus group used in this research study has been operated under the participant observation method. In this method, the researcher observed the perceptions of the respondents on the topic. Both focus group sessions were planned very carefully to recruit willing participants to share their perception on the topic. Before the conduct of each focus group session, the researchers deliberated about the purpose of the study, type of information required by conducting the focus group, importance of the information and significance of the gathered information.

To maximize the quality of focus group procedure, the researchers also managed several operational issues including locating the relevant participants, establishing qualification criteria of the participants, finding motivated participants, finding a suitable location to conduct focus groups, formatting the leading questions to be asked and selecting an appropriate moderator. A chronological plan was developed, including the process of developing the subjects, identifying participants' characteristics, drafting a list of the potential participants, recruiting the participants, conducting meetings, soliciting feedback from the planning, transcription, analysis and composition of the report.

At the first stage of the focus group, a group of 15 - 20 students was recruited in each country. This sample of 20 students represented Bachelor's and Master's Degree programs. Students were recruited carefully to have a good mix of students from senior as well as junior semesters. This group was a combination of high achievers and mediocre students with an appropriate representation from both the genders. The rationale behind choosing a mix of students was to include student viewpoints from all possible angles. This also helped the researchers to get unbiased feedback from the students. At the second stage of the focus group, a group of 10 - 12 faculty members from each of the two countries were recruited from various teaching departments, including senior and junior faculty members.

The level of moderator involvement is very important in the conduct of a focus group. The moderator outlined the propositions of the study into the focus group for discussions and intimated the members whenever the discussion was going out of the scope of the focus group. Both the sessions were audio recorded as well as transcribed and later on, the text and audio were analyzed using observational and judgmental methods.

### Focus Group Findings

#### **Stage I Students' Focus Groups (held at Pakistan & Philippines)**

**Proposition 1:** A lenient faculty behavior leads towards higher (Positive) students' feedback.

While conducting the focus group, the students provided multiple responses when asked on their feedback about the lenient teacher. A majority of students said they like lenient teachers and rank them high. They enjoyed the class instead of that conducted by the strict teacher but some students did not agree with this. According to their view, some

teachers are

lenient, but along with their leniency they are compromising learning; leading to negative feedback. Another view of students is that, making a course interesting is different from lenient teaching. They said initially or at the start of the degree they really appreciate lenient teachers and like their teaching style but as they approach the higher level, it is no longer the case (as they become senior students). They said they do not want to accept free gifts in terms of grades, which means that grades should be based on the performance of the students. They come for learning and if a teacher only tells stories during classes, they definitely give negative feedback about that teacher. There are very few students who exhibited this kind of mentality. They also believe that every lenient teacher compromises teaching quality and learning. We inferred from all these views that majority of the students like lenient teachers and they definitely give positive feedback to them. They believe that every student wishes to be promoted with good grades, so that they may possibly obtain scholarships or other academic achievements.

**Proposition 2:** A strict faculty behavior leads towards lower (Negative) students' feedback.

Then in the second round, the researchers asked students on their perception about a strict teacher. Did they give negative feedback about that teacher or rank him high? Promptly, one of the students said, "*Yes of course I will definitely give negative feedback*". Another one gave the same statement and said that a majority of them wanted to pass with good grades and strict teachers give lower grades. One of them said, for new students definitely that they gave lowest rank to strict faculty, but more students who enrolled in the previous semesters stated they might give negative feedback to a strict teacher. According to more senior students, proper checks and balance is important, and if a strict teacher might lead them to higher learning, wisdom and sophistication, they will surely give positive feedback. They also stated that, it depends on a student's mentality that either they come to school only for the degree and good grades or for learning. If students are willing to learn, then a strict teacher will not always get a negative feedback.

On the other side, students who are against the strict teaching style do not believe that the strict teacher would get positive feedback. They explained that it is human nature, even in the parent-child relationship, that strictness leads towards breeding of bad habits in the child such as disliking parents, telling lies, and theft etc. They completed their discussion by stating that teachers should not be so strict. Teachers should incite a sense of affinity with their morality and virtue in their students. They stated that if a teacher remained strict throughout the class, most of the students will drop the course. Irrespective of all these discussions, one of the senior students concludes all these deliberations by saying: "It all depends on students' own attitude towards learning. If a student is satisfied with his/her progress, even a strict teacher is acceptable and it may lead to positive feedback." Moreover, perception is more important in this regard.

**Proposition 3:** The level of student satisfaction is an indicator of teaching quality.

The last part of our discussion is related to teaching quality and student satisfaction. We proposed: Is there any relationship between student satisfaction and teaching quality? To know the answer to this question we asked students who are the actual audience of the focus group. One of the students from our focus group stated, that he does not answer the feedback form to reveal his dissatisfaction level. A majority of students agreed with him. They said that there are many flaws in the feedback system. There are only quantitative remarks not qualitative remarks about teachers in the feedback form. It's just like a customer satisfaction survey. Questions are not specific. Feedback is not a measure of satisfaction and teaching quality, it has no ability to judge the satisfaction. It's a mechanistic activity. It should be qualitative because qualitative remarks may explain why a student is ranking a faculty member high or low. Feedback might be useful for the university but not for the students. Student feedback is not a true reflection of student satisfaction because the feedback form has a validity issue.

According to the second group of students, teacher feedback is a true reflection of teaching quality. They feel satisfied in giving feedback. They stated that there might be two groups of students in class: Students with high grade may tick 5 (highly satisfied) whereas the rest may opt for 2 or 1 (highly dissatisfied). Higher grades lead to higher feedback and lower grades lead to negative feedback. Some students said it might be partially useful. To them, a few words written on the feedback form cannot judge teacher presentation/teaching quality.

#### **An experience with Feedback System**

At the culmination point of the focus group discussion, the researchers realized that students are really enjoying this discussion then the researchers asked them to voluntarily share any experience with feedback system. One of the students started telling his experience and said that in one of the semesters, the teacher was very strict throughout the course completion but when he came to giving feedback, he threatened the class. The new entrants think that negative feedback would cause them to have lower grades and that is why they avoid negative feedback.

Another question we asked of the students is "Have you ever felt empowered by feedback activity?" Most of the students answered "Yes". Almost 90% students feel empowered and think that giving feedback provides them the opportunity to get even with the teacher.

#### **Stage II Faculty's Focus Groups (held at Pakistan & Philippines)**

##### **Proposition 1**

In the second round of discussion, the focus group was faculty. First, we asked their opinion regarding the relationship between lenient teaching and feedback from students. The first member in the group replied that the teacher is not required to be lenient throughout the semester but should be the day your feedback (FB) is due. Quizzes announced on FB day and a

lenient behavior on that day may lead to lenient FB from students. The second member of the group disagreed with the first member and stated that in his personal view, it has a very small impact. It does not matter. It is subjective in nature. It's nothing but merely a Class-Fit matter. A lenient behavior on FB day does not make any impact. If the teachers are too lenient, it gives a very negative impression to students. The third faculty member started his/her opinion by defining leniency and explaining how students perceive it. S/he says leniency is subjective in nature because in what sense one may view being lenient, i.e. arrival in class / curriculum / reducing quizzes etc. The teacher does not have any idea about it at that time. In his/her first semester, FB was very poor because of strict behavior but now he/she is a bit lenient but doesn't know it has any impact on FB or not. Other faculty members also provided their valuable comments and suggestions as they perceived the impact of being lenient. One of them suggested that the FB form should be with students throughout the semester because FB time is very short. Students need to understand and then fill it out. Everyone in this world has a different perspective, by saying this, one of the faculty members said, "in my opinion teachers should follow a simple rule that is *Strict teaching – Lenient Examination*". A majority of students like these kinds of teachers who pretend to be really very strict throughout the semester, but when the examination day comes, the exam is lenient. Their perception about that teacher changes in a couple of minutes. As opposed to this opinion, the other faculty members responded that the stage of career one is in matters a lot. Additionally, what perception students have towards a teacher also matters.

One of the faculty members said, "I think on one argument almost every faculty member agreed is that students do comparison between teachers". Abruptly, another faculty member also agreed with this statement and said, yes, it happens. A student is being taught by five or six teachers. Yes, they compare one with the other teachers. Bit by bit everyone agreed by responding yes, comparison is there and students tell you that the "*rest of the teachers do not do this*". They perceive it above leniency and strictness. Every good teacher is lenient in nature but it has a weak relation.

They concluded their discussion about the first proposition by saying in the short term, it has a positive relationship but in the long term, it turns into a negative. Students give you positive FB when you show leniency towards them. But at the undergraduate and graduate levels, leniency definitions are different among students. For instance, at graduate level, a teacher may allow students to enter late in the class and at the undergraduate level, you may be available in your room other than your counseling hours. Every faculty member agreed on our first proposition but they were not sure on its long term positive relationship. They said sometimes students might also give negative feedback about a lenient teacher as well. Because in a class some students who are hard workers and want to learn, may give negative FB if a teacher is too lenient. But these types

of students are very few. This opinion of faculty is consistent with the view of student's focus group discussion.

### **Proposition 2**

Then we asked their perception about our second proposition i.e., what relationship they conceived between a strict teaching behavior and student's feedback. Is it positive or negative? One of the faculty members in the focus group said that sometimes they need to tell them why they are strict. If you are going against the culture of the organization, students will have a different impression about you. Another said, if students think that FB has no impact on teachers they give positive FB. Another faculty member started conveying his opinion by saying, sometimes you are logical, even if a teacher is not good, but as a person you are very good; they give you positive FB (stereotyping). Students need leniency. Teachers perceive that sometimes students give negative FB because they do not like the course. Therefore, our question is what we should do to improve this system by which students' perception may change. The public/private education sector may play a moderator role. And also students perceive some psychological entitlement. They do not know the actual worth of the feedback. While filling out the FB form, students should know how credible the FB is. Sometimes, students say that it is not relevant. As opposed to this, if students know the impact of FB, they can manipulate it.

### **Proposition 3**

In our third proposition, we asked the faculty members if there was any relationship between students' satisfaction and teaching quality. First they said that as far as their University is concerned, they did not perceive any relationship between student satisfaction and teaching quality. If the institute has quality intake of those who are interested in learning and having a good academic background, even a strict teacher might be a favorite because he/she induced them to learn, and ultimately, students will like him/her. One of the faculty members said, that in some cases student satisfaction might be an indicator of teaching quality. While arguing from the first view, another member said no and that it should be 360° feedback and do not think that there is any relationship between student satisfaction and teaching quality. Meanwhile, one of the faculty members said that student satisfaction is an indicator of the quality of teaching as it reflects the competency of the teacher.

In opposition to all of the above arguments, a faculty member said that sometimes two same level courses may have different FB for the same teacher even though the students are taught in the same manner. It depends on class formulation. It's not only the student satisfaction which is the indicator of the quality of teaching, other factors may also be included in this such as class participation, timings of the class, duration of the class, room, size of the class, age group or back-to-back classes. They concluded that in some members' perception, there is no relationship between students' satisfaction and teaching quality, disagreed and perceived that students will

be satisfied if they believe their teacher to be competent enough. They also said that scale of FB should be re-validated for more accuracy.

### Discussion

It is very much evident that students do comparison between teachers. It is a common practice among students to discuss teachers. They will discuss who is strict and is more lenient than others. Definitions of leniency and strictness also vary as both phenomena may be perceived differently by students. These variations in definitions also make a strong impact on their liking or disliking of teachers and ultimately affect their faculty's feedback. But usually a lenient teacher is very much liked by majority of the students. There are very few students who believe being lenient is a major hindrance in providing quality learning in the classroom.

Organizational culture has a strong impact on the feedback of students when teacher's leniency and strictness is discussed. Sometimes teachers have to explain why they are strict. The personality of the teacher is also one of the key predictors of students' feedback, even if the teacher is not too good in teaching. Sometimes the course itself leads to a negative feedback as students may not like to study that particular course and as a result may reflect in their feedback.

Some of the teachers even claim that student's satisfaction is not an indicator of teaching quality. But it is very much agreed by the majority that student satisfaction is not the only factor to indicate quality of teaching as teaching more than one section of the same course by the same teacher may produce different students' feedback. There are many other factors which do contribute as well. These factors may include age group, number of students in the class, class duration, back to back classes, even class timings, etc.

### Conclusion

On the basis of four distinct focus group sessions with students and faculty members in two different countries, this research study concludes that it is likely that lenient faculty behavior with students will get a high percentage of students' feedback and may compromise quality of teaching. Similarly, strict behavior of faculty will get low percentage of feedback despite good quality of teaching. In this way, there is a possibility of relationship between the quality of teaching and positive students' feedback. This research also concludes that the students' evaluation (feedback) seems to be a direct measure of student satisfaction and a weak measure of teaching quality. In addition, students' evaluation questionnaires used in various universities need to be revalidated.

As far as the cross country analysis and trends are concerned, although both the countries are miles apart, the researchers have found strong correlation and likeness in the focus group discussion and arguments of both faculty and students about faculty behavior and teaching quality. One possible reason of this resemblance could be the comparable socio economic factors of both the countries as both are struggling economies and ranked as developing countries.

## Future Implications

Despite the significance of this study, there are several recommendations mentioned below for scholars conducting research in the near future:

1. Duration spent at university may be an important factor to consider; it is suggested to repeat the study with students from multiple study years i.e., comparison among 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> year and graduating students.
2. It is also recommended to make a comparison among business and non-business students.
3. Students' feedback scale should be re-validated and the study may be re-conducted to see any significant changes.
4. The study has been done using qualitative method whereas it may be replicated using quantitative methods to obtain more accurate results.

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