

This book centres on improving educational quality in higher learning institutions. “*Constructive Feedback*” explores the key concept of “Education for All” arguing convincingly that improved access to primary and secondary education will in the long run increase the influx of students into higher education. Therefore, the quality of education in higher learning also needs attention. It requires highly trained lecturers and researchers to provide high quality instruction. Considering this, the book identifies constructive feedback as a key tool for improving teaching quality. Since the study was conceptualized as a controlled intervention, it gives educational practitioners insights on how positive changes for educational quality improvement can be initiated and implemented. The findings discussed in the light of the discourse on feedback and educational quality lead to the conclusion that constructive feedback as an approach to individual student support is necessary for the enhancement and development of the overall education system.

Thus, these findings provide guidelines for establishing a culture of feedback in universities, as well as in schools, that is useful for improving the quality of teaching and learning. Researchers and other educational stakeholders will find this book useful in the reflection and implementation of education quality.



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Nyiramana, C.

Constructive Feedback



Brot
für die Welt

New Perspectives on Quality Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Edited by Susanne Röss, Tharcisse Gatwa,
Susanne Krogull, Annette Scheunpflug, and Penine Uwimbabazi

Constructive Feedback: A Tool to Enhance Educational Quality in Higher Learning Institutions

Christine Nyiramana

PIASS PUBLICATION SERIES N°20

Constructive Feedback

New Perspectives on Quality Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Over recent decades, national and international policy actors together with teachers, parents, community leaders, and faith-based organizations have made great progress in providing access to education. Today around the world, more children are in school than ever before. Yet being in school is not enough. These exceptional improvements in expansion of access to schooling require a sustained effort to ensure the quality of education provided in schools. This series presents new findings on dimensions of quality education in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. The authors in this series have conducted their research in the context of the *International Master Program of Educational Quality in Developing Countries* (IMPEQ) at the University of Bamberg in partnership with the Protestant University of Rwanda, the Free University of the Great Lakes Region in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Evangelical University of Cameroon. The research has been made possible through the funding from Bread for the World – the Development and Relief Agency of the Protestant Churches in Germany. The monographs in this series highlight the importance of continuous teacher education and, most importantly, the centrality of efficient leadership for fostering educational policies and practices that meet the needs of all students.

*For my husband and my daughters who stood
on my side and kept on encouraging me
until I achieved this milestone.*

Constructive Feedback: A Tool to Enhance Educational Quality in Higher Learning Institutions

Christine Nyiramana



Brot
für die Welt



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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| CATs | Continuous Assessment Tests |
| DAC | Director of Academics |
| DAQ | Director of Academic Quality Assurance |
| EFA | Education for all |
| GAR | General academic regulations |
| HEC | Higher Education Council |
| HIV | Human immunodeficiency virus |
| IMPEQ | International Master Program in Educational Quality |
| INATEK | Institute of Agriculture, Technology and Education of Kibungo |
| INILAK | Independent Institute of Lay Adventists of Kigali |
| IUCEA | Inter-University Council for East Africa |
| JISC | Joint Information Systems Committee |
| LTC | Learning and teaching centre |
| MDGs | Millennium development goals |
| MINEDUC | Ministry of Education |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PPP | Power point presentation |
| SSA | Sub-Saharan African |
| ULK | Kigali Independent University |

| | |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UNSW Australia | University of New South Wales Australia |
| WS | Work sheet |
| WU | Work unit |
| VRAC | Vice-Rector Academics |

SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

Beyond the fact that the completion of compulsory education has substantially improved over the past twenty years, achieving educational quality for all continues to be a major challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa where many children do not reach basic skills in reading and numeracy by the end of primary school (UNESCO, 2014). A focus on quality education is thus paramount to improve the overall performance of educational systems and to support students' academic achievement. High quality education requires high quality research that combines sophisticated knowledge of educational theories, adequate research methods, and contextualizing sensibilities for local realities as they intersect with global political, economic, social, and historical forces. Every educational dimension imaginable – school access, didactics and pedagogical approaches, academic content and competences – if approached with such a notion of high quality research presents itself as a challenge that poses many questions and few certain answers. To nonetheless forge pathways towards much needed answers requires a sturdy intellect, diligence, creativity, and a supportive community of scholars engaged in critical feedback. Monographs in this series carefully investigate educational concepts and theories as they pertain to quality education in Sub-Saharan Africa. They cover many topics ranging from leadership skills, competence-based and learner-centered pedagogies, cognitive activation, critical thinking skills, and socially responsive and inclusive approaches to teaching. The monographs go beyond theory in that they reflect on the practical implications of the research findings. The authors provide in-depth analyses grounded in a deep knowledge of and experiences in the context in which the research was

conducted. They articulate recommendations that touch on the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of schooling. In this way, the series provides a collective space for emerging African scholars to discuss their research on education to impart lessons for mastering 21st century challenges in education everywhere.

In *Constructive Feedback: A Tool to Enhance Educational Quality in Higher Learning Institutions*, Mrs Christine Nyiramana uses her study to handle a crucial problematic in educational quality that is linked to higher institutions of learning with particular references to one quality tool; constructive feedback. She contextualizes her argumentation in higher learning institutions in the developing countries with Rwanda as her case study. Christine approaches this by a triangulation of merging the situation of higher institutions of learning in Rwanda and crafting a linkage between the Education for All paradigm and the concept of constructive feedback. She handles the study at hand by employing her analytical prowess in a deep theoretical x-ray of constructive feedback from its definitional orientation to educational quality enhancement in Rwandan high learning institutions. Christine skilfully adopted the qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews as her modus-operandi and crowned it with an intense intervention to collect data. Her meticulous and coherent study resulted to crucial findings indicating that constructive feedback is in urgent demand and in dire need for the enhancement of development not just in the educational realm but also in the society as a whole. Christine uses precise and simple language and advocated for further research and practice.

AUTHORS' PREFACE

This book titled: “Constructive feedback: A tool to enhance educational quality in higher learning institutions“ has been adapted from my Master Study which was submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Educational Quality in Developing Countries at Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg, Germany.

The book is centered on a growing field of educational quality: higher learning institutions. The book delves on a key UN program concept of “Education for All” and argues convincingly that its aim to bring all children into school will finally result to taking more students in higher learning institutions. Therefore, and also in view of the need of well-educated men and women for the growth of developing countries, higher learning institutions in this context need to focus on quality education. Considering this, the book therefore concentrated on the identification of a key tool to improve quality in this perspective: constructive feedback.

The book begins with a contextual delimitation of the higher learning sector of Rwanda, establishes a relation to EFA and quality education and links it to the role of constructive feedback. This led to an identification of the research question, which the book exploited and answered by looking at the experiences of teachers in higher learning institutions about giving feedback. It goes further to handle the international state of research on constructive feedback, moving from definitions, guidelines on its provision, to its impact on educational quality enhancement and finally, to the context of Rwandan higher education. In doing this, the book adopted a methodological procedure guided by qualitative methods, prominently steeped in a controlled intervention and semi-structured interviews that provided

the data collected and analysed. This study that resulted in this book is divided in six chapters: appreciation of training and recognition of importance of constructive feedback, challenges when providing constructive feedback, suggestions on strategies for better use of constructive feedback. Each one of these aspects is described with several sub-aspects and supported by sections of the transcripts. A reflection on the limitations of the data suggests ways and venues through which the research could be taken further and improved.

The findings are discussed in the light of the discourse on feedback and educational quality in an affirmative way. They lead to the conclusion that constructive feedback is needed for the enhancement and development of the educational system. The conclusion also develops recommendations for further research and practice.

Several persons have contributed a lot to the accomplishment of this work. Firstly, my appreciation goes to Otto Friedrich University of Bamberg, Germany and the Protestant Institute of Arts and social Sciences (PIASS), Rwanda for initiating and running together this International Master's program of educational quality. My recognitions go more especially to the responsible of the program, Professor Doctor Annette Scheunpflug, to the former Executive Director of the program, Dr. Susanne Krogull and to all academic staff members of the program. This research would not have been possible without their generous support and encouragement. Their enthusiasm for this study has been unwavering. My special thanks are addressed to Bread for the World- Protestant Development Service, Germany that supports financially the program and willingly covered all the financial expenses for my

studies. My gratitude is as well addressed to the leaders and staff of INES-Ruhengeri, Rwanda my former employer during the period of my master degree studies for their guidance and support throughout my studies.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my beloved family for always being there for me all the way, all the time, through difficulties during the whole process of completing my studies. All their support and sacrifices are invaluable to the success of my studies. It is with all my family's never-ending love, understanding, and encouragement that I reach the finishing line earning me a master degree. Without all the above help, it would have been far more difficult to complete my master studies successfully.

Finally, my sincere appreciation goes to the current Executive Director of IMPEQ, Dr. Susanne Röss and her team, who spent their time proof reading and working on the formatting of this book. Accept my deepest thanks.

1

INTRODUCTION

Rwanda is a sub-Saharan African (SSA) country in which higher education level dates back to 1936 (World Bank, 2003, p. 136). Higher education in Rwanda is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and more precisely of the Higher Education Council (HEC) created in 2003. The primary objective of HEC is “enhancing quality of education, the modes of providing it within higher learning institutions and making sure that those graduating from such institutions are knowledgeable for the improvement of the Rwandan residents’ welfare and development of Rwanda” (HEC, 2013, p. 11). According to the ownership status, higher education in Rwanda is divided into governmental higher learning institutions and non-governmental higher learning institutions. In the Rwandan context, these two types of higher learning institutions are respectively recognized as public and private higher learning institutions. This research focuses on one of Rwandan private higher learning institution.

Higher education in Rwanda expanded very rapidly after 1994 in terms of number of institutions and number of students admitted. In 2000-2001, there were 12 higher learning institutions with nearly 12,718 students. This increased to 38 higher learning institutions with 84,448 students in 2013 (World Bank, 2003 & Republic of Rwanda, 2014). Higher learning institutions in Rwanda differ also

in terms of categories of admitted students. Generally, students who are admitted in public higher learning institutions are selected among the best performers in national examinations done at the end of secondary level. The remaining students, i.e. those who are not admitted in public higher learning institutions seek admission in private higher learning institutions. This means that private higher learning institutions admit in most cases not the best but rather the average and the low performers. This explains why the issue of quality development is foremost important in Rwandan private higher learning institutions (Gauthier & Dembélé, 2004; Heckman, 2008; Heckman, 2011 as cited in OECD, 2012). Currently, quality education does not only concern private higher learning institutions but all education systems. The High Education Council (HEC) put it as follows: “since 1994 we have invested in building the quantity of Higher education. Much has been achieved but now we have to focus on establishing quality within our education system” (Republic of Rwanda, 2008, p. 2).

Additionally, quality education is a worldwide concern. Since the elaboration of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in reference to the Jomtien declaration and the Dakar declaration, quality education is mostly emphasized and highlighted by both the six “education for all” (EFA) goals and two education MDGs (Fredriksson, 2004; Ross & Genevois, 2006). The role of higher education in achieving the other six MDGs is considerable. For instance, the UNESCO reports on the central role of education in the MDGs shows that there is a strong link between education and the achievement of MDGs such as poverty reduction, better maternal health, reduction of child mortality, prevention of new HIV infections and

environmental sustainability (UNESCO, 2010, p. 218). Among the strategies proposed in this report to accelerate this movement, there is improvement of education quality and catering for underserved groups. Holtland and Boeren (2006) stress the role of higher education and research in the realization of all the eight MDGs. Concerning education quality, Holtland & Boeren (2006) point out that “more and better higher education leads to improvement in the quality of the total education system as all levels of education are interdependent” (p. 10). However, in the context of international educational movements, the higher education system has been neglected so far though its fundamental importance in achieving the MDGs is actually recognized (Materu, 2007; Burnett & Felsman, 2012). This implies that the next step has to focus on quality in higher education especially in SSA where it is still of the essence and where the interdependent relations between higher learning institutions and EFA have not been solid (Materu, 2007, p. 7).

The theme of my study is linked to the reflection of the contribution of constructive feedback in enhancing teaching and learning process; this is the reason why it tries to understand whether it can be embedded in the discourse on quality education. This is because the discourse on teaching quality shows that constructive feedback is one of the indicators to reach higher competence levels among students (Centra, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Kamardeen, 2013; UNESCO, 2004). From what is known, education quality is assessed from students’ competencies especially according to how they apply their knowledge in solving real world problems (Biggs, 2001, p. 222); these competencies are expressed in terms of learning outcomes at school level. Likewise, assessment is considered as “an essential

element in the learning cycle central to an understanding of how these learning outcomes are achieved” (Wilson, 2012, p. 1). In this regard, assessment is understood as any process used to appraise the learning of a student depending on predetermined objectives (McCulloch, 2007, pp. 2-4).

Literature reveals that assessment has undergone changes aiming at improving the quality of education. In this regard, many educational researchers say that the role of assessment should not be limited to students' achievement testing and certification but mainly in determining the kind of learning support they need. More and more new approaches emphasise formative assessment and assessment for learning rather than on summative assessment and assessment of learning (JISC, 2010, p. 12). In formative assessment, the results are used for feedback during learning since students and teachers both need to know how learning is proceeding. Formative feedback may also operate both ways to improve learning of individual students and to improve teaching itself. Thus, “formative feedback is inseparable from teaching and the effectiveness of different teaching methods is directly related to teachers' ability to provide formative feedback” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 163). This is as well emphasized by Vitiené and Miciulienė (2008, p. 167) who specify that assessment is said to be of good quality if it gives students the opportunities to receive feedback for the future improvement of their performances. Hence ‘quality’ assessment is done through motivating each student to improve his/her performance, and by providing both the teacher and students with information on the needed improvement.

According to Ovando (1994, p. 4), feedback may be for learning or for teaching. In providing feedback for learning, different ways can be used including tests, students' assignments, projects, and performance in class during the instruction process. In this regard, teachers are best placed to provide feedbacks. This study focuses on feedback for learning from the teachers. Feedback is understood as an information provided by teachers to help their students reduce the gap between their current and desired performances (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, pp. 86-87). However, there exist different forms of feedback given to students but according to Laurie (2013), regardless the feedback content i.e. good or bad, its delivery should always be positive. Laurie adds that the best feedback is constructive as it is the most useful and beneficial to the receiver because it provides encouragement, support, corrective measures and direction. Hattie and Timperley emphasize that the kind of feedback and how it is conveyed influences students' learning and achievement (2007, p. 86).

It is important to mention that literature in this field uses different appellations to mean constructive feedback. Some of these appellations are formative feedback, effective feedback, good feedback, high quality feedback and positive feedback. In this study, I have chosen to use the term constructive feedback because its characteristics combine the meaning of the others. The following section states the problem behind this research on constructive feedback.

1.1 Statement of the problem

During their studies, students' competencies are shaped depending on different aspects such as their social background, intelligence, context and the kind of teaching they receive but among all these aspects, teaching matters most (UNESCO, 2004, p. 161). This is because regardless of other aspects, when the quality of teaching is improved even low performing students benefit from it (Gauthier & Dembélé, 2004; UNESCO, 2004). However, to achieve this, different parts of teaching should be taken into consideration. In this view, feedback is a structural part of two subsystems operating within the study system of a higher learning institution, namely the subsystem of teaching and learning processes, and on the other hand, assessment (Nijolé, 2012, p. 36). Educators at the James Cook University (2011, p. 1) emphasize that it is very important to provide and receive effective feedback during the teaching and learning process; it is one of the most important tools motivating and ensuring quality learning to students. Hounsell (2008, p. 5) underlines this saying that students underperform or do not attain their capabilities if they are not given effective feedback.

Actually, the HEC also, being responsible for securing coherent provision of quality higher education in Rwanda in line with the Government policies and priorities (HEC, 2013), conducts institutional audits in different higher learning institutions to assess the quality of their education. The auditors inquire about guidance and support provided to students including the kind of feedback students receive on submitted works looking if it is prompt, detailed and helpful (HEC, 2007, p. 118). However, according to research findings, feedback continues to be a source of

students' dissatisfaction (Learning and teaching centre, 2008, p. 1). From this, one question can be asked about the type of feedback students need for the betterment of their performances.

Among Rwandan researchers who focussed on this problem of feedback provision on assessment of students' learning in higher education, Rwanamiza (2011) reported the views of some interviewees as following:

The key reason for my dissatisfaction is that when any assessment is done ... no correction is made so that one knows what the right or wrong answers were but only scores / marks are given back to students. Even in case there was not enough time to make this correction, at least students could be given their scripts back so that they compare these. This is very important even if one would have got a zero score/mark. (p. 71)

And in the summary of his findings, Rwanamiza mentions that most students and some lecturers found out that assessments were not followed up either through individualized feedback comments or at least through collective correction. Additionally, an investigation carried out by one private higher learning institution in 2013 on the causes of students' failures has shown that poor feedback provided to students especially after continuous assessment is among the five most important causes of students' failures (INES-Ruhengeri, 2013, p. 6).

The beginning of 2013-2014 academic year has experienced different changes, especially concerning the review of general academic regulations governing all higher

learning institutions in Rwanda. Among the modifications made are: the setting of minimum admission criteria in all higher learning institutions, the abolition of second sitting examinations at all levels and the changes of conditions of promotion from one level to the next (Republic of Rwanda, 2013a, p. 12). It is important to note that public higher learning institutions continue to admit the best students selected according to results from national examinations written at the end of secondary level studies. However, literature shows that education quality matters more than the kind of students admitted (Gauthier & Dembélé, 2004; Heckman, 2008; Heckman, 2011 as cited in OECD, 2012).

As in the Rwandan higher education at the end of each academic year, a certain number of students repeat either the whole academic year or are allowed to progress to the next level but have to repeat the modules they failed (INES-Ruhengeri, 2013; INILAK, 2013; INATEK, 2014; ULK, 2014). However, “it is known that simply having a child repeat a grade is unlikely to address the problems s/he is experiencing. Likewise, “simply promoting a student who is experiencing academic or behavioural problems to the next grade without additional support is not likely to be an effective solution either” (Jimerson, Woehr & Kaufman, 2004, p. 1).

While reviewing the general academic regulations, an increase of repetition rate was expected but also preventive strategies mainly aimed at improving quality education. Preventive strategies include the increase of the marks allocated to CATs from 40% to 60% of the total module score (INES-Ruhengeri, 2013; Republic of Rwanda, 2013a; INATEK, 2014; INILAK, 2014). Continuous assessment tests (CATs) were emphasized

because this new general academic regulation stipulates that students should normally receive timely feedback on their grade and performance on CATs to that they take advantage for the improvement of their learning process (INES-Ruhengeri, 2013; Republic of Rwanda, 2013a; INATEK, 2014; INILAK, 2014). According to the importance assigned to feedback in teaching and learning process by many scholars, constructive feedback is a key element of quality teaching (Hattie, 2009; Newstead & Hoskins, 2008; Race, 2001; Hattie, 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Nijolé, 2012; Kamardeen, 2013; UNSW Australia, 2014). This is also stressed in a research conducted among Rwandan students in higher education; “students expressed their desire to have feedback on their work so that they use it to improve their learning” (Mugisha, 2010, p. 95). One student interviewed said:

[It] is common in our department for students to get marks and not scripts on which they answered questions and even the marks are disclosed long after we have written the assessment task. This is true for both partial and final exams. So that is why I am also saying, like those who talked before me, that there is a need to strengthen the existing regulations and make them cover assessment issues to the point of providing feedback to students. Personally, marks alone don't tell me much. (p. 97)

With regard to the above-mentioned problems related to feedback to students, under the provision of the present study, we conceived an intervention consisting in training academic staff members in one private higher learning institution on constructive feedback. The present study

describes how the intervention has started bringing change to the existing situation. The main objective and the guiding questions are presented in the following section.

1.2 Research questions

The aim of this study is to analyse experiences of teachers with regard to constructive feedback provision to students and more specifically to the challenges they are encountering. In order to achieve this aim, I was guided by the following three research questions: (i) What experiences do teachers have with the provision of constructive feedback to students? (ii) What are the challenges to be faced by teachers in delivering constructive feedback to students, and (iii) what strategies are necessary to be taken to ensure good provision of constructive feedback to students? In answering these questions, I hope to give teachers of higher learning institutions the specific skills and strategies needed to help students perform well by using constructive feedback. In a broader perspective, the purpose of this study is to provide findings, which can be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning in higher learning institutions.

1.3 Structure of the book

This book is divided in six chapters. In chapter one, I state the problematic of research in this important domain of improving quality education by an institutional policy on feedback to students, then chapter two link to the existing scholarly literature on the theme.

Given the identified need of improving educational quality in the targeted HLI, a professional training on constructive feedback was organized. The third chapter enlightens the

objectives of the conducted training and its implementation. Encountered problems, and lessons learnt from this training are described. The next chapter presents the methodology used to conduct this research. Since the research question is associated with understanding of processes of quality improvement, it has been conceptualized as a controlled intervention followed by a research. It was done using semi-structured interviews with teachers selected among participants of the above mentioned training. In the fifth and sixth chapters, findings of this study are presented and discussed. In here, it becomes clear that without a constructive feedback, it is difficult for teachers to identify and teach in a way that meet students' needs. Additionally, findings indicate that if feedback is not given on time, the teacher's work is incomplete and students miss a lot for achieving expected learning outcomes.

Finally, the conclusions and recommendations invite teachers to make use of constructive feedback for promoting active participation of students and enhancing pedagogical relationships.

2

CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK AND QUALITY EDUCATION

Over the years, there have been different opinions on what should be the best definition of feedback. In this regard, Ashby mentions that: “feedback exists between two parts when each affects the other” (Ashby, 1957, p. 53). Later on different definitions have been given and some of these definitions explain very well its importance in the education sector. Feedback is defined as “information describing students’ performance in a given activity that is intended to guide their future performance in the same or in a related activity” (Ende, 1983, p. 777). Similarly, the learning and teaching centre (LTC) (2008) of the Macquarie University defines feedback on students’ assessment performance as:

A vital element in their learning which purpose is to justify to students how their mark or grade was derived, as well as to identify and reward specific quality in their work, to recommend aspects needing improvement and to guide students on what step to take (p. 1).

Additionally, Vitiené and Miciuliené state that feedback is an: “information on the assessment of student achievements prepared by a lecturer and provided to each student individually” (Vitiené & Miciuliené, 2008, p. 153). More precisely Nadine says: “feedback is a constructive

and objective appraisal of performance. It is given to improve a student's behaviour or skills" (Nadine, 2006, p. 4). Moreover, Yasir and Sajid says that, "feedback should have two main objectives such as appreciating the good/right things with logical explanations and identifying the bad/wrong things by providing options to change them" (Yasir & Sajid, 2010, p. 224). From the above paragraph, the definition of feedback itself as provided by different scholars emphasizes its usefulness. But, in order to alleviate some misconceptions about feedback, the following sections reinforce its effectiveness by emphasizing constructive feedback.

2.1 Constructive feedback

In most cases, students receive feedback after different kinds of assessments done during the courses. On the one hand, assessment is defined as "the measurement of the extent to which students have met the learning objectives of a course of study" (The Higher Education Academy, 2006, p. 1). On the other hand, feedback is "the information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley 2007, p. 81). Besides, "one of the most important person-to-person communication skills is the ability to give and receive feedback effectively and feedback does not have to be painful" (Poertner & Miller, 1996, p. 4). Poertner and Miller also argue that: "whenever we respond to another person, we are giving that person feedback and add that although there are many types of feedback, not every feedback is useful" (Poertner & Miller, 1996, p. 10). On this issue as mentioned in the introduction of this study whatever the content of feedback to be given to students

is, be it good or bad; it has to be provided in a positive way i.e. it should be constructive. Constructive feedback in turn is defined as “on-going, open, two-way communication between two or more people which should be timely and honest, as well as provide useful comments, suggestions and actions that contribute to a positive outcome, better process or improved behaviours for it to be effective” (Laurie 2013, p. 56). Moreover, Laurie (2013) differentiates good constructive feedback from destructive feedback saying that good constructive feedback is given with the goal of improvement. It is timely, honest, respectful, clear, issue-specific, objective, supportive, motivating, action-oriented and solution-oriented whereas destructive feedback is unhelpful, accusatory, personal, judgmental, subjective, likely to undermine the student and to leave issues unresolved. Additionally, “destructive feedback i.e. negative feedback given in an unskilled way generally leaves the recipient simply feeling bad with seemingly nothing on which to build and no useful information to use for learning” (The University of Nottingham, 2012, p. 1).

Based on the different definitions of feedback and their perspectives, constructive feedback in this study is understood as on-going, open and solution-oriented information provided skilfully by teachers to help their students reduce the gap between their current and desired performances and to reach required competences at the end.

2.2 Characteristics of constructive feedback

There is a large amount of literature on characteristics of constructive feedback (For instance: Ovando, 1994; Race, 2001; Yasir & Sajid, 2010; the University of Nottingham, 2012; Susan, 2012; the University of Columbia, n.d;

Krogull, Scheunflug & Rwambonera, 2014). In some studies, these characteristics are called principles of constructive feedback, guidelines for constructive feedback, or standards of constructive feedback. In spite of these different terminologies used what matters most is that they all converge towards the same meaning. The Personal Development and Performance Review Guide of the University of Nottingham stipulates the necessity of learning to give and to receive constructive feedback for human beings basing on its importance in human intellectual and social development. It also adds that constructive feedback should not only be understood as positive feedback, but also negative feedback given appropriately (the University of Nottingham, 2012, p. 1).

From the above literature, to be effective, constructive feedback should be specific, descriptive, factual, immediate, solicited, balanced, encouraging, quantity regulated, able to establish a climate of trust and respect, and directed towards changeable behaviours. In this way, general comments should be avoided, but rather the comments should be given on time, and explicitly focusing on the behaviours rather than on the person. Additionally, it is essential that the quality of the comments be insinuated than the quantity. Regarding the behaviours on personal levels. Moreover, the feedback provider has to make sure not to offend the receiver in the process by inclusively building on what was well done to later on suggest what is to be improved. However, it must be noted that feedback is most effective when it is inspiring because it prompts the student to ask for it the next time.

The following section help to understand some models, which may be used to simplify the provision of effective feedback.

2.2.1 Models of giving constructive feedback

There are different models suggested by different authors (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Yasir & Sajid, 2010) for simplification and good quality provision of constructive feedback. The basic aim of these models is to deliver constructive feedback by focusing on the principles and features involved in the process of feedback. According to Hawkins and Shohet (1989 as cited in James Cook University, 2011, p. 5), the CORBS model can be used to help remember how to give effective feedback:

- CLEAR - try to be clear about what the feedback purpose as being vague and faltering increase the anxiety in the receiver and may not be understood.
- OWNED - The feedback you give is your own perception and not an ultimate truth. It helps the receiver if this is stated or implied in the feedback, e.g. "I found that ..." rather than "It's obvious that..."
- REGULAR - If the feedback is given regularly, it is more likely to be useful. Avoid waiting until someone is leaving to tell him / her how he / she could have done better.
- BALANCED - It is good to balance negative and positive feedback
- SPECIFIC - Generalized feedback is hard to learn from.

Yasir and Sajid, (2010, p- 226-227) propose also different models but choose to focus on the TELL model because of its simplicity and ability to address all the characteristics of constructive feedback including the most important aspect of feedback, that is of being a two-way communication.

Yasir and Sajir explain the TELL model as follow:

- TELL students, specifically, about the exact behaviour you want repeated or is problematic (and therefore, to be corrected).
- EXPLAIN what results or implications are created by their actions either negative or positive. Do not blame or attack
- LISTEN to their ideas for correcting the problem.
- LET them know what positive or negative consequences will occur if the problem is corrected or not.

In the same regard, Hattie and Timperley (2007, pp. 86-87) propose a model of feedback that identifies three main feedback questions:

- Where am I going? (What are the goals?)
- How am I going? (What progress is being made toward the goal?)
- Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?)

These three questions address the dimensions of feed up, feedback, and feed forward respectively. In addition, the answers to these questions enhance learning when there is a discrepancy between “what is understood” and “what is aimed to be understood.” The effectiveness of feedback depends on the level the feedback operates such as task level, process level, self-regulation level and self-level.

In the academic context, it appears that most students fail simply because of missing a clear guidance to help them understand envisaged goals, and needed effort.

Besides, the feedback that would help them is cryptic leading students into difficulties of decoding its meaning. In this regards, it becomes obvious that using one the above models would help teachers engage students in the process of feedback, and thus become active partners for the effectiveness of their learning process.

2.3 Challenges teachers face giving feedback

Normally to be able to achieve the goals of any activity, everyone needs to have enough awareness about its characteristics, benefits that one can expect from it as well as obstacles; he / she may meet while accomplishing it. This is the same in teaching activity where teachers need to have a clear vision and understanding of the work which is awaiting them to be able to help their students perform well. Especially to be able to provide high quality feedback, teachers should have information about the challenges they may meet and strategies to overcome them.

Both students and teachers meet challenges in the process of giving and receiving feedback. The UNSW Australia (2014), the LTC (2008) and the James Cook University (2011) identify some of these challenges. On one side, students find feedback cryptic (for example, “More”, “What’s this?”, “Link?”, or simply ticks and crosses). In these cases, students are sometimes unable to gauge whether a response is positive or negative, whether and how the feedback is related to their marks, and what they might do to improve. When feedback consists mainly of grammar and spelling corrections, and provides little or no advice for them to act on, students cannot tell what they have done well, what they need to change and why they have achieved the grade, they have. Feedback that does not acknowledge the way students’ learning has progressed

over time does not help them get a sense of how far they have come and what they have yet to achieve. On the other side, the academic staffs also report a range of concerns about assessment feedback, including the following: preparing good-quality assessment feedback for students is very time-consuming, in spite of its potential value for improving learning. When evidence suggests that students have not read the feedback or have acted on it, teachers see time and effort put into providing feedback as wasted. Giving feedback can be repetitive and unproductive. The academic staff often find themselves giving the same or very similar feedback to many students, or giving the same feedback to repeated efforts by one student, with no change occurring in that student's performance. Students can focus on negative comments and fail to register positive comments. Moreover, Hatzia Apostolou and Paraskakis (2010, p. 120) mention that both big class size and workload of higher education academic staff reduce the quality of feedback provided to students whereas feedback is central to students learning.

For both, students and academic staffs, when the assessment's feedback is delayed, it becomes a wasted effort for the academic staff and a wasted learning opportunity for students. On this concern, educators at UNSW Australia (UNSW Australia, 2014) note that if feedback is provided too late it cannot influence neither learning nor teaching, as teachers do not have time to adjust their teaching in response to students' performance.

2.3.1 Measures to overcome the challenges

In an assessment toolkit, educators at the UNSW Australia (UNSW Australia, 2014) provide a number of strategies that may be used to alleviate challenges encountered

within the process of feedback delivery. They group these strategies into three main categories such as planning for feedback, using technology and ensuring of fairness. Under the first strategies, they advise the academic staff to provide assessment feedback to students using different modes, at different times and places and with different goals. Concerning different modes of providing feedback to students, the LTC (2008, p. 3) suggests modes such as informal, formal, individual, generic, formative and summative. In the same assessment toolkit elaborated by UNSW Australia, a clear communication between teachers and students is suggested about shared understanding of what feedback is and of its purposes. It also mentions that feedback should be aligned with assessment criteria.

For large classes, researchers at UNSW Australia and LTC suggest that teachers should identify and address common issues in students' assignments, verbally or in a summary hand out and use lectures to provide feedback efficiently to a whole cohort. In addition, the fully understanding of the subject is essential in feedback provision. On the second strategy, educators at UNSW Australia propose as well to teachers to think on the use of technology such as track change function in Word to comment on students' work. Thirdly, the UNSW Australia points out that teacher should take into consideration students' diversities that may affect a student's capacity to receive and respond to a feedback when designing it. Hatziapostolou and Paraskakis (2010, p. 120) also propose the reduction of academic staff workload at higher education to allow them have enough time to be able to provide quality feedback to students.

Concerning the challenges met by teachers due to the fact that some students do not read the feedback or fail

to integrate feedback comments to improve their further learning, Spiller (2014, p. 2) suggests a number of solutions. Spiller says that to maximize students' engagement teachers should for instance design assessment so that students can see the direct benefits of attending to feedback advice, explicitly link feedback to learning goals and assessment criteria and show to students how feedback comments can be incorporated into subsequent performance. Spiller also adds that feedback should not be solely delivered by the teacher but should actively involve students in terms of self and peer feedbacks. This is as well supported by the implicit normativity of Greek education which stipulates that education needs personal involvement and even the implicit normativity of the allegory of the cavern which argues that even if the teacher may guide students, the way up must be done by students own power.

Under these strategies that may be used to overcome challenges of giving feedback, the James Cook University (2011, p. 5) advises teachers to use models of providing constructive feedback such as the CORBS model to plan what they have to say to ensure it is Clear, Owned, Regular, Balanced and Specific. The James Cook University also indicates the necessity of professional learning communities for teachers to discuss their concerns and reflect on related strategies for further improvement.

2.4 Constructive feedback and educational quality

“Assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in universities is currently of major concern” (Biggs 2001, p. 221). This is similar to the main objective of the Rwandan HEC as highlighted in the introduction of this study where it was created to fulfil mainly this purpose

(HEC, 2013). However, to be able to understand the purpose of this study, there is a need to first understand the concept of quality of education. This requires of course the understanding of the meaning of the term quality in education.

According to Materu (2007) “the notion of quality is hard to define precisely, especially in the context of tertiary education where institutions have broad autonomy to decide on their own visions and missions” (p. 1). The Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) compares quality to love which is as well difficult to define. This council continues by saying that there is no unique definition for quality as it is for love. Rather, the IUCEA takes quality as a multi-dimensional concept, i.e. quality of inputs, quality of process and quality of outputs, which dimensions have to be considered while assessing quality (IUCEA, 2010, p. 4). However, for the IUCEA as higher learning institutions have so many stakeholders with different opinions about quality, it has concluded that: “quality is a matter of negotiating between the academic institution and the stakeholders” (IUCEA, 2010, p. 4). Hence, the IUCEA describes quality as follows: “quality is achieving our goals and aims in an efficient and effective way, assuming that the goals and aims reflect the requirements of all our stakeholders in an adequate way” (IUCEA 2010, p. 4). In the same regard, the IUCEA gives three useful questions to be used while assessing quality among which according to my understanding the second fits best with the purpose of this study. These questions are: “Are we doing the right things? Are we doing the right things in the right way? (Are we in control of the process to achieve our goals and aims?) Do we achieve our goals?” (IUCEA 2010, p. 6). In the same view, Harvey and Green (1993) pinpoint different

aspects to help defining quality. As cited in Biggs (2001, pp. 221-222) two of them reflect the purpose of this study and have been summarized as follows:

Quality as fit for the purpose of the institution. Universities have several purposes, with teaching and research being the most important. The concern here is restricted to the purpose of getting students to learn effectively, and to accredit that they have learned in respect of publicly recognizable standards. The basic question then for quality assurance is: are our teaching programmes producing the results we say we want in terms of student learning?

Quality as transforming. Quality teaching transforms students' perceptions of their world, and the way they go about applying their knowledge to real world problems; it also transforms teachers' conceptions of their role as teacher, and the culture of the institution itself.

2.4.1 Constructive feedback and teaching-learning process

“Providing high quality formative feedback and assuring that students engage with it facilitates and promotes learning” (Hatziapostolou & Paraskakis, 2010, p. 121). “There is little doubt that good quality, comprehensive and timely feedback on students' coursework is one of the important factors to students' learning” (University of Ulster, 2013, p. 65). In addition, Biggs & Tang (2007, p. 39) underline that the most powerful enhancement to learning is feedback during learning. In their opinion, feedback is helping someone to know where they are going, telling him or her how well he or she is progressing, heightens expectations of success.

Nijolé (2012) utilizes a figure to illustrate the three subsystems operating within the study system of higher education institutions to highlight the importance of feedback. Nijolé says that: “a change in feedback will produce a change within the subsystems to which it belongs, i.e. the change will occur in both the subsystem of teaching and the subsystem of assessment” (p.36). Concerning assessment, Nijolé recognizes two types such as formative assessment and summative assessment. Usually, formative assessment takes place during the learning process while summative assessment takes place at the end. As indicated in the introduction of this study, formative assessments are designed to help students learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performances and on how they can be improved. Taking into consideration this purpose of formative assessment and due to the interaction, that exist among the three subsystems of a study system, the change in teaching and assessment should affect the subsystem of learning too, which will eventually lead to a change in the study system to which the three subsystems belong. Hattie and Timperley (2007) share the same view. They say: “feedback has no effect in a vacuum; to be powerful in its effect; there must be a learning context to which feedback is addressed” (p. 82). Moreover, Nijolé mentions that higher learning institutions need to improve the way feedback is provided to students in order to promote their learning (Nijolé, 2012, p. 43).

According to O’Farrell (2002), effective feedback contributes a lot in shaping students ‘learning. He says that: “successful feedback will for example build confidence in the students, motivate students to improve their learning; provide students with performance improvement information,

correct errors and identify strengths and weaknesses” (p. 6). Additionally, Hattie (2012) says that there are five important factors of the learning equation because they are related to learning intentions and success criteria among which he mentions confidence. Hattie says that the ability to be confident that one can achieve the learning objectives is critical. Such confidence can be obtained from many sources, including the teacher, by providing feedback and effective teaching. This ensures success in terms of feedback sharing and keeping away distraction.

2.4.2 Constructive feedback in the context of pedagogical relationship

“One of the main challenges of improving education is enhancing the interaction between teachers and students at all levels” (Yu, 2007 & Stanat et al, 2010 as cited in Krogull, Scheunpflug & Rwambonera, 2014, p. 49). This problem is also mentioned among the causes of repetition where it is mentioned that because of lack of pedagogical training, teachers do not know how to help students make up when they fall behind. According to UNSW (2014, p. 2) “constructive feedback guides students to become independent and self-reflective learners, and better critics of their own work, stimulates reflection, interaction and dialogue about learning improvement. Likewise, feedback is among strategies which enhance teacher-students relationship i.e. positive school climate”. Additionally “when students feel recognized and do not fear being embarrassed or compared to peers, they are more likely to identify positively with school, use cognitive strategies that contribute to academic success, and feel confident in their ability to learn” (OECD, 2012, p. 122).

2.4.3 Constructive feedback and students' motivation

“Feedback can be a powerful mechanism for enhancing student learning and motivation” (Retna & Cavana, n.d, p.1). In addition, “it is now widely acknowledged that the most effective pathway to improve student learning outcomes is the quality of teaching, especially teachers’ ability to motivate and facilitate such learning” (Enhancing quality of teacher education, n.d, p. 13). But, according to Callahan (2010, p. 1), motivating students is one of the greatest challenges that instructors face. Motivation is an important factor in the student’s learning process; it is positively correlated with students’ willingness to learn, high-level cognition, creativity and performance (Liu et al, 2012, p. 178). Yet, feedback is among the six essential pillars identified for a motivation-driven learning and teaching practice. One of these includes adopting relevant assessments and providing balanced feedback promptly (Kamardeen, 2013, p. 39). Moreover, “positive feedback encourages students to become self-motivated and independent learners because both positive and negative feedback influence student motivation and effort” (Centra, 2007, pp. 20-21).

Newstead and Hoskins (2008, p. 72) say that more often teachers complain about students’ lack of motivation and ask what they can do to solve this problem. They conclude this chapter saying that they have no ready panacea for solving the problems of student motivation, but it seems reasonable to suggest that the learning context and specifically the provision of high-quality feedback and the adoption of appropriate assessment systems are at least part of the answer. Besides, Irons (2010, p. 51) argues that it is important for academics to be aware of the motivating

effect of feedback, particularly positive feedback, on students. Students can be demotivated when feedback is not clear, not related to given assignment, judgemental and destructive.

2.4.4 Constructive feedback and self-regulated learning

In addition to teachers' guidance for students to learn better, students' self-engagement is much needed. In this same view it is argued that: "if students are to be prepared for learning throughout life they must be provided with opportunities to develop the capacity to regulate their own learning as they progress through higher education" (Nicol & Macfarlane, 2006, p. 15). Ross and Genevois support this idea where they mention that: "a high-quality education has to consider the learner as an active participant and a central part of educational efforts" (2006, p. 43). In this regard, self-regulated learning is defined as "an active constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features of the environment" (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002, p. 64). Different definitions of feedback show very clearly how feedback can help students take responsibility of their own learning i.e. become self-regulated learners. Roland & Bee (1998, p. 9) compare maintaining and improving performance to piloting an airplane from one area to another and use this as evidence to enhance this argument. For this, they reveal that to be successful constructive feedback should be given in time.

According to Nicol and Macfarlane (2006, p. 5), there are seven principles of good feedback practice that stress the usefulness of feedback in enhancing students' self-

regulation, which should characterize HE. On this issue, Nicol and Macfarlane (2006, p. 7) state that good feedback should clarify the meaning of good performance in terms of expected learning outcomes, foster self-reflection on learning, convey helpful information to students on their learning, and promote teachers' collaboration for teaching and learning improvement.

2.4.5 Constructive feedback as an indicator of educational quality

Feedback is not a new concept. It has been argued that, to make feedback beneficial to students and especially to different aspects involved in education, feedback has to be constructive. In this regard, constructive feedback is understood as on-going, open and solution-oriented information provided skilfully by teachers to help their students reduce the gap between their current and desired performances and to reach required competences at the end. To reach this purpose, the provision of constructive feedback needs to fulfil a number of characteristics such as being well timed, quantity regulated, balanced, encouraging and directed towards changeable behaviours. But the provision of good quality feedback is subjected to some challenges including for instance the fact that its preparation is very time- consuming.

The relationship between constructive feedback and educational quality improvement is mostly understandable through the benefits of constructive feedback in teaching and learning process. UNESCO in its EFA monitoring report, points out that the quality imperative is so important to differentiate educational outcomes from the processes to reach them while debating on quality of education (UNESCO, 2004, pp. 223-225). Additionally, the report

underlines different notions of quality associated with different educational traditions and approaches among which the quality understanding in humanist tradition contrary to the other traditions is very linked to the purpose of this study as it recognizes the usefulness of feedback to students. In this tradition, “the role of assessment is to give learners information and feedback about quality of their individual learning. Teachers’ role is more of facilitator than instructor is. Quality within this tradition emphasizes social constructivism” (UNESCO, 2004, pp. 32-35).

Moreover, the EFA report uses a framework for understanding, monitoring, and improving education quality that identifies five dimensions associated with quality which are interrelated and as shown by this framework, feedback is among the elements composing one of these dimensions. These dimensions are the following: 1) learner characteristics: this dimension stipulates that during assessment of education quality outputs initial learners’ differences should be considered. These differences include for instance socio-economic background, health, place of residence, cultural and religious background and the amount and nature of prior learning. 2) context: this dimension insists on the solid interrelation existing between education and the society. 3) Enabling inputs: the quality of teaching and learning is more influenced by the resources made available and their management. 4) Teaching and learning: this dimension shows that teaching and learning process is central to quality as it is considered as the main aspect for human development and change. It includes learning time, teaching methods, assessment, feedback, incentives, and class size. 5) Outcomes: this dimension indicates the overall education quality and includes literacy, numeracy, and life skills, creative and emotional skills, values, and social benefits (UNESCO, 2004, pp. 35-38).

Rowntree uses the example of golf to justify the need of constructive feedback in learning process. He states that to succeed at golf a person needs to be able to locate the ball. He takes feedback as the essence of learning saying that learners need to be directed throughout their learning by means of a personal response from another person able to encourage and help them reach expected outcomes (Rowntree, 1999, p. 17). This personal response should not be given anyhow as depending on the way it is given it may result into destruction instead of human construction. In this regard, constructive feedback comes in as it always aims at encouraging students. Besides, Hattie (1999, p. 11) takes feedback as the most influential element that improves achievement. In his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement, Hattie (2009) mentions six indicators towards quality in education among which two highlight the importance of feedback. In these two indicators, Hattie says that teachers should know individual support needed by their students and then be able to bridge identified gaps accordingly by means of constructive feedback.

Additionally, feedback is among the first ten factors on Hattie's rank order of 138 factors that influence students' achievement (Hattie, 2009). Furthermore, "learning achievement is the fundamental goal of all school efforts" (Krogull & Scheunpflug, 2010, p. 6). In this view, the importance of constructive feedback mentioned above helps to understand to which extent constructive feedback fuels the learning engine and at the end strengthens students learning. Additionally, according to the Johary's window of self-awareness, feedback helps both students and teachers to gain more knowledge about themselves in terms of their strengths and weaknesses which knowledge was previously hidden to them (James Cook University,

2011, p. 2-3). Similarly, “quality enhancement in higher education institutions should be a double-looped process searching to know whether institutions are doing things right and whether they are doing the right things” (Argyris & Schön, 1974 as cited in Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008, p. 12). Here, constructive feedback comes in to verify the effectiveness and efficiency of provided education and to open up students’ eyes towards desired competences the society expect from them.

2.5 Feedback in the context of Rwandan Higher Education

In the context of Rwandan higher education, feedback is mentioned in different documents. At national level, it is reflected on for instance in the general academic regulations (GAR) governing all Rwandan higher learning institutions revised in June 2013 and in the handbook for academic quality assurance and enhancement elaborated by the HEC. The private higher learning institution I have chosen as the case study of my research, mentions feedback as well in its academic documents. For example, feedback is stressed 30 times and 11 times respectively in its assessment policy and the handbook for profession-oriented education and training. The GAR of the concerned private higher learning institution revised in December 2013 to comply with the national regulations does also underline the importance of feedback.

From the above-mentioned documents, the way feedback is treated invites to reflect on the characteristics that make it constructive. Among these characteristics, time is the aspect, which is mainly focused on (INES-Ruhengeri 2013; Republic of Rwanda 2013a; INATEK 2014; INILAK 2014). On this issue of time, the assessment policy of the said

private higher learning institution indicates that: “students should receive ... feedback as soon as practicable, to maximise their opportunity to improve their performance, otherwise assessment will lose its impact to learning” (INES-Ruhengeri, 2014, p. 7). Moreover, this assessment policy specifies that: “to maximize the benefits of the continuous assessment, students must be given feedback (marks and suggestions for improvement) ... of the assessment done, not later than 48 hours after doing the assessment” (INES-Ruhengeri, 2014, p. 7). Besides timeliness, other characteristics regarding the regulation of feedback quantity, the reference of feedback to predetermined assessment criteria and the fact that feedback should be encouraging students in improving their performances are presented in the assessment policy but shallowly.

The assessment policy of this private higher learning institution underlines also some of the benefits of feedback. This assessment policy recognizes that assessment feedback is used to “enable and enhance student learning” (INES- Ruhengeri, 2014, p. 3). Additionally, this policy mentions: “feedback to students on their learning forms a critical part of the learning process and should be aimed at being analytical, constructive and empowering. High quality feedback will support development and will do more than simply justify the mark given” (INES-Ruhengeri, 2014, p. 7).

From what has been said above, one can ask himself / herself the reason behind conducting this research since feedback is already recognized by academic documents used in Rwanda especially in private higher learning institutions. The first reason is that all these documents have been recently elaborated i.e. in late 2013 and in early 2014. The second reason is related to the problems, which

are revealed in some research works mentioned above in the introduction of this study. The third reason is related to the importance assigned to in-service teacher training (UNESCO, 2014, p. 236). In this regard that I introduced as solution to the above-mentioned gaps and to help lecturers of the concerned private higher learning institution to understand the concept of constructive feedback well. Even if it is still early, this research is an evaluation on the implementation of the outputs of this training for further actions related to educational quality enhancement.

However, different research findings reveal the usefulness of constructive feedback with regard to educational quality enhancement in general and more specifically in higher education level. In this light, the provision of constructive feedback helps teachers to maintain the interconnection among the three systems operating within the study system of higher education institutions, which are teaching, assessment and learning. Additionally, when students are provided with constructive feedback, they become motivated and responsible of their learning and thus constructive feedback is considered as an indicator of educational quality. This is because constructive feedback falls among important factors, which influence students' achievement. Quality education being currently emphasized on in Rwandan higher education, feedback is among the key factor to be considered. Recently developed academic documents insist on it. However, they still present some gaps what explains the reason of conducting this research.

3

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING ON CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

As part of the research, a training workshop on constructive feedback was organized for university lecturers at one private HE institution in Rwanda. The training aimed to address the problem of poor student performance and dropout, which can be explained in part with the lack of constructive feedback given in seminars and concerning students written work. In this chapter, I provide details on the objectives, didactical planning, and implementation of the training.

3.1 Training objectives

Different scholars highlight the importance of in-service teacher training. For instance, Fredriksson (2004, p. 13) states that initial teacher education does not suffice in terms of teacher education but rather teachers needs ongoing support through in-service training for them to be aware of new discoveries in teaching and learning process for the effectiveness of their work. Teaching and learning process that includes teaching methods is central to education quality (UNESCO, 2004, p. 229). According to Biggs and Tang (2007, p. 196), teaching methods should be closely related to teachers' competences concerning the provision of formative feedback to students. It is

in this perspective that, after realizing the role played by constructive feedback not only in the adjustment of teaching methods to students' needs but also in the whole process of teaching and learning and in accordance with top managers of the concerned private higher learning institution, I decided to train the lecturers on the concept of constructive feedback. While preparing this training my intention was to help teachers have knowledge and experiences about the provision of constructive feedback to students. The objectives of this training are divided into two categories depending on their time of achievement. These categories are short-term objectives i.e. outputs of the training and long-term objectives i.e. outcomes of the training. The aim of this study is to evaluate how far these outputs are being implemented in the classroom context in order to take action to ensure the achievements of expected outcomes. The outputs of this training were that after the training, participants were expected to know the difference between constructive and destructive feedback, have identified guidelines for providing constructive feedback, have experienced to give constructive feedback, understand the benefits of using constructive feedback, understand the challenges faced when giving constructive feedback and how to overcome them. The expected outcomes in the long term following the implementation of the above outputs are that lecturers should be able to give constructive feedback to students, adapt and adjust their teaching style according to students learning needs, help students improve their performances, and support students bridge the gap between their actual performances and the required performances. Trained lecturers are also expected to assure good learning climate, promote dialogue about learning improvement between them and

their students, enhance students' motivation, and Help students become self-reflective and self-responsible of their learning.

Recognizing that students' poor performance lead sometimes to repetition in higher learning institutions of Rwanda, this study was initiated. As highlighted by some research findings, this problem is linked to inadequate feedback provided to students by lecturers especially after CATs (Mugisha, 2010; Rwanamiza, 2011). Lecturers revealed the same problem during this training when they said that they thought that marks' provision, no matter the time, and marking schemes were enough as feedback. Researchers as well point out this misconception. For instance, medical schools in Pakistan regarded awarded marks as enough feedback for their students (Yasir & Sajid, 2010, p. 224). Thus, I used this training to react to this problem taking into account the importance of in-service teacher training in education quality enhancement (Biggs, 2001, p. 227) and to the importance assigned to constructive feedback by different scholars as highlighted in chapter one as well as in chapter two of this study. For instance, Hounsell (2008, p. 5) declares that students underperform or do not achieve their capabilities if they are not given effective feedback. With respect to this importance given to constructive feedback, views from different beneficiaries were considered during the elaboration of this training project.

3.2 Training beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of this intervention on constructive feedback include the academic staff- trainees-, students who were being given constructive feedback after the training but also all the stakeholders of the concerned

private higher learning institution. Research findings show that students gain more from being provided with constructive feedback. It should be normally an integral part of the teaching and learning process and even after assessment, the dimensions of feed up, feedback and feed forward by answering respectively the questions of where to go, how to go, and what next should be addressed. The answers to these three questions help students to bridge the gap between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood and to improve their performances (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 86). The provision of constructive feedback helps students become motivated during their learning. It helps them as well acquire necessary competences for their learning and even for their social life such as self-responsibility, self-reflection, self-independency, self-esteem, self-confidence, etc. The same benefits for students apply also for their parents or their relatives. This is because as constructive feedback helps students to improve their learning, it is possible that the probability of either repeating an academic year or failing modules will be removed. Thus, parents or relatives will not need to spend extra money because of repetition and most importantly, their children will complete their studies being equipped with desired competences useful for their development and even for the development of their societies.

The first benefit for the lecturers trained is that they were equipped with competences to provide constructive feedback to students. The second benefit is that they will even profit a lot from the provision of constructive feedback. This is evidence by the UNSW Australia (2014) which says that it promotes dialogue between teachers and their students and guides teachers to adapt and adjust their

teaching to accommodate students' learning needs. During teaching, most teachers try to use different strategies to motivate their students. They do this with knowledge that motivation is an important factor in students' learning positively correlated with students' willingness to learn, high-level cognition, creativity and performance (Liu et al, 2012, p. 178). In this regard, Kamardeen (2013, p. 39) places feedback among six essential pillars identified for a motivation-driven learning and teaching practice. In addition, given that any particular private higher learning institution in Rwanda faces competition from twenty-seven others, there is always need for better strategies that could be quenched by skills acquired from the training (www.hec.gov.rw). Among the strategies that may be adopted, academic staff may play an important role with the provision of constructive feedback to students if they are well trained. This is because once students are given constructive feedback on time as we said above; they will be able to perform well at the same time improving their competences. With this, it is probable that they become the best ambassadors of the institution once outside either on the labour market, or among their peers, or in their communities, etc.

Last but not the least; I too gained a lot while preparing this project. It was my first time to prepare a project of this kind and implementing it. Therefore, the process helped me to deepen my theoretical knowledge about project planning and implementation. Additionally, according to Johari's window, which is a model for self-awareness, personal development, group development and understanding relationship, I was able to discover myself through the delivery of this training project (James Cook University, 2011, p. 2-3).

3.3 Didactical planning

To ensure good implementation of training project, different activities took place. These activities included the choice of training participants and preparation of the training content. The choice of participants was guided by the following criteria: origin of participants, background of participants, expected age and gender of participants, motivational factors of participants and voluntary or forced decision to participate. The list of lecturers to be invited to the training was established taking into account the above criteria. From these criteria, lecturers who were invited in this training were characterized by the following: only full time lecturers were invited; all departments were represented; and participants had different academic grades from tutorial assistants to professors. Besides, both male and female lecturers were represented; all participants were informed and interested about this training before using strategies of talk to and talk to again.

For motivation, I used different strategies but mostly talking to the leaders of the concerned private higher learning institution in the first place to convince them about my training. After receiving the authorization, I talked to the deans of faculties, heads of departments and even to lecturers I was targeting to invite in order to let them be aware of my objectives in time and to win their interest. Additionally, the institution supported this training project as the Rector of the concerned institution signed the invitation letter. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this training was facilitated not only by myself as the organizer, but also by the Director of Academic Quality Assurance (DAQ) and the Director of Academic Studies (DAC) of the concerned institution.

The content of the training was contextualized to the real situation of the private higher learning institution. It was composed of five main topics namely: introduction to the indicators of education quality, meaning, and importance of constructive feedback, feedback, and error correction, feedback in practice, challenges related to the provision of constructive feedback, and associated mitigation measures. This content was passed on using active methods, that is, by involving the participants during the training. This was done using different active methods such as brainstorming, partner discussions, group discussions and presentations, role-play, plenary sessions, individual drawing, etc. The way these methods were used during the training is explained in the following section and the detailed didactical plan is in Appendix II.

3.4 Implementation of training

This workshop took place on Monday, 22 and Tuesday, 23 December 2014 in a conference room at the higher learning institution. Before the workshop took place different activities to ensure its good preparation and conduct have been undertaken. These activities included elaboration of the project plan, request for authorization to carry out the project at the institution, preparation of training content, selection of training participants, writing invitation letters which had to be signed by the Rector of the institution, distribution of invitation letters and logistical arrangements.

Constructive Feedback

Table 1 provides an overview of the activities during the workshop.

DAY ONE **Date: 22nd December 2014** **Time: 08:30-16:20**

Topic: Training of higher education academic staff on constructive feedback

| Content | Presenter |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Opening speech | DAQ |
| 1. Workshop Unit: Introduction | |
| Presentation and plenary discussion | CN ¹ , DAQ |
| 2. Workshop Unit: Constructive feedback - Why does it matter? | |
| Oral brainstorming, summary, graph interpretation, plenary discussion | CN, DAQ |
| 3. Workshop Unit: What do literatures say about constructive feedback and learning? | |
| Benefits of constructive feedback Presentation, group reflection, group presentation and plenary, summary | CN, DAQ |
| 4. Workshop Unit: Feedback and error correction | |
| <u>Feedback and error correction</u> Presentation and plenary session | CN, DAC |
| <u>Consolidation</u> Individual drawing, questions and discussion in plenary | CN, DAC |
| <u>Closure</u> First day evaluation, closing remarks | CN, DAC |

DAY TWO **Date: 23rd December 2014** **Time: 08:30-16:20**

| Content | Presenter |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| <u>Recap</u> Brief review of the first day | CN |
| 5. Workshop Unit: Feedback in practice | |
| <u>Constructive/destructive feedback</u> Presentation, role play, summary | CN, DAQ |
| <u>Constructive feedback: Do's and don'ts</u> Written brainstorming, characteristics of constructive feedback | CN, DAQ |

¹ CN: Christine Nyiramana – Training Organiser

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <u>Constructive feedback: Characteristics</u> Partner discussion, plenary discussion | CN, DAQ |
| <u>Acronyms for providing feedback</u> Presentation, questions and discussion in plenary | CN, DAQ |
| 6. Workshop Unit: Challenges with assessment feedback to students and how to overcome them | |
| <u>Challenges and alternative solutions</u> Group reflection, group presentation and plenary, summary | CN, DAQ |
| <u>Evaluation</u> Open discussion, evaluation of the training | CN, DAQ |
| <u>Closure</u> Closing speech | VRAC or DAQ |

The training started with an opening speech by the DAQ. During his opening speech, the DAQ stressed the importance of receiving feedback not only in teaching and learning process, but rather in everyday life to increase participants' motivation. To make his point clear, he used Johary's window of self-awareness where he mentioned that feedback comes in what someone does not know but others know on him or her i.e. the blind space. He added that feedback could construct or destroy the receiver, if it is given in a good way or bad way, respectively, which is the reason why there was need of having a training workshop on the concept of constructive feedback. In this workshop, 22 academic staff members from eleven departments of the concerned institution were invited. It is important to note that a flash back on assessment policy of the concerned institution was done, because feedback is in general given to students on conducted assessment either formative assessment or summative assessment. In this regard, it was judged necessary to start with this flash back in order to contextualize the training. The second presentation consisted in discussing together with participants on problems identified at the concerned

institution, which explains the reason behind conducting this training. We did not limit ourselves to the concerned institution level, but with the third presentation, we shared on the need of constructive feedback from research level. The fourth presentation helped to emphasize on the need of correcting errors made by students in terms of language either oral ones or written ones by the means of constructive feedback. This was stressed because good communication skills are key for better performance of students - at school and outside in their real life situations (Morreale, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000; Abbasi, Siddiqi, & Azim, 2011).

The second day was mostly reserved to practice, but before that, a short presentation was made on characteristics of constructive feedback, the differences between constructive and destructive feedback and the models of providing constructive feedback. This presentation helped the participants to perform the activities given and to put the feedback provision into practice. Finally, and importantly, participants were given time to discuss about challenges identified about the provision of constructive feedback and corresponding strategies to alleviate them.

Beside the above-mentioned presentations made during the training, active and participatory methods were used. This was done in order to avoid one of the challenges pointed out by Vavrus (2013) regarding the implementation of learner- centred pedagogy when he writes that “without high-quality initial training, teachers largely teach the way they were taught. It is difficult for them to adapt and adopt learner-centered pedagogy” (p. 10). Activities given to participants to ensure their active participation included: (1) Exchange on how and when participants usually

convey feedback to students, (2) Interpretation of a graph showing the accumulation of teachers' effects on students' performances, (3) Group discussion on the benefits of constructive feedback in the context of the concerned institution, (4) Drawing of individual life experiences concerning feedback received by participants in their past time while at school, (5) Role play on the provision of constructive feedback among participants, and (6) Group discussion on challenges identified with the provision of constructive feedback and proposed strategies to alleviate them.

Moreover, each activity was followed by a presentation and each power point presentation was preceded by a revelation. This strategy consisted in discussing with participants on a presentation before it took place to open up participants' attention and to raise their motivation. After every presentation and group presentations, plenary discussions followed to allow participants exchange their experiences for a better understanding. From this workshop, participants found answers to different misunderstandings they had on assessment and feedback. Some of the misunderstandings exposed by participants during plenary sessions or group works were: (1) Assessment was mostly taken as a way of availing marks to be used to promote students in the next level of study, (2) Participants thought that providing marking scheme to students after written tests was enough as feedback, and (3) Providing marks to students after final examinations was enough.

These presentations made and plenary discussions held during this workshop helped participants to gain sufficient understanding about the use of constructive feedback and its importance not only for students and lecturers, but also

for concerned institutions. A summary of recommendations deduced from group works and plenary sessions is presented in chapter seven.

3.5 Problems encountered and lessons learnt

During the implementation of my training project I encountered different problems in terms of changes to what I had planned before. These changes concern both preliminary activities of the workshop and the workshop activities themselves, from which I learnt.

Changes that affected the preliminary activities were especially linked to financial means for my training, because I was not able to find financial support from the only one source I had planned for before. When this happened, I started looking for another source from which my financial problem was solved. This financial problem led to change of schedule and the training took place later than anticipated. I learnt that it is always better to plan not only one alternative solution, but rather have more than one in hierarchical order so that if any problem occurs the next one may be applied without any remarkable disturbance.

Another change regards the workshop structure and schedule. In collaboration with the DAQ and DAC of the concerned private higher learning institution, we agreed to change the workshop structure. We came up with six presentations. The content remained the same as it was proposed in the project plan but the order and titles of the presentations changed. It is important to note that two presentations: flash back on assessment policy of the concerned institution and Feedback and error correction were added. This change reminded me of the importance of teamwork (Krogull, Scheunpflug & Rwambonera, 2014,

p. 99). This is because as mentioned in the previous sections, I worked together with two facilitators not only during the training as such, but also during its preparation to ensure the success of my training.

As for the time, it was respected on the first day but on the second day; there were some changes. From the workshop schedule, it was supposed to be concluded at 13:00, but after an agreement with the participants we stopped at 16:00. This prolongation was due to the fact that plenary discussion after role-play on provision of constructive feedback took much time and we could not skip or narrow these exchanges as they helped participants to understand more and receive as well constructive feedback on their presentations either from participants or from facilitators.

Moreover, in this workshop, I was expecting a participation of 90% of invited participants but, the participation rate was 82% and 86% for the first and second day respectively. The expected participation was not achieved because the workshop took place during the Christmas period. This was both an advantage and a disadvantage. During this period, administrative activities continued but teaching ones were stopped for students to go and celebrate with their families. With this, the training did not disturb teaching activities. Lecturers in turn were supposed to be at work for other activities rather than teaching, but some of the invited participants had taken this opportunity to join their families living far from the institution area or abroad. Nevertheless, most of the participants came because they were motivated to participate in the workshop because I had talked to them personally, even before they received the invitation letter. Another strategy I used after distributing invitation letters was effective communication

with invited participants; lecturers who were not able to attend the workshop because of good reasons were identified, and then replaced by others from the same department or faculty. This taught me that in case of any project, such as training for instance, distribution of the invitations alone is not enough, it always need to be followed up through regular effective communication with the invited participants. This is a dimension well evidenced by literature which emphasizes the importance of effective communication in project management (Heldman, 2005; Steinfort & Walker, 2007; Modesto & Stephen, 2009; Culo & Skendrovic´, 2010; Goudar, 2010; PMI, 2013).

This chapter deals with the intervention I conducted as a solution to problems I identified while conducting my research on the concept of constructive feedback in higher private education levels. It explained the objectives of this intervention, which consisted of the training workshop of lecturers of the concerned institution on the concept of constructive feedback. In this chapter, I described the didactical planning of the training as well as its development. I described how during this training active participation as well as the provision of constructive feedback were taken into consideration as a good example of what would happen in classroom context. At the end of this chapter, the problems I encountered during the preparation and implementation of this training project are given in order to share these experiences with the readers of this study.

4

METHODOLOGY

A two-day teacher training workshop was part of this study. The objective was to train lecturers at a private university in Rwanda on the use of constructive feedback. As part of the research design, this training was evaluated. The study has been conceptualized as a controlled intervention followed by an evaluation. The workshop on the concept of constructive feedback contributed to the problem of dissatisfaction of students with regard to feedback received from their teachers. More specifically because the provision of feedback from teachers to students, especially on CATs is a great challenge in Rwandan higher learning institutions as pointed out by different Rwandan researchers in their research conducted in Rwandan higher learning institutions (Mugisha, 2010; Rwanamiza, 2011). Therefore, as a staff in charge of quality assurance and student in the international master program on educational quality at Otto Friedrich University of Bamberg and in agreement with the Rector of the concerned private higher learning institution, I decided to gather lecturers of the institution for a two days' workshop.

Teachers are considered as a central element for the enhancement of educational quality (Hopkins & Stern, 1996; Leu, 2005). Besides, some authors stress the usefulness of constructive feedback given to students by

teachers in the improvement of educational quality (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Hattie, 1999; Hattie, 2009; Hatzia Apostolou & Paraskakis, 2010; Kamardeen, 2013), it is necessary not only to focus on initial teacher training but also on in-service teacher training. In this regard and according to the purpose of this study, it is necessary to train teachers on the concept of constructive feedback and its usefulness in the process of teaching and learning. This is evidenced by the fact that “no one is born to be an outstanding teacher. Good teaching is a result of education, training and experience” (Fredriksson, 2004, p. 9). Therefore, the training was organised in order to work together for identifying the faced problems in relation to teaching quality, their causes and the means to change this situation by using techniques that are globally known to be efficient to improve the conditions and the results in their particular professional environment. It is in this concern that my intervention served as a model of how the afore mentioned challenges could be addressed.

4.1 Objective and content of the training

As shown in chapter one and two, feedback is an important factor in improving quality. The purpose of this intervention was therefore to contribute to the enhancement of educational quality at the concerned higher learning institution, however small this contribution may be in the overall quality context. But in order to reach strategically this goal, it is necessary to operationalize the great theme of quality into smaller steps. In chapter seven, I show how a small intervention as this one can be included in a systematic approach.

The main objectives were, to give participants required knowledge about constructive feedback and help them

develop competences through experiences of giving and receiving constructive feedback during the training. To achieve these objectives different topics were addressed. They included, in general, existing gaps related to poor feedback provided to students with regard to the context of the concerned private higher learning institution, flash back on existing documents about feedback such as assessment policy, importance of constructive feedback in influencing students' performances and strategies to improve the existing situation through the provision of constructive feedback.

4.2 Training development

In order to achieve these objectives and to change the concepts of learning, it is important that the training confronts the participants with their proper practices and eventually with the mediocre results of their practices. During the training, I first made them reflect on their role in teaching and learning process i.e. why they matter most among other factors influencing students' competences. Secondly, I gave them time to exchange on their practices concerning feedback provision to students. I then made them predict the changes in educational quality linked with the acquired knowledge and new techniques concerning the objective of improving the teaching quality in their institution by the use of constructive feedback provision to students especially on their performances once assessed.

During the workshop, participants did not acquire only knowledge about the concept of constructive feedback; through different activities realized, participants also experienced the reception and provision of constructive feedback either from the workshop facilitators or from peers. For example, one activity given to allow participants

get experiences about constructive feedback consisted in forming group of six persons in which three were the assessors and the other three were assessed. The assessors elaborated a questionnaire on their choice to assess the others, which they corrected and commented on constructively. Group presentations on this activity allowed facilitators to give general constructive comments to all groups and participants to understand better the concept of constructive feedback.

4.3 Participants, time and place of the training

Trained teachers are deans of faculties, heads of departments and at least one other teacher from each department among eleven departments of the concerned private higher learning institution. The reason behind choosing such group was to let deans of faculties and heads of departments be able to monitor the provision of feedback to the students of their faculties or departments and even to be able to work together with the other trained teachers as multipliers in their respective faculties or departments. In addition to their responsibilities, deans and heads of departments are as well teachers. Besides, and according to assessment policy of the concerned private higher learning institution, this will help deans and heads of department fulfil their role in the implementation of this policy. This is in line with some scholars who argue that education leaders play an important role in changing processes aiming at improving education quality (Fredriksson, 2004; Leu, 2004; Krogull, Scheunpflug & Rwambonera, 2014).

This workshop was prepared and facilitated by myself with the assistance of both the director of academic quality assurance and director of academics in the institution

because academic quality improvement and training of teachers are among their responsibilities. As mentioned above, this workshop was limited to two days because of different reasons such as financial constraints, time, and working environment.

In summary, this training workshop allowed teachers to reflect on the assessment and feedback in teaching and learning process. In plenary sessions, they discussed about existing problems with regard to students' performances and drew conclusions in terms of strategies to be taken as well as provision of constructive feedback to students.

4.4 Evaluation by semi-structured interview

4.4.1 Formative evaluation

Since the outputs of this training are still in the early phase of implementation, there is need of conducting an evaluation to be aware of what is going on, how far these outputs are being implemented and what difficulties trainees are encountering. According to Scheerens, Glas and Thomas (2003) evaluation in education serves to “formally regulate desired levels of quality of educational outcomes and provisions; to hold educational service providers accountable and to support ongoing improvement in education” (p. 4). It is in this regards that, as mentioned in chapter one, this study intends to provide answer to the following questions: (i) What experiences do teachers have with the provision of constructive feedback to students? (ii) What are the challenges to be faced by teachers in delivering constructive feedback to students? and (iii) What strategies are necessary to be taken to ensure good provision of constructive feedback to students?

The evaluation of a project may be formative or summative. With regard to the purpose of this study as mentioned above, the evaluation conducted is formative rather than summative. This is because “formative evaluation is defined as an evaluation that takes place during pilot-stages or implementation phase of a program. It is aimed at providing feedback that is relevant to support and improve the process of implementation” (Scheerens et al, 2003, p. 12). While “summative evaluation makes up the balance in checking whether a program has reached its objectives” (Scheerens et al, 2003: 12). This is as well strengthened by Salomon et al (2015) who mention, “formative evaluations are conducted primarily for the purposes of program improvement ... A summative evaluation is an evaluation used to make decisions about the continuation, revision, elimination, or merger of program.” (p. 51)

4.4.2 Qualitative approach

The choice of research tradition underlying this study is explained not only by its purposes but also by the fact that in the Rwandan context little research has yet been conducted in the field of education especially on higher education level. In this view, I decided to use qualitative approach to evaluate my intervention because my research seeks to understand experiences trained lecturers are having with regard to the provision of constructive feedback to students. Savin-Baden & Major (2013) posit that “qualitative research embodies a unique approach that can help answer questions about human action and experience” (p. 16) and this support my choice. Another reason is that qualitative research is a useful approach that helps to study human experiences, attitudes and behaviours and describe it (Dawson, 2002; Savin-Baden

& Major, 2013). Moreover, this research is underpinned by phenomenological research paradigm. This is explained by the fact that “phenomenologists seek not only to uncover what individuals experience but also how they experience the phenomenon” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 215). This is the same case in my research because I do not only look for lecturers’ experiences with regard to the provision of constructive feedback to students but also I look for challenges they are facing and strategies needed to overcome them.

4.5 Method of data collection: Semi-structured interview

In qualitative research, there exist five major methods used to collect data. These methods include observation, interviews, questionnaires, document review and use of audio-visual materials (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Besides knowing these methods, the problem was to choose one corresponding to the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In my research, I decided to use interview simply because it is central to data collection in phenomenological study (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013, pp. 357-358).

Interview may be structured, semi-structured, unstructured or informal. I did a semi-structured interview because it allows flexibility in terms of questions to ask, their order, management of time available. Here the interviewer is not obliged to ask only pre-determined questions as it is the case for structured interviews but is allowed to add some questions depending on provided answers. He/she can also change the order of interview questions once it is judged necessary (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013, p. 359).

4.5.1 Sample size and sampling strategy

The number of my interviewees, that is the sample size of my research was limited to three trained lecturers. This choice was motivated by the fact that I did not intend to generalize my findings but rather describe and explain what was happening after my intervention using a small number of lecturers who participated in the training, as it is normally the aim of qualitative research (Dawson, 2002, p. 47). This sample was chosen using purposive sampling since it is used “if description rather than generalization is the goal” (Dawson, 2002, p. 49). In addition, Savin-Baden and Major (2013, p. 314) mention that purposive sampling helps to select carefully participants who are likely to provide effective information. This explains the reason why lecturers who participated in my intervention were in best position for my research i.e. to provide answers to my research questions.

4.5.2 Data collection

There exist different interview media that may be used by researchers. These media include face-to-face interview, telephone interview, and instant messaging interview, email interview, computer conferencing / chat interview and interviews in online places and spaces (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pp. 362-364). I chose to use face-to-face interview because all the interviewees work in the same institution. It was also easy for me to meet all of them because they participated in the above-mentioned training and I live nearby the place. Additionally, I chose to use face-to-face interview because of its advantages in comparison to the other types of interview media (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pp. 362-364).

My interview was composed of major questions, which were supplemented by probing questions. These probing questions were structured depending on the answer provided by the interviewees. Open-ended questions were used to give interviewees enough room to express freely their experiences on the implementation of constructive feedback in classroom context. Following Savin-Baden and Major (2013, pp. 364-365), my interview guide was composed of initial question to encourage participants provide information that would serve to ask probing questions related to my research purpose later. Equally, questions aimed at gathering in-depth data were added to incite participants share their experiences, and questions for follow up to let participants give more explanation on what they had said before were also used. At the end, concluding questions helped to give interviewee an opportunity to give their suggestions about what they think would help in the improvement of educational quality in higher education in relation to the purpose of this study. It is important to note that after agreement with all the participants, interviews were done in Kinyarwanda in order to let the interviewees and I feel free during the interviews; they were later translated in English during the transcriptions. Kinyarwanda is our mother tongue for both the interviewees and I (See interview guide in appendix 1).

The interviews with the three participants took place at the concerned private higher learning institution. This place was chosen because of its accessibility to the participants who work at this institution. For this reason, I agreed with participants to use the same room we used for the training because it was well situated far away from any kind of noise or distraction. These interviews took place during times agreed on with participants depending on their availability

and each interview took between 35 minutes and 50 minutes. All interviews were recorded using my computer alongside note taking. I used both recording instrument and note taking because of precaution. The notes taken reminded me to ask probing questions but also helped me during transcription later. Both recording and note taking were controlled in order to avoid as far as possible losing my attention from the person being interviewed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This means that during interviews, I kept as far as possible eye contact with the interviewees. I only took notes of little information necessary for the well conducts of interviews and their transcriptions as above-mentioned. Sometimes I also looked very rapidly on the computer to make sure that the recording was still working well.

Combining recording and note taking helped me ensure the quality of my data. This is because in addition to what is said in the previous paragraph note taking allowed me to record non-verbal communication used by interviewees helpful in data analysis. The place where my interviews took place added as well something on my data quality because it was free from any kind of distraction and noise except during one session where we were obliged to stop a while because of heavy rain. Moreover, the quality of the results of my data relies the questions asked during interview and the selected participants for interview. Interview questions were set in relation to the research questions and interviewees were selected among lecturers who participated in the afore mentioned training as being in the best position to provide answers to related questions.

4.6 Data analysis method: Content analysis

It is known that “Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process that involves breaking data into meaningful parts for the purpose of examining them” (Saven-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 435). In addition to this, “qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among categories” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p. 395). Inductive analysis is defined as a procedure qualitative researchers use to “synthesize and make meaning from the data, starting with specific data and ending with categories and patterns. In this way, more general themes and conclusions emerge from the data rather than being imposed prior to data collection” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p. 395). In this regard, Saven-Baden and Major (2013, pp. 435-446) give a number of methods that may be used during qualitative data analysis. These methods include keyword analysis, constant comparison, content analysis, domain analysis, thematic analysis, analytical analysis, heuristic or phenomenological analysis, hermeneutical analysis, ethnographic analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, semiotic analysis and event analysis. This research employed content analysis method because it is an efficient method that condenses large materials into less content categories in regards to explicit guidelines of coding (Stemler, 2001, p.8).

The preparation of my data followed different steps. These steps include characterizing, cutting, coding, categorizing, converting and creating (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pp. 419-429). This was done referring to the research questions; interview guide; themes, concepts and categories used by other researchers; personal experiences and data

themselves (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In this regard and according to Savin-Baden and Major (2013, pp. 419-429) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014), records of my interviews were listened to at least three times before transcription combined with the notes. Secondly, data were divided into meaningful segments and then similar segments were assigned the same code. Thirdly similar codes were put together to form categories responsive to the research questions and categorized into major and minor categories. From codes and categories, I formed themes that helped to analyse my data with regard to the literature provided in chapter two of this study and to the research questions (Berg 2007).

4.7 Problems encountered during evaluation and data limits

As mentioned above, the only problem I met during this evaluation was related to the rain, which forced the interviewee and me during the first interview to stop a while because its noise was interfering with the recording. For the other two interviews, they went on smoothly since the venue was well chosen, free from any kind of disturbances except for natural ones. The limitations of data as described in chapter five are related to the data collection method and sample size used as well as to the fact that I am the one who organized the intervention and then conducted interviews for its evaluation.

5

FINDINGS AND EVALUATION RESULTS

The intervention consists of a training workshop on the concept of constructive feedback, as it is described shallowly in chapter three and more in details in chapter four. According to the purpose of this evaluation, as explained in chapter three, I conducted a formative evaluation using a semi-structured interview with three lecturers selected purposively among trained lecturers.

The results of this evaluation are described in two parts. The first part with three sections describes the accumulated data related to the research questions and the second part gives a summary of the results from the three conducted interviews. As mentioned above, the results of the conducted evaluation are described in accordance to the research questions underlying this research. These research questions are: what experiences do teachers have with the provision of constructive feedback to students, what are the challenges to be faced by teachers in delivering constructive feedback to students and what strategies are necessary to be taken to ensure good provision of constructive feedback to students? It is important to mention that, as described in chapter three, the interviewees were three lecturers who participated in the above-mentioned training on constructive feedback.

These lecturers came from different departments in the concerned institution. They had different teaching experiences in terms of years, different academic grades and hold different responsibilities: a head of department, a dean of faculty and a lecturer. It is worth mentioning that even heads of departments and deans of faculties are also lecturers in addition to administrative responsibilities. For the anonymity of the interviewees (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014), they have been given names of three lakes located in Rwanda, respectively Kivu, Ihema and Muhazi.

It is important to mention that the formative evaluation, took place five months later after the intervention took place. This means that the intervention was conducted in late December 2014 and its formative evaluation in the beginning of June 2015. At the beginning of each interview conducted, the purpose of the evaluation was reminded to the participant and interviews took between 35 to 50 minutes. The accumulated data with respect to research questions are described below.

5.1 Appreciation of the organized training

When asked about the training they have participated in, interviewees started by demonstrating appreciations. They said that from the knowledge gained from the training and activities carried out, they had realized that they needed this training to enhance their work as teachers. In this view, one of the interviewees said:

...That training was of help to me. I realized that sometimes I did wrong things calling them right. Before the training, I as a teacher would give an exam or tests as the lesson was going on and would take long time to mark the papers.

Sometimes, I would mark them even after students have finished my lesson and since I got the concept of constructive feedback I realized that doing things in that way denied students the chance to know where they need to improve and this to me hindered their understanding of the lesson. As a result, I changed my way of teaching after the trainings and started putting into consideration giving students feedback on every assessment they would do as early as possible so as to help them have also logical suit in the lesson. (Muhazi)

This appreciation was also emphasized by another interviewee who said that from her experience as a student, while still at school she kept on wondering whether students had the right to get not only marks after assessment but also advices on what they needed to do to improve. On this, she pointed out that the concerned training had come as a solution to her wishes:

In fact, I liked the idea of carrying out such training since from my experience as a student sometimes back I had always liked that after doing any assessment I would get to know how I performed. In exams it would be easy since papers would be brought back and it would be easy to assess where things didn't go well. But, in group assignments teachers would mark the work, just tell us the marks we got and keep the papers and deny us that opportunity of looking into what we failed in a long run as a result we would redo the same mistakes. I would say the training came as a solution to my wishes

of letting students know how they have worked and what they need to do to improve ... (Ihema)

Kivu also shared the same opinion as the other two interviewees, mentioning that before the training took place it was rare for him to comment on students' works. He added that after participating in the training on the concept of constructive feedback, he realized how worthwhile providing feedback to students is. Moreover, all participants confirmed that they had started providing constructive feedback to students and the following parts illustrate the importance of constructive feedback, they have realized so far.

5.2 Recognition of the importance of constructive feedback by lecturers

During the interviews, participants did not only demonstrate appreciation, concerning the organized training as mentioned above. From the responses provided on asked question, they also shared experiences they were having with regard to the provision of constructive feedback to students. One could realize that these teachers have started seeing the importance of providing constructive feedback as described below:

5.2.1 Improvement of teaching and assessment methods

Throughout the responses, given by interviewees on the questions about experiences they were having with the provision of constructive feedback to students, interviewees outlined that the provision of constructive feedback to students helped them adjust their teaching methods to comply with identified gaps within students' performances

and even assessment methods. In this perspective one of the interviewees said:

Yes, it helps me to know the loopholes or gaps in the learning process of students since as a teacher my objective is to have 100% of every student in class understand my lesson and so the use of constructive feedback helps me identify where more emphasis is needed to which I act accordingly hence helps me meet my expectations. (Kivu)

Ihema was of the same opinion:

This helped them in such a way that they appreciated it very much and they asked me questions which helped me to adjust certain things in my work to be more effective than before. (Ihema)

Moreover, Muhazi said that giving constructive feedback helped him in the preparation of his subsequent lessons and from this; he got to know where he needed to do more research in order to enrich his preparations. He expresses it in the following words:

And as a teacher when I am teaching a module with three units, after every unit I give an assessment and I leave time to discuss with students and they ask clarifications on some points. This helps me know what adjustments I need to make when preparing the next lessons thus guide on which other research I need to carry out, among others. This is because as I said earlier when a student has not understood the

lesson, he or she does not ask any question and he or she remains with this misunderstanding, which is not good at all. (Muhazi)

5.2.2 Improvement of pedagogical relationship

One interviewee said that after participating in the training on constructive feedback, she came to realize that students needed more clarifications on different assignments and CATs done before they sit for final exam. She said that, from what she had experienced so far, by interacting with her students on their performances they felt free to ask her questions and added that her students had improved their performances in final exam compared to other assessments done before. She shared this experience in the following words:

I appreciate very much what we learnt from the training, and I managed to apply it in one class I was teaching where after marking the assignments and CATs I sat with students before they would go for the final exam and discussed on their performances and this helped them a lot in such a way that they appreciated it very much and they asked me questions which helped me to adjust certain things in my work to be more effective. As a result, I saw many students improving in the final exam ... (lhema)

This experience of lhema shows that the provision of constructive feedback to students helps in the establishment of good pedagogical relationship between teachers and their students. This is because once students are given opportunity to ask questions, it is a good time for them and their teachers to exchange and to help one another in the process of teaching and learning.

5.2.3 Students' guidance

During the interviews, interviewees mentioned to which extent they had realized how useful constructive feedback is in guiding students throughout their learning process. More specifically, one interviewee gave an example on how she came up to help fresh students (year one students) by the use of constructive feedback. While marking their papers she realized that students did not perform well because they had not understood the questions asked. She said that after her advices they did well in final exam of the same module:

I gave the feedback to students in Year one ... I thought as new students they needed more time and guidance so what I did was to help them get used to assessments by helping them understand questions ... since I had realized failing was mostly due to students not understanding the questions they have to answer and my objective here was to guide them on how they have to first understand the questions and answer accordingly and that was in CATs. I saw some general improvement in the exams that followed where students tried to understand questions and answer them accordingly ... what I am sure is that there was a general improvement in the way they answered. (Ihema)

The provision of constructive feedback does not help only year one students to get used to higher education ways of assessments but also other students in different years of study. In this regard the experience of Ihema was completed by Kivu, who takes constructive feedback as

a strategy to guide students understand better what they learn:

You know when students are doing an assessment, they think what they are doing is right and from their performance it turns out the opposite but then along the process of giving constructive feedback when you sit to discuss with them to see how things should have been done I believe it helps them understand more what's being taught. (Kivu)

5.2.4 Improvement of students' performances

All interviewees mentioned that among the experiences, they had so far with the provision of constructive feedback to students; they had realized the improvement of students' performances. As mentioned above, according to Ihema, constructive feedback did not only help her to guide year one students to get used for higher education ways of assessments, it also resulted into the improvement of her students' performances especially in final exam after advising them, that before answering any question, they needed first to understand it.

The other two interviewees also shared the same experience as Ihema. In this view, Muhazi gave an example of one module he taught in three different classes. Two classes learnt this module before he participated in the training on constructive feedback. He said that students in the third class, which he had taught after participating in the training on constructive feedback had performed better compared to the two first classes. He believes that this difference in students' performances is due to the fact that he accompanied the students in the third class throughout

the course by the use of constructive feedback. He said:

I will give an example of the module I taught after the training ... where after teaching we would have an open discussion and students would ask questions on what they had not well understood and other students would share their views and as a teacher I added something. In addition to this I gave few questions after a simple assessment to test their understanding and after marking it I gave the feedback showing students where they needed to adjust, among others. This helped students perform better in exams and the results were very good in that class compared to the two other classes I had taught before the training. (Muhazi)

Muhazi also added that when students got feedback on time, it helped them not only understand what they learnt but also gained additional knowledge to the previous one. On this issue of feedback given to students on time, Kivu said that this had helped him to help students correct their mistakes and remove confusions, something he did not consider before he participated in the training on constructive feedback. Kivu said that through this training he had realized that students need regular and continuous guidance all the way through their studies if a teacher want them to perform well. In addition, Ihema mentioned that giving constructive feedback did not only help students while at school, but also according to the experience she was having, it would help them in the long term while proving their competences to the society.

5.3 Challenges faced by lecturers in regard to the provision of constructive feedback to students

When I asked questions about challenges they have so far encountered with regard to the provision of constructive feedback to students, interviewees mentioned different challenges. Interviewees said for instance that constructive feedback was time-consuming, preparing and providing constructive feedback to a large class size was difficult, and that their workload became an obstacle to quality of feedback to be provided to students. These challenges and others are described below.

5.3.1 Time consumption

During the interview with Kivu, he came to the fact that for him the main challenge he faced so far, with regard to the preparation and provision of constructive feedback, was that it was time consuming. He said that taking into account all the work to be accomplished by a teacher and besides finding time for each student to give him / her feedback was so difficult. He stressed on individual feedback because he said that sometimes students demonstrated different problems and, in this case, students needed individual feedback. Here he explained that by saying that in class, not all the students had the same level of understanding and the slower ones needed more time than others. Kivu also mentioned that when the size of the class was large, the preparation and provision of constructive feedback to students became hard.

He said:

In my view, the main challenges are that the use of constructive feedback is time consuming

and in classes with many students, it is hard to reach all of them. (Kivu)

5.3.2 Big class size

Two interviewees, namely Kivu and Muhazi, mentioned the challenge regarding large class size. As mentioned above, Kivu associated it with time required for preparation and provision of constructive feedback. In this regard, Kivu said that the bigger the number of students was, the more time needed for constructive feedback would be. When asked whether this stops him from providing feedback to students, he mentioned that it did not but affected the quality of feedback to be provided to students. He said:

Not really, it does not stop me but however the quality of feedback given is not good as it would have been if time was enough. (Kivu)

Muhazi emphasized on this challenge saying that if classes had an averaged number it would be easier to help each student:

The challenge is that, in higher learning institutions there are classes with a large number of students; hence it is hard to get to every student in a class of 200 students. Yet if the class had few students it would be easier to attend to every student. (Muhazi)

5.3.3 Lecturers' workload

Ihema mentioned that besides teaching, lecturers assumed some other responsibilities or were required to participate in other activities rather than teaching. She realized that these involvements in various responsibilities and activities

beside teaching had become an obstacle to the provision of constructive feedback to students. She said:

However, I did not keep on doing this since with time the workload increased in such a way that some final exams were done before I finish marking the assignments and thus getting time to give students the feedback was hard and this hurt me since I know how important it is to give the feedback. (Ihema)

As mentioned above in her words, even if she faced this challenge, she knew that there was something important, which was not done and this is very important for human beings as it helps in problem solving.

5.3.4 Provision of feedback after final examination

All the interviewees mentioned that what they gained from the training on constructive feedback had helped them understand to which extent providing constructive feedback on final exams would be beneficial to students. However, they said that until now this is a problem. Kivu said that when students got pass marks, they were not motivated to come back to their teachers for feedback on final exam in order to know where they had done well and where they needed pieces of advice. He added that feedback on final exams would help students to be aware of existing gaps in terms of learning outcomes, they would have achieved and what they needed to do to bridge these gaps. Ihema added that when she noticed that students had not performed well in final exams, she wished to get them back to discuss on what went wrong and advise them for subsequent modules since in a program, modules to be studied are interconnected. But she said that it was difficult

to get them. In the same light, Muhazi added that feedback on final exams would be helpful, as in most cases these exams covered all the learning outcomes of a module and that this feedback would not only be of help for students' learning, but also for their competences needed by the society. Muhazi said:

I would say students do not care a lot about it and even teachers do not use student hours well. But if teachers could use student hours well and students avoid this idea of saying that the lesson has ended after the final exam, they would come and see their marks and consult their teachers on what they should have done to get better marks since what we teach in most cases does not end here in school but it is also applied outside.

From what has been mentioned by Muhazi, we also notice that even teachers do not use hours reserved for students' guidance in their workload well. He said that it would be better if teachers could use these hours to provide feedback on final exams to students and to help students understand the importance of getting feedback.

5.4 Suggestions on strategies for the better use of constructive feedback

Among the questions asked during this evaluation, there were questions seeking to know strategies proposed by teachers to ensure good provision of constructive feedback to students. Interviewees suggest making the provision of constructive feedback to students a part of lecturers' workload.

Constructive Feedback

During the interviews, all the interviewees agreed that the provision of constructive feedback to students should be given value as other activities such as teaching, assessment, marking students' papers and providing marks. For Ihema, even if teachers are involved in many activities, they should be aware of the importance of giving feedback to students. She recommended all teachers to integrate the provision of constructive feedback to students in their daily teaching activities. She added also that for her, if a teacher did not provide feedback to students, his / her work was incomplete because if it would be given it would help both, the teachers and students, to improve. In this regard, Ihema said:

Well I think feedback is necessary considering how important it is in making students advance in learning and also in helping teachers who give it to know where they need to improve by learning through mistakes made by students during assessment or answering questions teachers gave them to do. I suggest that giving the feedback should be somehow an obligation since I consider it to be part of teaching, because if you give knowledge to students and you don't have time to show them their progress or the position in which they are standing at a certain time in the process of learning, to me, I consider the work to be incomplete, ... So to me, every teacher should include in his program of teaching that part of giving students the feedback.

Kivu added that teachers needed to know that by providing feedback to students, their teaching process became more effective. Muhazi said, teachers should not only consider

teaching as the time they spent in class teaching, but also take into consideration the time for teaching preparation, assessment, marking and time for feedback preparation and provision. He said that he thought the better the preparations were the more effective teaching became.

5.4.1 Make use of staff meetings and create learning communities among lecturers

Among the suggestions on strategies to be used to ensure the better implementation of the provision of constructive feedback, the ideas given by all interviewees reflected the use of staff meetings within departments and learning communities among lecturers. Ihema said that besides being a teacher she was a head of department. She thought that during department meetings the issue of feedback provision to students should be part of the agenda. She also added that it would be better if during break time in staff room, lecturers could exchange on their students' performances and then share on strategies to be used to help them including as well the provision of constructive feedback since in each department at least two lecturers had been trained on this concept of constructive feedback. She said that trained lecturers should encourage their colleagues on the use of constructive feedback because she had experienced its importance in teaching and learning process. Kivu also emphasized this in the following words:

*... Last but not least, there would be regular trainings without necessary spending a lot of money but just teachers sharing from their experiences how they are doing in different areas, how they handle faced challenges, etc.
(Kivu)*

Muhazi recommended the same as his colleagues but brought in the role of faculties to monitor the provision of constructive feedback to students. He said:

I would recommend more meetings in different departments because many teachers did not attend the training but through these meetings the concept on constructive feedback can be shared considering how important it is and faculties should monitor whether it has been done accordingly in departments through verifying reports from departments since departments are more close to teachers. (Muhazi)

5.4.2 Provide continuous in-service training and ensure lifelong learning

All the interviewees agreed that having experienced the usefulness of the provision of constructive feedback to students, all lecturers who had not participated in the training on constructive feedback needed to attend the same training to let them experience to which extent constructive feedback could help them improve the quality of education they provided. Kivu said:

If I was to recommend I would ask those in charge of teachers especially in charge of capacity building to let every teacher attend such a training because I am sure, after attending the training, they will get to discover for themselves that what they will get from the training is very useful in their day to day activities as teachers, to make their work more effective and to even improve the quality of education they provide. (Kivu)

Ihema recommended that such trainings should be organized regularly to let lecturers have time to discuss together on their daily activities as teachers and learn from each other through sharing of experiences. Ihema also added that as teachers they needed to keep on learning to be aware of new concepts regarding educational quality improvement such as the use of constructive feedback.

5.4.3 Encourage effective teamwork among teachers and interconnectivity across modules

Interviewees also mentioned the need for collaboration and teamwork among lecturers teaching the same module not only in teaching and assessment process but also during feedback provision to their students. Ihema said that the module teaching team should prepare together feedback and decide on how to give it either by one of them or together as a team. Ihema did not limit herself on the need of teamwork among lecturers teaching the same module but rather recommended also teamwork among all lecturers. She said that this would help to motivate students seek feedback after final exam because by working together as a team, students would realize the interconnectivity across all modules. Students would be aware that even if they get a pass mark in one module they still need it as a pre-requisite for other modules then seek feedback for the better understanding of the completed module and the next ones.

Still in relation to interconnectivity, Kivu also said that teamwork among module teaching team during the provision of feedback would help students understand more the interconnectivity among units composing a module. Kivu expressed it in the following words:

Having them come to give the feedback would be helpful since they would help students understand the interconnectivity between different units. (Kivu)

5.4.4 Offer equal opportunity for all students and use student hours effectively

With regard to the problem of big number of students in some classes mentioned by Kivu and Muhazi, they suggested the adjustment of students' number in each class to give all students equal opportunity of being given constructive feedback. Kivu stated:

Secondly, the number of students in classes can also be taken into consideration so that the teacher can be able to give constructive feedback to students.

Muhazi who talked about students' hours completed this idea of Kivu. According to Muhazi, in the allocation of teachers' workload hours there are hours reserved for students' mentorship. Apart from these hours, he also mentioned that 35% of every module weight was reserved for students' self-study hours. In this regard, he recommended teachers to make use of this time to help their students in their learning by providing constructive feedback on CATs before they sit for final exam. He also emphasized on feedback on final exams saying that these hours would be of help. This feedback would help them become more effective for the communities they were being prepared for. Muhazi indicated:

The second thing is for students' hours to be taken into consideration by having departments monitor whether the time their teachers have

reserved for students was used effectively and this can be easier by publishing the list of teachers in a department and the hours at which they are available for students' guidance.

His recommendation reflects as well the role of departments in monitoring whether students' time is used or not.

5.4.5 Use of peer feedback and provision of timely and regular feedback

On the same issue of large class size, Muhazi said that he made use of students helping themselves. He mentioned that he let students first help their colleagues and intervened to supplement them. Additionally, Muhazi said that if he realized the mistake made is common for all students or a big number of students, he preferred to give collective feedback in class in order to save time. Muhazi added that from what he experienced, he found out that this strategy helps students to understand well the lessons.

Besides, Kivu recommended that from what he had experienced, feedback should be provided to students progressively as the lessons go on and in an appropriate time:

In my view, feedback should be provided as the lesson is going on and to this, I would recommend that continuous assessment tests should be done as the lesson is going on and the provision of feedback as well progressively. For the feedback to be constructive it should be given when the lesson is going on and the time gap should be very minimal. (Kivu)

5.4.6 Role of academic leaders

Interviewees also recommended the role of academic leaders. For instance, Ihema mentioned that heads of departments should be the first to remind lecturers on the importance of constructive feedback in teaching-learning process and to monitor whether they were providing it to students. He said that heads of departments were more useful in this regard than other leaders because they were the ones near teachers following the academic leadership hierarchy.

Muhazi shared Ihema's view on the role of heads of departments but also added that the role of senior leaders was needed. He said that senior leaders were needed to intervene in the organization of training of lecturers who had not participated in the above-concerned training on the concept of constructive feedback. Not only this training above-mentioned but also the organization of other regular in-service trainings as above recommended to give lecturers a room to discuss on their tasks for the improvement of their teaching quality. Ihema suggested that it would be better if senior leaders could see how to incorporate the concept of constructive feedback in the academic procedural manual, i.e., its characteristics and guidelines for its provision for subsequent use by teachers after trainings because they are missing in the current academic documents.

5.5 Summary of results and limitations

The results from the three interviewees show that they have all implemented what they had learnt in the training on constructive feedback. During the interviews, they shared the experiences they had regarding the provision

of constructive feedback, challenges they are facing, and strategies they are proposing for the better provision of constructive feedback to students. Using content analysis method as described in chapter three, the results have been classified into three categories with different sub-categories. The three categories are: appreciation of the organized training and recognition of the importance of constructive feedback by lecturers, challenges lecturers have met so far with the provision of constructive feedback to students, and suggestions on strategies for better use of constructive feedback. Concerning their experiences on the provision of constructive feedback to students, they first demonstrated to which extent they appreciated the organization of the training.

Interviewees did not only appreciate the training, but also shared the benefits they are realizing in their teaching, and learning process using constructive feedback. These benefits have been classified into four sub-categories namely: improvement of teaching, and assessment methods, improvement of pedagogical relationship, students' guidance, and improvements of students' performances. In this regard, from the way interviewees expressed their experiences with regard to the provision of constructive feedback to students, the provision of constructive feedback could be used as another way of teaching students in order to help them reach desired competences.

From the responses provided during the interviews, all the three interviewees have so far realized some problems that reduce the quality of feedback they provided to students or hindered them from providing the constructive feedback to students. These challenges have been classified into four

sub-categories, which are time consumption, large class size, heavy lecturers' workload and availability of students after final exam. Almost all the interviewees established a link between the two first challenges saying that in a large class size, much time was required for constructive feedback preparation and provision as in most cases students' problems differ from one another. Interviewees did not only express problems they were having with regard to the provision of constructive feedback to students, but also made suggestions on what should be done to alleviate these problems. In this regard, all the interviewees agreed on the fact that teachers should integrate the provision of constructive feedback in their daily teaching activities. The suggestions made reflected the role of staff meetings, and use of learning communities among lecturers. The interviewees suggested that feedback provision to students should be part of the agenda during departmental council meetings, and that break times should be used by teachers to exchange on their students' performances, and what they could do to help.

Besides the use of staff meetings, and learning communities among lecturers, interviewees said that it would be better if the same training on the concept of constructive feedback could be organized for all the other lecturers who had not attended it the first time. Not only this training, but also the organization of regular trainings was recommended to allow lecturers have time to discuss on their daily activities, come up with solutions, and keep on learning for the enhancement of their teaching quality. Regarding the problem mentioned related to provision of constructive feedback on final exam, interviewees suggested teamwork among lecturers to ensure interconnectivity across modules through which students could realize

that feedback on final exams helps to enhances their understanding on completed, and subsequent modules. In addition, the reduction of the students-staff ratio would give all the students equal opportunity of being given constructive feedback. Interviewees as well mentioned the use of students' hours as another way of overcoming the above-mentioned problems especially both feedback on CATs, and on final exam. Lastly but not least, interviewees mentioned that academic leaders had to play a great role in the implementation of constructive feedback provision to students starting from heads of departments. The role of these leaders proposed in this regard include for instance monitoring feedback delivery to students, organization of trainings, and integration of constructive feedback missing aspects in the academic procedural manual. Even if the implementation of the concept of constructive feedback is still in its early stages, after the training took place in December 2014, interviewed participants started realizing the benefits of constructive feedback in teaching, and learning process. However, they encountered some problems, which were probably caused by the fact that they were still in the initial phase. Furthermore, interviewees said that from what they had yet experienced, the provision of constructive feedback should be emphasized as a routine at all levels of education.

It is important to note that this study has strengths, and weaknesses. On the one hand, the strengths consist of the fact that, as indicated in previous chapters, this study was conceptualized as a controlled intervention followed by an evaluation. The findings discussed above are the results of a formative evaluation conducted five months after the intervention took place. Moreover, data were collected from a sample selected purposively from trained

teachers using face-to-face semi-structured interview. On the other hand, the limitations of this study results from data collection method, and sample size used. This is because if it had not been time constraints, I would have accompanied interview with observation in classroom context to be able to see myself if the feedback provided to students is constructive or not, and the reactions of students on it. I would have also used a sample of more than three teachers, and even consider the opinions of non-trained teachers to for instance check whether they are learning something important from their trained colleagues, and their desire about having the same training on the concept of constructive feedback. Another limitation is that interviewees might have been influenced by the fact that I was the one who organized the intervention, and then conducted interviews for its evaluation. Moreover, it would have been important to get views of students on feedback they are getting from trained teachers to check whether both teachers, and students have the same opinions. These are some of the reasons why more research is needed in this regards as proposed in chapter seven, which deals with conclusions and recommendations.

6

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, findings of this study are discussed in the context of the scientific discourse on educational quality, that is, in light of the discourse presented in chapter two. The findings show that all the three interviewees appreciated the organized training as they testified to have learnt from it important content applicable to their daily work as teachers. Likewise, they affirmed to have experienced the importance of providing constructive feedback to students. However, they also attested encountering problems, and proposed different strategies to ensure good provision of constructive feedback to students. The discussion revolves around the three research questions underlying this study.

6.1 Benefits of constructive feedback provided by teachers to students

This section deals with the answers provided by interviewees on questions related to the first research question, seeking to know the experiences trained teachers are having with regard to the provision of constructive feedback to students as presented in chapter five. These answers show that trained teachers have already started experiencing the benefits of constructive feedback in teaching and learning process. In the following sub-sections, the benefits gained are discussed.

6.1.1 Constructive feedback and teaching-learning process

In chapter five, the findings of the present study show that interviewed lecturers have started realizing the importance of providing constructive feedback to students in the improvement of their teaching and assessment methods. For instance, one interviewee mentioned that the questions asked by students, while she was giving them feedback had helped her to adjust her work to be more effective than before and that her students had improved their performances in subsequent assessments. These findings are interrelated to the findings in educational discourses. In this regard, feedback is recognized as a part of two of the three subsystems, which constitute the study system of higher education institutions (Nijolé, 2012, p. 36). Nijolé suggested that a change in feedback leads to a change not only in the two subsystems to which it belongs (teaching and assessment) but also to the third subsystem, which is learning (pp. 36-37).

With regard to the experiences all the three interviewees have had on the provision of constructive feedback to students, they were all of the same view that it has helped them in their teaching process but also their students in learning process. According to what was mentioned by interviewees, the importance of feedback is not limited to the improvement of teachers' work and students' performances in the concerned module, but also in the long run for the whole programme in subsequent modules. This was witnessed by one interviewee who said that she had realized that with feedback, students did not only come to understand better the studied content, but also they got additional knowledge important not only for their

subsequent learning process, but also for their future life in the society. With reference to this importance of constructive feedback reported by interviewed teachers, it is evident that the use of constructive feedback will be useful in the implementation of modular system which is a Bologna system adopted by Rwanda's higher education as a strategy to enhance its quality education (Mbabazi, 2013, p. 29). More importantly, the findings of this study are in the same light as what has been revealed by different scholars reflected in the statement that "the benefits of successful feedback set in the context of learning outcomes are many" (O'Farrell, 2002, p. 6). These scholars say that giving students the opportunity to know how they are working in class and helping them to know what they need to do to improve their performances is an essential factor to assure their success (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Hattie, 2012; Hatziapostolou & Paraskakis, 2010; University of Ulster, 2013). This has been also emphasized by Hounsell (2008, p. 5), who declares that without effective feedback, students do not achieve optimally.

6.1.2 Constructive feedback in the context of pedagogical relationship

As mentioned in 4.4, activities given to participants aimed at letting them reflect not only on the different ways they used to convey feedback to students before the training but to reflect on the feedback they have received while they were still at school. These activities helped participants to feel the need of providing constructive feedback to students after sharing their own experiences on feedback they received while at school which most of them reported that it relied only on negative aspects. During the evaluation, interviewees reported that after participating in the

training on the concept of constructive feedback, they had realized the need to interact with their students on their performances in CATs before they sit for final exam. The findings of this study as described in chapter five show that after being trained on the concept of constructive feedback, lecturers have been able to make use of it in their interactions with students. For instance, one of the interviewees said:

... I will give an example of the module I taught after the training ... where after teaching we would have an open discussion and students would ask questions regarding where they have not well understood and other students would share their views and as a teacher I added something ... (Muhazi).

This is similar to the experience of Ihema who added that the constructive feedback she had provided to students encouraged them to ask her questions freely from which she drew lessons, which helped her adjust something in her teaching practices. Findings also indicate that these dialogues originating from the use of constructive feedback between teachers and their students are helping students, improve their performances.

Educational discourses indicate that interaction between a teacher and students in a classroom context is one of the important indicators of teaching quality (Africa Yu, 2007 & Stanat et al, 2010 as cited in Krogull, Scheunpflug & Rwambonera, 2014, p. 49). OECD also recognizes this in its publication on equity and quality in education: supporting disadvantaged students and schools (OECD, 2012, p. 146) and the UNSW Australia (2014) which stipulates that constructive feedback promote interaction and dialogue leading to learning improvement. Additionally,

constructive feedback is defined as “on-going, open, two-way communication between two or more people” (Laurie, 2013: 56). Similarly, feedback on students’ assessment is regarded as an important element in their learning, which helps them understand and identify what they need to do for further improvement (LTC, 2008, p. 1). On the other side, feedback is recognized as an element for understanding, monitoring and improving education quality (UNESCO, 2004, p. 229).

In this context of pedagogical relationship, I would advise teachers to use the TELL model presented in 2.2.2. This model promotes two-way communication as the most important aspect of constructive feedback. It consists of telling students specifically the behaviour to be maintained or corrected, explaining the implications to be created by their actions either positive or negative without blaming or attacking them, listening to their ideas for correcting the problem, and letting them know what would happen if the problem is corrected, or not (Yasir & Sajid, 2010, p. 227).

6.1.3 Constructive feedback and students’ motivation

During the interviews, when a teacher said that students asked many questions fostered by feedback provided to them, I guess that if they were not motivated they would not ask these questions which fortunately helped them to understand better and get additional knowledge as mentioned by the interviewees. In addition, from what interviewees declared not only students gained from the feedback but also teachers came to adjust their teaching process accordingly. This is in accordance with one of the characteristics of constructive feedback as mentioned in 2.2.1 that says that constructive feedback should be aimed at encouraging students, i.e., “motivating students and

teachers to continue and to increase teaching and learning efforts” (Ovando, 1994, p. 5). From the benefits teachers are realizing from the provision of constructive feedback, it is worth noting that according to literatures (Ovando, 1994; Yasir & Sajid, 2010) and from the results of this study, students need regular, well timed and continuous guidance with the use of constructive feedback. If teachers want them to perform well both at school and in the society. Furthermore, teachers need to know that students may be demotivated because of provided feedback (Irons, 2010, p. 37). In this regard, teachers have to know that not every feedback is useful but rather teachers should be aware that whatever the content, any feedback should be given to students in a constructive way (Poertner & Miller, 1996, p. 22). More importantly, teachers have to be aware that even if motivating students for learning is one of the important problems that teachers encounter in their daily teaching activities (Newstead & Hoskins, 2008; Callahan, 2010) motivation is an essential element in students’ learning (Liu et al, 2012, p. 173). Likewise, feedback is considered as one of the tools to be used to motivate students (Centra, 2007; Newstead & Hoskins, 2008; Kamardeen, 2013) and the findings of this study show that trained teachers have started experiencing it.

6.1.4 Constructive feedback and self-regulated learning

The results of this study show that trained teachers have been able to use constructive feedback as a guidance tool for their students. One interviewee mentioned for instance how she had used constructive feedback to help year one students understand higher education assessment system what helped them bridge the gaps they had demonstrated in CATs during final exam. This aspect is as well supported

by Nicol and Macfarlane (2006, p. 13) who argue that good feedback provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance. In the same view, another interviewee also mentioned that students he had taught after being trained on the constructive feedback had shown much involvement in their learning and at the end had achieved better performances compared to those of their colleagues of the same year in the same module. Similarly, research findings show that in education quality students should be considered as central and active members in teaching and learning process (Ross & Genevois, 2006, p. 43). In this same view, it is recommended that students need to be helped throughout their studies to exercise their responsibilities (Nicol and Macfarlane, 2006, p. 15).

The findings of this study show that students are contributing to their learning practices as a result to the constructive feedback they are receiving from their teachers. On the other hand, different definitions given to feedback and constructive feedback as mentioned in 2.1 by different scholars (Ende, 1983; Nadine, 2006; Vitiené & Miciuliené, 2008; Yasir & Sajid, 2010) highlight the importance of feedback in helping students become self-regulated learners. This is the reason why in this study constructive feedback is understood as on-going, open and solution-oriented information provided skilfully by teachers to help their students reduce the gap between their current and desired performances and to reach required competences at the end. This shows as well to which extent constructive feedback may be used as a tool to help students become self-responsible of their learning process.

6.2 Challenges faced by teachers in delivering constructive feedback to students

The findings of this study show that interviewees have already started experiencing some of the problems linked to the provision of constructive feedback as the ones pointed out in existing literatures (LTC, 2008; Hatziapostolou & Paraskakis, 2010; James Cook University, 2011; UNSW, Australia 2014). The problem declared by interviewees as a main challenge they are encountering is related to time required for feedback preparation and provision. This declaration of interviewees reflects the point of view of Hatziapostolou and Paraskakis who indicate that the preparation of high-quality assessment feedback useful in learning improvement requires much time (2010, p. 120). One of the interviewees associated the problem of time consumption to the one of large class size saying that even if a teacher can give collective feedback he has realized that individual feedback is also needed to address individual problems for each student has his / her own strengths and weaknesses.

During the interviews, it was noted that these problems do not stop teachers from giving feedback to students but rather affect the quality of feedback provided. This is also the point of view of Hatziapostolou and Paraskakis who argue that feedback is central to students learning but its quality is reduced by large class size and workload of higher education academic staff (2010, p. 120). The findings of this study show that this problem of workload was mentioned but the important in this case is that teachers were aware that when feedback was not provided on time there was something important missing in students' learning process.

Even if this happens, the important thing is that trained teachers are already aware of and have experienced the importance of constructive feedback in teaching and learning process. Here, it is as well important to note that the implementation of constructive feedback is still in its early phase since the training took place in December 2014. In the long term, this knowledge will hopefully help teachers to avoid late feedback, which is considered as wasted effort and opportunity for both the teacher and students (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989; UNSW Australia, 2014) and instead try to find ways to provide regular feedback to students. Additionally, on the problem identified concerning large classes, interviewees agreed on the use of peer feedback and collective feedback as proposed in some literatures (For instance Spiller, 2014; UNSW Australia, 2014).

During all the interviews, I realized that all participants had met a problem, which I associate to the fact that feedback should rather be solicited than imposed, that is, “feedback is useful when the receiver himself / herself has formulated the questions which those observing him / her can answer or when he/she actively seeks feedback” (Promes, 2012, pp. 1-2). Participants said that it was hard for them to get students back after marking final exams in order to give them feedback. Whereas from the experiences they were having after participating in the training on constructive feedback they had realized that feedback on final exam would help students in their learning in addition to feedback got on CATs, either for better understanding of the same module or for subsequent modules. The reason behind this problem is due to the fact that feedback on CATs are normally given while the course is still going on which means in this case students are still studying the

course whereas final exams are done at the completion of a course. From the above suggestion, if students could be aware of the importance of feedback not only after CATs but also after final exam, they would be the first to seek for feedback on final exams. This model shows that for feedback to enhance learning it should be linked to learning goals and progress made by students toward these goals and then advices for better progress (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 86). Likewise, the purpose of assessment in Rwandan higher learning institutions should be to assess to which extent expected learning outcomes have been achieved (Republic of Rwanda, 2013a, p. 7).

6.3 Strategies proposed to ensure good provision of constructive feedback to students

Findings of this study show that strategies proposed during interviews are either in line with or complementary to the ones proposed in the existing literatures (LTC, 2008; Hatziapostolou & Paraskakis, 2010; James Cook University, 2011; Spiller, 2014; UNSW Australia, 2014). For instance, on the issue of lecturers' workload which has been shown as an obstacle to the provision of timely feedback, findings of this study show that if a teacher does not provide feedback to students his / her work is incomplete. In this regard, it has been suggested that teachers should consider the importance of providing constructive feedback to students in teaching and learning process and then incorporate it in their daily teaching activities even if they are involved in other activities besides teaching. On the contrary, Hatziapostolou and Paraskakis suggest the reduction of lecturers' workload to allow lecturers have enough time to provide quality feedback to students (2010, p. 120). In my opinion, the two ideas

above are right but I insist on the fact that teachers should not wait for the reduction of workload but rather strive for the completion of their work. Another interviewee talked about preparation as a strategy, which is as well proposed by the UNSW Australia, grouping strategies for feedback into three categories such as planning for feedback, using technology and ensuring of fairness (UNSW Australia, 2014).

Educators at the James Cook University propose a strategy, which reflects the usefulness of collaboration among lecturers. In this regard, the James Cook University suggests that teachers should discuss their concerns with colleagues and consider how they could improve (James Cook University, 2011, p. 9). According to different discourses, a number of approaches may be used to give teachers a room to discuss and share experiences on their daily works (Scheerens, Glas & Thomas, 2003; Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008; Vavrus, 2011; Krogull, Scheunflug & Rwambonera, 2014; UNESCO, 2014). These approaches include for instance the use of staff meetings and learning communities, continuous in-service training, and effective teamwork, monitoring and evaluation considering what interviewees have suggested.

In Rwandan higher education context, on one hand a programme of study is defined as “a set of modules which together have defined set learning outcomes which a student must complete to the satisfaction of a Board of Examiners in order to be eligible for the award of a qualification” (Republic of Rwanda, 2013a, p. 5). Furthermore, “a module is a coherent and identifiable unit of learning and teaching with defined learning outcomes and module descriptions may include pre-requisite and/

or co-requisite modules” (Republic of Rwanda, 2013a, p. 6). Additionally, a group of lecturers called module team delivers a module. In this regard, the interviewees have suggested the need of collaboration and teamwork among lecturers not only teaching the same module but also in the same programme of study to ensure interconnectivity across all modules of a programme to comply with the above-mentioned general academic regulations. Interviewees expressed that by working together as module teams, students will realize the need for feedback not only on CATs but also on final exams as feedback becomes most useful when students actively seek for it (Susan, 2012). During interviews, all the interviewees agreed on the fact that staff meetings within departments would be useful for teachers to share on the concept of constructive feedback especially trained ones helping those who did not attend the organized training. On this issue, one of the interviewees brought in the necessity of monitoring the implementation of the provision of constructive feedback to students by the faculty and this is in other words one of the roles of academic leaders. Likewise, this was also my expectation while I was choosing participants for the training. Besides, the importance of staff meetings is recognized in the literature as a central part of school communication, planning and decision-making. These meetings are seen as one way of lifelong learning for the staff (DECD, 2014).

Moreover, one of the interviewees mentioned that teachers might make use of break time in staff room to exchange on their students’ performances and strategies to be used accordingly. According to my understanding, I have associated this idea to the approach of learning communities, which is defined as “groups of students /

teachers who learn collaboratively and build knowledge through intellectual interaction and are judged to enhance student learning by increasing students' and teachers' satisfaction" (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008: 4). This same strategy was proposed for action on challenges facing adoption of learner-centered pedagogy in SSA (Vavrus, Thomas & Bartlett, p. 2011). Daly (2011) describes the role of learning communities based on his study conducted in seven institutions to examine the impact of semester-long faculty learning communities. In this study, it was reported that: "faculty learning communities provided a confidential environment for faculty to discuss their challenges, but participants were also able to identify and share information about teaching practices in which they had developed significant expertise" (Daly, 2011, pp. 11-12). From this study, the use of learning communities can help trained teachers to discuss on challenges they encountered with regard to the provision of constructive feedback to students and to find solutions collaboratively. Moreover, these learning communities once adopted would help trained teachers to act as multipliers of the concept of constructive feedback in their respective departments. Initial teacher education is not enough but rather it should be supported by in-service teacher training to let teachers keep in touch with new findings and to obtain continuous support for the enhancement of their teaching quality (Fredriksson, 2004, p. 13).

Additionally, the UNESCO in its EFA global monitoring report argues that "In-service training is especially important for teachers who may be untrained or undertrained. In addition, teachers need on-going training to adapt to new teaching and learning methods, and trainers themselves need on- going education ..." (UNESCO, 2014, p. 236). In this

same view, all interviewees also recommended that senior leaders of the higher learning institutions should organize a similar training on the concept of constructive feedback for all teachers who did not attend the first one. Moreover, interviewees suggested that regular trainings should be organized to let teachers have a room to exchange on the enhancement of their teaching quality by use of different approaches included in constructive feedback. In-service training will as well help in regard to lifelong learning, as “quality is dynamic to mean that it changes over time and by context” (Leu, 2005, p. 9).

6.4 Summary of the chapter

The discussion above shows that findings of this study are either in relation or complementary to the findings of educational discourses as described in chapter two. This is because; findings of this study show that the provision of constructive feedback is helping trained teachers in different ways of their teaching and learning process. The benefits reported by interviewees include the improvement of their teaching and assessment methods, improvement of pedagogical relationships with students, guidance of their students, and improvement of their students’ performances. As mentioned in previous chapters, educational discourses also indicate that constructive feedback enhance teaching and learning process, pedagogical relationship, students’ motivation and self-regulated learning. Moreover, different literature shows that the above aspects are as well indicators of education quality (For example: UNESCO, 2004; Ross & Genevois, 2006; OECD, 2012). This means that the provision of constructive feedback to students will undoubtedly lead to enhancement of educational quality.

As trained teachers are still in the early stages of implementation since the training on constructive feedback took place only in December 2014, at least they have started realizing some problems, which have also been identified in above-mentioned educational discourses. Moreover, strategies proposed by interviewees as ways of solving encountered problems and expected ones are in line with those proposed in existing literatures, what gives assurance of their efficiency once applied. Nevertheless, the findings of this study show that the importance of constructive feedback also works in post-conflicts country like Rwanda as compared to what is mentioned in different literatures on educational discourses. This indicates that the development of constructive feedback provision is needed in Rwandan culture either at school in all levels or in the society for the enhancement of unity and reconciliation expected to play an important role in Rwanda's development process (Republic of Rwanda, 2013b, p. 82).

7

CONCLUSION

This study is associated with the understanding of the process of quality improvement in Rwandan higher education. It is in this regard that it was conceptualized as a controlled intervention followed by an evaluation. The intervention carried out consisted of a training workshop for two days on the concept of constructive feedback as a reaction to identified problems related to feedback provision to students by lecturers. More specifically, constructive feedback was chosen following the fact that it is recognized as an important factor, which influences students' achievement.

In this study, constructive feedback is understood as ongoing, open and solution-oriented information provided skilfully by teachers to help their students reduce the gap between their current, and desired performances, and reach required competences in the end. The main objectives of the training were to help participants acquire knowledge on constructive feedback, develop related competences, tools and strategies to deliver it. As the implementation of the outputs of this training was in its early phase, a formative evaluation was conducted to be aware of what is going on, how far these outputs were being implemented and what difficulties trainees were encountering. The evaluation sought to give answers to the following research questions: (i) What experiences do teachers have with the

provision of constructive feedback to students? (ii) What are the challenges to be faced by teachers in delivering constructive feedback to students? (iii) What strategies are necessary to be taken to ensure good provision of constructive feedback to students? To achieve this, a qualitative approach was used through a semi-structured interview with three lecturers selected purposively among trained lecturers. During interview, open-ended questions were used to give interviewees enough room to express their experiences on the implementation of constructive feedback in classroom context. Data was collected using computer recording alongside notes taking to facilitate their transcription later. After transcription, the collected data was analysed using content analysis method.

After analysis, the results of the study reported herein clearly indicated that trained lecturers had started experiencing the benefits of providing constructive feedback but were facing some problems, which needed to be taken into consideration for effective provision of constructive feedback to students. From the collected data, the provision of constructive feedback to student is helping teachers to improve their teaching and assessment methods, improve pedagogical relationship with their student, guide their students. Teachers are observing improvement of their students' performances as results. Problems expressed by interviewees included the fact that they had realized that the preparation and provision of constructive feedback was time-consuming especially when the class had a big number of students. Another problem mentioned consisted of the fact that lecturers are sometimes given additional responsibilities or involved in additional activities besides teaching. Interviewees also pointed out that it is not easy for them to get students

for feedback on final exams whereas they have already realized the importance it should have in teaching and learning process. These problems are more likely linked to the fact that constructive feedback provision is still in its initial phase of implementation. Alleviating them was one of the objectives of this study.

The results of this study show that interviewees proposed a number of strategies that may be used to assure good provision of constructive feedback to students since they have already experienced its benefits in teaching and learning process. For instance, all the interviewees agreed on the fact that teachers should integrate the provision of constructive feedback in their daily teaching activities because according to them, if a teacher does not provide feedback to students, his / her work is incomplete. The suggestions made also reflected the role of staff meetings and the use of learning communities among lecturers in the implementation of the provision of constructive feedback to students. Besides, interviewees said that it would be better if the same training on the concept of constructive feedback could be organized for all the other lecturers who did not attend it the first time. Not only this training but also the organization of regular trainings was recommended to let lecturers have time to discuss on their daily activities, come up with solutions and keep on learning for the enhancement of their teaching quality as quality changes over time and by context. Lastly but not the least, the role of academic leaders at all levels was mentioned especially for the follow-up and monitoring of provision of constructive feedback to students. Even if this study seems to be the first one conducted on the effectiveness of constructive feedback in the improvement of educational quality in Rwandan higher education, the analysis of its

findings shows that they are interrelated with the findings of different educational discourses. This interconnection allows me to formulate the following recommendations at different levels starting from students, teachers, higher learning institutions leaders, government of Rwanda right up to researchers.

From my study, the following suggestions can be drawn for the praxis in the field and educational science. Considering the fact that constructive feedback is recognized to play an important role in teaching and learning process and that in Rwandan higher education a programme of study consists of a set of modules which together have defined set learning outcomes. The student must complete to the satisfaction of a Board of Examiners in order to be eligible for the award of a qualification, I urge students to participate in their learning actively and more importantly take the first action to seek for feedback from their teachers. Besides, academic staff are called upon to make improvements on the way feedback is conveyed to students insisting on the use constructive feedback taking into consideration its characteristics and effective teamwork among themselves. Recommendations do not regard only students and teachers but also academic leaders of the private higher learning concerned in this study. The intervention conducted was in an initial phase and the findings from its evaluation have shown that teachers are facing some problems in the implementation of constructive feedback. In this regard, a continuous support is needed to help teachers get in the routine use by means of different professional development instruments such as in-service training, regular staff meeting and collaborative learning. More particularly, looking at the results this intervention, non-trained teachers should have

the same training on constructive feedback to ensure educational quality at the end. Monitoring and evaluation help to regulate desired levels of quality of educational outcomes and provisions, formally to hold educational service providers accountable and to support on-going improvement in education (Scheerens et al, 2003, p. 4). From this, academic leaders at all levels are called upon to conduct regular monitoring and evaluation to assure that students are being given constructive feedback and to help teachers solve encountered problems in this regard on time.

Rwanda is a post-conflicts country. In this context, constructive feedback can play an important role in improving pedagogical relationships between teachers and learners. In this regard, it is recommended that the government of Rwanda especially through MINEDUC consider the use of constructive feedback as an additional important tool among others for the enhancement of social cohesion not only at school level but also in the society and then reflect on its implementation in all levels of education from nursery to higher education.

With regard to the time and context in which this study has been conducted, some areas could be interesting for future researches. This study has sought to explore teachers' experiences with regard to provision of constructive feedback to students this is to mean that the only participants for the conducted interviews were teachers. It would be of interest to investigate from students how they are perceiving feedback they are getting from their teachers because students' perceptions may be different from those presented by teachers. Interviewees pointed out the need of feedback on final exams whereas exiting

research and literature that I have used focus on formative feedback. In this respect, I suggest other researchers to conduct research on the usefulness of constructive feedback on final exams in teaching and learning process.

To conclude I agree with the opinions of scholars who declare that "...everyone has the right not only to receive education, but also to receive education of a high quality" (Fredriksson, 2004, p. 2) and that "if universities are to improve the quality of teaching and learning, special attention must be paid to feedback" (Retna & Cavana, n.d, p. 3). From these citations, I recommend higher learning institutions especially in Rwanda to consider constructive feedback as an important tool they could use to enhance their educational quality. However, the provision of constructive feedback alone does not suffice to assure effective and sustainable educational quality improvement. Rather, there is a need to reflect on other aspects of educational quality improvement to complete the use of constructive feedback.

Appendix I: Training Plan

DAY ONE **Date: 22nd December 2014** **Time: 08:30-16:20**

Topic: Training of higher education academic staff on constructive feedback

| Agenda | Content | Presenter | Tools | Time |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Opening speech | | VRAC or DAQ | | 08:30 - 08:40 |
| 1. Workshop Unit: Introduction | | | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation • Plenary discussion | Christine Nyiramana, DAQ | PPP | 08:40 - 09:10 |
| 2. Workshop Unit: Constructive feedback - Why does it matter? | | | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral brainstorming: Indicators of education quality and factors influencing students competences • Summary: Indicators of education quality and factors by UNESCO (O=SB+C+I+T) • Graph interpretation: Teaching matters • Plenary discussion: Problems identified at the concerned private higher learning institution in relation to feedback provided to students | Christine Nyiramana DAQ | WS | 09:10 - 09:40 09:40 - 09:50 09:50 - 10:20 |
| Break | | | | 10:20 - 10:40 |

Constructive Feedback

| Agenda | Content | Presenter | Tools | Time |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. Workshop Unit: What do literatures say about constructive feedback and learning? | | | | |
| Benefits of constructive feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation: definitions and benefits of constructive feedback in teaching and learning process from research point of view. • Group reflection: Discuss the benefits of constructive feedback in the context of your institution? (To different stakeholders: students, teacher, labor market ...) • Group presentation and plenary Benefits of constructive feedback • Summary | Christine Nyiramana, DAQ | PPP Flip chart and markers PPP | 10:40 - 11:10 11:10 - 11:40 11:40 - 12:10 12:10-12:30 |
| Lunch | | | | 12:30 - 14:00 |
| 4. Workshop Unit: Feedback and error correction | | | | |
| Feedback and error correction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation and plenary session | Christine Nyiramana, DAC | PPP | 14:00 -14:40 |
| Consolidation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual drawing: Life experience with regard to feedback received • Questions and discussion in plenary | Christine Nyiramana, DAC | WS, flip chart and markers | 14:40-15:20 15:20 - 15:50 |
| Closure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of the first day, closing remarks with indication of the next day | Christine Nyiramana, DAC | Evaluation sheets | 15:50 -16:20 |

DAY TWO

Date: 23rd December 2014

Time: 08:30-14:00

| Agenda | Content | Presenter | Tools | Time |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Recap | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief review on the first day presentations | Christine Nyiramana | PPP | 08:30 - 08:40 |
| 5. Workshop Unit: Feedback in practice | | | | |
| Constructive feedback and destructive feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation: Difference between constructive and destructive feedback Partner reflection Role play: Exchange with your partner on how you convey feedback to your students in case of success and in case of failure? Summary: Need of knowing characteristics of constructive feedback | Christine Nyiramana, DAQ | PPP | 08:40 - 09:00 09:00 - 09:20 |
| Do's and don'ts of giving constructive feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written brainstorming: what to do and what to avoid while giving feedback to students? Characteristics of constructive feedback | Christine Nyiramana, DAQ | Work flip charts and markers PPP | 09:20 - 09:30 |

Constructive Feedback

| Agenda | Content | Presenter | Tools | Time |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Characteristics of constructive feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner discussion: discuss on given feedback cases provided to students referring to characteristics of constructive feedback Plenary discussion | Christine Nyiramana, DAQ | WS | 09:30 - 09:50 |
| Acronyms to facilitate the provision of feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation: CORBS model, TELL model and Hattie's model Questions and discussion in plenary | Christine Nyiramana, DAQ | PPP | 09:50 - 10:10 |
| Break | | | | 10:40 - 11:00 |
| 6. Workshop Unit: Challenges with assessment feedback to students and how to overcome them | | | | |
| Challenges and alternative solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group reflection: What challenges may teachers face with the provision of constructive feedback and how they may overcome them? Group presentation and plenary: Challenges of constructive feedback and their alternative solutions Summary | Christine Nyiramana, DAQ | Flip charts and makers PPP | 11:00 - 11:30 11:30 - 12:10 12:10 - 12:20 |

| Agenda | Content | Presenter | Tools | Time |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open discussion: Reflection and recommendations on the whole training • Evaluation of the training | Christine Nyiramana, DAQ | Questionnaire | 12:20 - 12:45 |
| Closure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing speech | VRAC or DAQ | | 12:45 - 13:00 |
| | | | | |
| Lunch | | | | 13:00 - 14:00 |

Appendix II: Interview guide

Could you tell me about your daily work as a lecturer?

You are among lecturers who participated in the training on constructive feedback last year i.e. in December 2014; could you please share with me about what you learnt in that training?

What challenges have you encountered so far with regard to the provision of constructive feedback to your students?

Did anything else happen that could help me understand your experiences so far with regard to the provision of constructive feedback?

What would you advise for the better use of constructive feedback in classroom context in order to assure the enhancement of educational quality at the end?

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Abstract

Assuring and improving the quality of teaching in universities is currently a major and global concern. In addition, many scholars believe that providing high quality feedback to students is one of the most important factors in achieving learning outcomes. This study was conceptualized as a controlled intervention with academic staff of one private higher learning institution in Rwanda. This was a reaction to an identified problem related to students and teachers' dissatisfaction with feedback, which resulted in students' failures. The main objective of this intervention was to give participants the essential knowledge about the concept of constructive feedback and to help them develop related skills. Later, a research was conducted by means of semi-structured interviews with purposefully selected trainees to analyse their experiences with regard to providing constructive feedback to students and more specifically encountered challenges and mitigation measures. From this research, it is important for higher learning institutions to avoid any culture of unhelpful feedback and to reflect on other educational quality aspects alongside providing constructive feedback not only to reinforce its use but also to assure effective and sustainable educational quality enhancement.

Résumé

Assurer et améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement et apprentissage dans les universités est actuellement une de préoccupations mondiales majeures. En plus, donner le feedback de grande qualité aux étudiants est reconnu par beaucoup de chercheurs comme un des facteurs principaux qui favorisent l'accomplissement des objectifs fixés. Partant de cette problématique, j'ai conduit une

étude visant à conceptualiser une intervention contrôlée. L'objectif principal de cette intervention était de donner aux participants la connaissance nécessaire du concept de feedback constructif et les aider à développer des compétences y relatives à travers les expériences de donner et recevoir le feedback constructif durant même la formation. Plus tard, une recherche a été menée au moyen d'entretiens structurés avec des enseignants choisis parmi les enseignants formés de manière ciblée pour analyser leurs expériences en matière de feedback constructif à l'intention des étudiants et plus spécifiquement pour faire face aux défis et aux mesures d'atténuation. À partir de cette recherche, il est important pour les institutions d'enseignement supérieur d'éviter n'importe quelle culture de feedback qui n'aident pas les étudiants plutôt à réfléchir sur d'autres aspects de l'éducation de qualité complémentaires au feedback constructif non seulement pour le renforcement de son utilisation, mais aussi pour s'assurer de l'amélioration de la qualité l'éducation efficace et durable.

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