

Importance of collecting feedback in large class rooms

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First year undergraduate classes are examples for large class room teaching in many institutes, including ours. One of the issues associated with teaching in large class room is that teacher remains largely unaware of the teaching-learning outcomes in the class room, until Quiz I is conducted. Thus, scope for formative assessment techniques is enormous in large class rooms. The write up summarizes the attempts to collect feedback from undergraduate chemistry course during the last semester.

Method 1: Making an individual connection: If teacher wishes to collect informal feedback, he/she may want to make a rapport with the students in the class room. The first step in this direction is to know their names. Knowing the names of individual students in a large class room is a challenge for any teacher. However, a teacher can always be successful in learning a few names in the class. The difficulty, sometimes, is to remember the name and connect with the face. In order to overcome this difficulty, the following method is adopted. In a typical undergraduate class of 80-100 strength, students have been asked to introduce themselves, with a request to make the introduction attractive and memorable.

Some of the undergraduates in the class took it with good spirit and did a commendable job. A few other students introduce themselves in a normal and modest fashion. However, different ways and styles were observed (borrowing the styles from popular advertisement, movies etc.). This exercise was lasted only for two to three minutes in each class, however, I could match 60% of the names with their face, by the end of ten classes!

Research suggests that any information (eg. names of students) is relatively easy to retrieve from memory if the information is stored with a tag.¹ In the above exercise, the self-introduction served the purpose of the tag for the information (name).

It has also been observed that, once I know them by their name, students tend to interact outside the class room and through email, which are/can be utilized for getting a feedback on learning in the class room. One of the reasons for the existing 'disconnect' between the teachers and students in large class room could be the absence of personal rapport with students.

Method 2: Spare a little time to take data: While teachers are very anxious for delivering the most refined knowledge through their lectures and slides, they often spend little time to verify whether their efforts were fruitful or not, through techniques other than exams or quizzes. In large class rooms, frequent feedback is necessary for not only to check whether learning happens or not, but to verify whether the teacher's 'actions' in the class room are well received by the students also.

The following questions were given to each student in the class and their response was collected. The time spent for this exercise was 10 minutes of one class.

Questions:

1. In-class activities during teaching, are: (a) very effective (b) moderately effective (c) not effective (d) don't know
2. The problem solving sessions in each class make me (a) more confident in handling the problems, (b) familiarise the type of questions which can be expected in exams, (c) confusing, (d) don't know
3. Strictness in reaching the class on time is: (a) needed (b) not a bad idea (c) not needed at all (d) don't know

(The policy: students who come five minutes late to the class time are not allowed to sit in the class. This information was given in the first class and was strictly followed. A few students were sent back to hostel since they arrived late)

4. Self-introduction by students in the class is: (a) appreciated (b) moderately appreciated (c) not appreciated (d) don't know

The data was processed and the results are given below. Options a, b, c and d are coloured as blue, red, green and purple respectively.

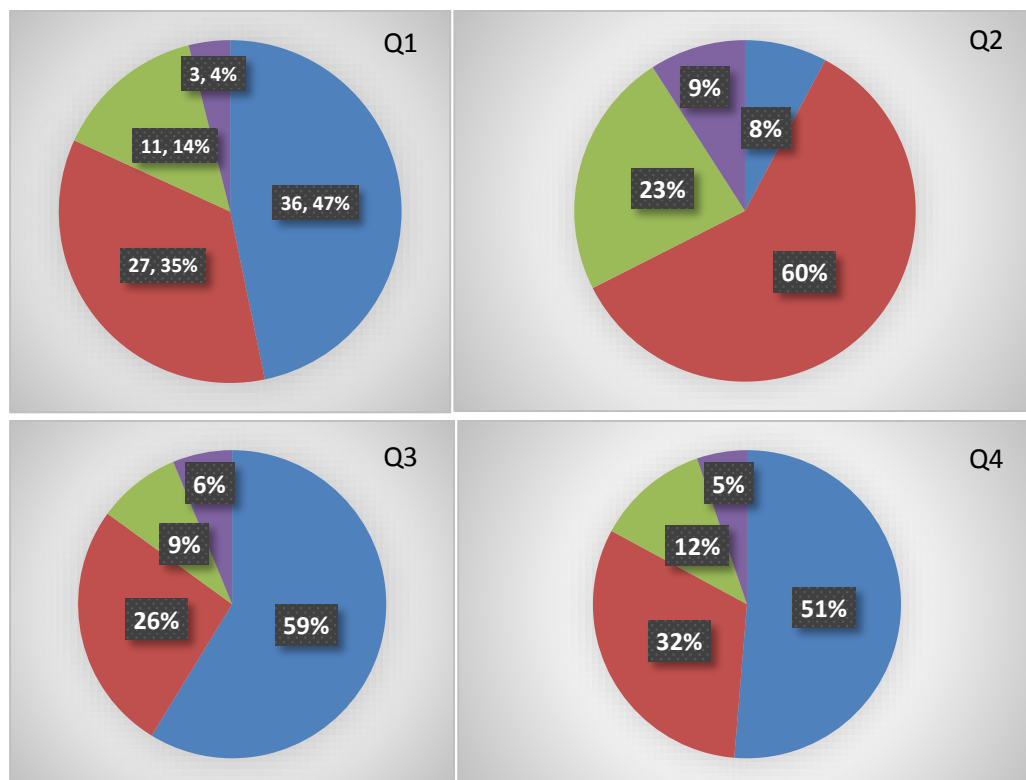


Figure 1: Four questions (Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4) and the percentage of students answered with their choice. The colour indicates the choice.

The data was shown to the class to primarily inform them that the data collection was meant for processing. The data also tells to the minor group of students, who are not very punctual in coming on-time, that late coming is viewed as a disturbance by their peers.

The feedback also suggests that majority of students welcome discipline and punctuality in the class, as opposed to the general view that present day learners are very casual in their approach.

Feedback helps the teacher to make sure that things are going according to the expectations of the teacher. Many a time, teachers assume, based on previous years' experience or perceptions and take decisions which may or may not have desirable impact on teaching learning process.