

From Peers to Progress: Tackling Feedback Challenges in Malaysian Medical Education

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Title

"From Peers to Progress: Tackling Feedback Challenges in Malaysian Medical Education"

Abstract

Background

Peer feedback is the process of students providing constructive comments to fellow students in a formative manner to help develop and improve their skills. Peer feedback underpins the educational principle of collaborative learning accomplishing interpersonal skills and group accountability. However, there are various factors documented in the literature that affect providing peer feedback.

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by Malaysian medical students in providing peer feedback and suggestions to facilitate peer feedback to enhance collaborative learning, leading to the achievement of the core competency of providing constructive feedback to team members.

Methods

The methodological approach was qualitative following the constructivism paradigm. Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted using purposive sampling for the fourth-year medical students who completed the Anaesthesia placement to explore the specific challenges for these students in terms of providing constructive peer feedback. FGD were recorded and transcribed. Data was analysed using the inductive approach of thematic analysis.

Results

Three themes were identified from two FGD, conducted with 12 students: tailored feedback; knowledge and experience; and individual perception and cultural acceptability. The proposed suggestions to improve peer feedback included - training by trained faculty, having

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51 regular sessions, use of information technology and making peer feedback anonymous.

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53 Conclusion
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56 Peer feedback has the potential to enhance collaborative learning in the Malaysian context.

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58 However, training in providing peer feedback by trained faculty can tackle the challenges of
59 providing peer feedback such as affecting peer relationships, feeling inefficient to provide
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1 comments and being judged based on the comments. In addition, the onus lies on the
2 facilitators to create a psychologically safe learning environment to optimize the benefits of
3 peer feedback.
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7 **Keywords** 8

9 Peer feedback, collaborative learning, medical education, peer assessment, undergraduate
10 medical students
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15 **Introduction/Background** 16

17 Peer feedback, also known as peer assessment, is the process of students providing
18 constructive comments to fellow students in a formative manner to help develop and improve
19 their skills (1). The national standard for undergraduate medical education in Malaysia
20 includes providing constructive feedback to team members as a core competency under
21 ‘interpersonal and communication skills’ (2). The use of peer feedback as a method of
22 assessment is on the rise in undergraduate medical education (1) due to advantages like
23 providing unique valuable feedback and enhancing student confidence and quality of work
24 (3). Peer feedback underpins the educational principle of collaborative learning
25 accomplishing interpersonal skills and group accountability (4).
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35 However, there are various factors documented in the literature that affect providing peer
36 feedback. For instance, fear of future consequences for relationships with peers (5,6),
37 perceived task difficulty, social discomfort, and a sense of responsibility in providing written
38 feedback (7,8) which can compromise the benefits of genuine peer feedback.
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43 In the researcher’s institute during the clinical group placement in the Anaesthesia
44 curriculum, fourth-year medical students prepare and present a pre-assigned topic using
45 PowerPoint slides in groups of 5-6 students. Each group subdivides the topic among
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themselves, giving each student an opportunity to present. After the student presentation, the floor is opened for peer feedback on presentation skills. This exercise aims to facilitate the development of ‘interpersonal and communication skills’, a core competency. Although the literature indicates that peer feedback can help enhance students’ presentation skills (9), anecdotally, these students find it difficult to provide constructive peer feedback.

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by Malaysian medical students in providing peer feedback to formulate target measures in future to combat those specific challenges.

This would enhance the benefits of peer feedback which can strengthen collaborative learning and achievement of the core competency of providing constructive feedback to team members.

Methods

Study design

A quality improvement study was conducted following the Plan–do–study–act (PDSA) cycle (10). This study specifically involved the S – study, part of the cycle. The plan and do is part of usual practice for this placement where students are expected to provide a group presentation and give constructive feedback to their peers after the presentation. The challenges explored will be used for future action planning (Act part of the cycle) to maximise the benefits of peer feedback to enhance collaborative learning.

The methodological approach was qualitative as this research explored the experiences of fourth year medical students while providing peer feedback, following a constructivist paradigm (11). Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted to explore the specific challenges for these students (12,13).

Study population and sampling methods.

The study population was fourth year medical students who have completed the Anaesthesia placement, and the researcher is their Anaesthesia lecturer familiar with the curriculum. Purposive sampling was used, since FGD relies on the ability and capacity of participants to provide relevant information involving cognition (14).

Data collection procedures

Once ethical approval was provided (REGO-WMS-ME-24.034), recruitment began after the student presentation-peer-feedback-session. The researcher approached and informed the students about the study, including the purpose of the research, participants' role, estimated time for the FGD (60-90 minutes) with opportunity to ask questions and reinforced the value of their participation, making the study relevant to them promoting willingness to engage in the group discussion which is instrumental in generating useful data (13,15). The approved participant information leaflet was provided to each student and they were left for an hour to decide about participating in the FGD which followed their presentations, without the presence of the researcher. Ideally the participants should be given at least 24 hours to decide

their enrolment, however the participants would have been starting a new placement/module the following day at a different location making it difficult to involve them in the study.

Students agreeing to participate were asked to provide written informed consent, which included consent for audio recording. Each FGD was planned to have 4-8 students, as there are 10-11 students in each group. Two FGD were planned due to the time frame of having only two months for data collection and analysis. In the current setting, two groups of Anaesthesia placements occur over a six-week period.

The FGD followed a topic guide which included a brief introduction, consent (including audio recording), confirming confidentiality, and laying down of ground rules, followed by the exploration of their experiences of the peer feedback session (13).

Ideally, a FGD involves a facilitator, an assistant, and the participants. However, in the absence of assistance, the researcher completed the preparation beforehand and, during the FGD, simultaneously managed note-taking and participant observation while guiding the semi-structured discussion with prompts (12,13). As a lecturer, the researcher is accustomed to facilitating group discussions in the classroom, which supported the management of this process. The FGD was audio recorded on a dedicated recorder. The recordings were transcribed verbatim using 'Turboscribe' AI. Each FGD recording was labelled as A,B,C... with the date and day and the participants were anonymised as participant No.1a,2a,3a.... and 1b,2b,3b....

Data analysis

Data was analysed using the inductive approach of thematic analysis (TA) (16). The data was coded and the relationship between codes established to develop themes using the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis framework by Clarke and Braun, (17) which is not tied to a

particular theoretical perspective and offers a clear and usable framework for thematic analysis (18). Using the inductive approach for thematic analysis enhanced the credibility of the research as themes are derived from the data without being affected by the researcher's preconceptions (18).

Results

Two FGD were conducted with 12 (5 and 7 students respectively) fourth-year medical students after their anaesthesia posting with 39-42 minutes duration. Three themes were

identified based on the challenges in providing and receiving feedback: (1) tailored feedback, (2) knowledge and experience, and (3) individual perception and cultural acceptability. Each theme is discussed in further detail providing quotations from the FGD identifying which person in which FGD (a or b) made the comment in brackets.

Overall, the students felt peer feedback (PFB) is useful as indicated by these quotes-

"I truly support feedback because it enhances our learning and development....

.... fosters trust and open communication between our individuals or among our friends." (Participant 6b)

"...also promotes growth and learning, regular feedback, postures a culture of continued learning to development leading to skill enhancement and personal growth." (Participant 5b)

1. Tailored feedback

a. Providing feedback

The students felt that as they know their peers, they are able to provide tailored feedback, as indicated by the following quote-

"I think that Peer Feedback can be useful sometimes because the peers know each other better and they know their strengths and weakness, so they can give tailored, like appropriate advice." (Participant-5a)

Knowing vs not knowing how the receiver will perceive

There was variation in the opinions regarding the ease of providing tailored feedback, knowing versus not knowing 'how the receiver will perceive' the feedback provided (Table 1).

The majority believed they needed to consider how the person will perceive the feedback for providing honest tailored feedback. Providing feedback was easier if they knew how the person would perceive the feedback. Similarly, some shared that not knowing how the receiver will perceive the feedback makes it difficult to provide feedback because of fear of being judged, hurting other's feelings, demotivating them affecting mental health. On the

other hand, some were of the view that even if they know the person it is difficult due to fear of spoiling the relationship. These variations are indicated by the quotes in Table 1.

Table 1: Providing tailored peer feedback (PFB) is affected by providers' awareness about the receiver's perception towards (PFB) provided

Knowing Vs not knowing the receiver's perception towards PFB provided	Quotes
Knowing 'how the receiver will perceive the feedback provided' makes providing PFD easy	<i>"But knowing my group members, my teammates, I had this feeling that they would take it in a positive way and light-heartedly. So, that's what encouraged me to give an honest feedback. (Participant 2 b)</i> <i>"So I know how they are, so it is like, it is kind of easy for me to predict them but if it is entirely someone new, it is hard for me." (Participant 2 a)</i>
Not knowing 'how the receiver will perceive the feedback provided' makes providing PFD difficult	<i>"For me, I find giving feedback hard in a very big group of people or with someone who is new to me, so it's very hard for me to give any feedback since I'm afraid of being judged and kind of things." (Participant 2a)</i> <i>"When I was asked to give feedback, initially I was very nervous. Because due to past experiences, there have been people who have not accepted feedback in an appropriate way." (Participant 2b)</i> <i>"So you might end up hurting someone, you might end up demotivating them, maybe they'll feel like, so what, even if I put in so much effort, I still got some problem with it, next time I'll just copy-paste from somewhere, next time I'll just read from the slides. So maybe people might end up thinking like that." (Participant 4b)</i>
Knowing or not knowing 'how the receiver will perceive' does not make any difference	<i>"Even if it's my own friend, because everyone has different moods in a day, what if today they are not in a good mood, I go and pass on something, finish, feel that our friendship is over, like that. So I feel like that would be difficult." (Participant 4b)</i> <i>"One of my experience is when I gave a feedback to my peer or so-called friend, so it has been backfired where they are not ready to accept their own mistake and they try to budge in and try to turn around and</i>

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	<i>try to criticize me for my mistake. So it's been like a backfire thing, so I feel like giving feedback to certain people it's like kind of hard and it also affects the one's mental health.” (Participant 2a)</i> <i>“Regardless of I know or I don't know, the emotions I would feel is sad in terms of conveying anything wrong. Worried that they may take it wrongly. But in the end, I would feel like I would try my best to make sure they appreciate what is being conveyed without any bias.” (Participant 3b)</i>
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b. Receiving feedback

The majority feel that the success of peer feedback depends on how it is received or perceived by the receiver of the feedback, as indicated by the following quotes-

“I think it is entirely based on the individual's presence of mind to accept any criticism or they would like to get offended. So I would say that it is entirely based on presence of mind and maturity.” (Participant 2a)

“....it can go in a negative way and it can be positive way depending on each individual's state of mind, so if they are open to suggestions then they are okay with the feedback.” (Participant 4b)

“I agree with what my colleagues have said, it all comes back to how the person takes it.” (Participant 2b)

Students believed the ‘tailored’ peer feedback received is accepted as their peers know and understand them and share a bond as indicated by the following quotes-

44 *“... we have a bond that we share so that we would not easily get offended even if we*
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46 *get a negative criticism and it also like, it is like a, it fosters a collaborative learning*
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48 *with this Peer Feedback.” (Participant 4 a)*

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50 *“The feedback that I get from my friends, they know how to sit and talk to me because*
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52 *they understand me, they know how to communicate with me, they know what to say*
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54 *so that I'll listen to them.” (Participant 1a)*

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56 *“Peer feedback will be more easier to understand than other, compared to other*
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58 *feedback as the peer can say in a way that the receiver understands.” (Participant 5a)*

2. Knowledge and Experience

a. Providing feedback

The majority believed they lack experience and knowledge in providing feedback, leading to inconsistency of the quality, subjectivity and bias in feedback. Students feel they are not in a position to pass comments on others as they are no better and at the same level of the course as indicated by the following quotes-

“... we may lack the experience or skills to give constructive feedback, making it difficult for them to identify issues effectively or suggest any actionable solution.”

(Participant 3b)

“... I have limited experience, I am not sure I can give sufficient knowledge, sufficient feedback, inconsistent standards, may be some defects, I understand it....”

(Participant 5b)

“They are our friends, so there might be bias, biasness in that relationship between your peers.” (Participant 4a)

b. Receiving feedback

Some students were of the view that the peer feedback received is inconsistent, difficult to interpret and not accepted as indicated by the following quotes-

“The quality of feedback is varying, so it is difficult to interpret... whether the presentation was good or 50-50 or whether they have to improve or whether they have to maintain the quality.” (Participant 4a)

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“... some of them cannot accept my opinion, bias and subjectivity, lack of clarity as I told you, some people are very emotionally sensitive.” (Participant 5b)

Some of them believed feedback is better accepted if provided by an experienced person, or faculty indicated by the following quotes-

“It's easier to accept from the faculty members other than peers.” (Participant 3a)

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"And coming from a professional, ... they would accept it honestly... but if it was given by ..a person who is similar level to them, it may look to them as biasness, it may look to them as a shamefulness...." (Participant 3b)

3. Individual perception and Culture

a. Providing feedback

There were varied 'individual perceptions' about providing peer feedback. Some students believe that peer feedback is provided sometimes just for the sake of it or because they are forced to do so.

"So, they will just pick up a few points here and there. And in the name of forcing themselves to give feedback, they give a random feedback. And they are not really serious about the comments they are passing towards their colleagues."

(Participant 7b)

"I don't usually give feedback because I like to just stay away, but people ask me, so because of their asking, I just give them." (Participant 3a)

"Because I'm not the kind of person where I would openly walk up and say, Oh, you could have done that at least.... Some people accept criticism, some people don't accept criticism....." (Participant 4b)

Some were of the opinion that it's not in their culture to provide criticism. The culture is to sugarcoat things, i.e. to provide only good comments hindering the real purpose of feedback.

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“I hope it will be practiced in our country. So, it will create a better community in our country, where we learn to give feedbacks in a good way, not, you know, like a sugarcoat anyways and then, like, tell everything good, good and all. So, people also will have the, what, immunity to accept the criticism”. (Participant 7b)

“So, I think the Malaysians, we as a Malaysian, instead of focusing on student, we focus on Malaysian, because Malaysian love to sugarcoat things. So, we have to, like, you know, as a name of a future generation, we have to, like, encourage this kind of

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habits among the students, so they can become a better community in the future. Yeah,
that's my view.” (Participant 7b)

Whereas some believed real friends provide honest feedback to improve their friends as indicated by the quotes-

“.... But towards my friends, I'll try to tell in general so that I can improve them.

Because I know them, so they won't hate me.” (Participant 6b)

I believe, a true friend will always be there for them, until the end, because a fake friend, would never want to, have intentions to improve someone, ... but a true friend, ...would actually correct someone's mistake.” (Participant 3b)

b. Receiving feedback

The majority feel that the perception of the individual receiving feedback may vary, depending on the personality and individual characteristics and the response varying from getting offended, defensive or improving their performance as indicated by the quotes in Table 2.

Table 2: Individual perception of receiving peer feedback

Individual perception and response	Quotes
Offended Some students may perceive peer feedback negatively and get offended	“And some students might take it personally and they get offended and they might have some conflicts with their other colleagues.” (Participant 7b) “I would feel like I am afraid that if I give to someone, they will take it wrongly or if someone is giving me, I might take it wrongly or I might feel hurt” (Participant 1b)
Defensive Some students depending on individual characteristics	“Some people will have ego things. So it will affect their ego and they will not be ready to accept your feedback from each other because all are same level. For example, this is year 4 level. So

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	<i>thoughts, so when you give a feedback, they won't be able to accept it, so that's what I find very hard.” (Participant 1a)</i>
<i>Improvement in performance</i> Some students may improve after peer feedback	<i>“I mean my peers, they give me feedback after my presentation and they include like in what way I can improve myself, so after getting this feedback, I think I changed. I now started to first read the articles, first read the information and then put it in a slide and study before presenting and that's what happened in my life. (Participant 4a)</i> <i>“And this, in personal experience, this feedback session has helped me, our group a lot. Where we have moved on from making a wordy slides to the point form slides.” (Participant 7b)</i>

Some of them believed based on their culture, feedback is better accepted if provided by a senior or elder as indicated by the following quotes-

“It's just someone you look up to advising you, someone older and all this, I think it's in our culture to just accept it, you are more open-minded, it's like our parents say something else, we accept it.” (Participant 4b)

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34 *“Advice from someone with authority will be easier to accept than peer feedback*
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36 *because like what they said, you have more respect towards them and they are more*
37 *knowledgeable.” (Participant 5a)*
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39 **Suggestions by the participants**

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42 When asked how to make peer feedback better, the participants gave various suggestions
43 based on their experiences and choices such as to include feedback training and practice in
44 curriculum, use anonymous forms, links etc as indicated by the quotes depicted in Table 3.
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Table 3: Suggestions to improve peer feedback by the participants

Suggestions	Quotes
1. To include feedback training in curriculum early to foster respectful communication and critical thinking by creating awareness about the importance of feedback, expectations, conduct, and emphasizing the shared goals between the provider and receiver of the feedback.	"I would suggest that we should start from small like when we enter to study we should implement a subject about it and put a professional who can teach the people.... about what actually feedback is and how to accept it from start." (Participant 3a)
	"You should have mutual respect before you give feedback. If they have mutual respect, it's fine. But in this situation, we travel for a long time." (Participant 3a)
	"If our peers have mutual understanding, like self-respect or mutual respect or an open-minded person, they might get easier to accept the feedback from the peers. It depends on the people." (Participant 3a)
	"They have to understand why they are giving feedback. they have to understand the fact that it is to improve the other people's skill and other people's growth that's why we are giving feedback and this main thing is very important to implement in the future in everyone's life." (Participant 4a)
	"If someone critiques them, ...they should, accept it, not, try to fight against it" (Participant 5b)
	"For the inconsistent quality, if we are very unsure about the feedback, maybe we can get feedback from qualified persons or we can leave a feedback template which includes the strengths, area of improvement, area of enhancement and so on so that we can identify what are the strengths and what are the things that we have to improve." (Participant 4a)
2. To have regular sessions to normalise the practice	"Both the one that is giving and the receiving one should be they should have the same goal in mind that is to improve so that will make the that is the main aim of feedback so both of them should have the same goal and work towards that goal feedback." (Participant 5a)
	"I think, it should be had, more often, because, when you have it only like, 3 months once, 4 months once, even if today, I'm talking so much, the next time, I have a feedback session, I might go back to, point zero again." (Participant 4b)
	"How, accept it, doing the feedback session, more and more, so, if, the feedback session, is like, become a routine already, so, it will be like, everyone will be like, it's a part of a, lifestyle, it's like that, I think, how to make feedback easy is that you should focus on the specifics" (Participant 5b)
	"When you doing it regularly, as my colleagues say, regularly, they, it's automated in their daily lifestyle to give the feedback. So, these have been practiced in other countries." (Participant 7b)
3. To involve experienced faculty	"I think that should be done more often because that was very helpful. If the students who are giving feedback are being honest, then it would help our work as well. So the more often this is done, we will get more used to it. So I think that is one of the way." (Participant 1a)
	"Feedback can come from, a professional person, instead of, beginning with students itself, because I feel like, when your peer judges you, it gets more, I think it hits more, compared to someone, who is in a better position than you" (Participant 4b)
	"There is a knowledge difference between lecturers and peers that differs the feedback." (Participant 4a)
4. To use appropriate tone and body language	"I feel like the person who is conducting the feedback session should produce an environment which is conducive and comfortable for both of them to give and receive the feedback so that they won't feel anxious or offensive " (Participant 2a)
	"...The way the person giving feedback is speaking, the tone, the body language, I think all that matters for the person opposite to be able to receive it in a good manner." (Participant 1a)
5. To ask for consent and choose appropriate words	"I just want to add on that the person who is giving feedback shouldn't be very bossy you don't even know this, I think that's not how you should be commenting on someone no matter how much you know, no matter how much knowledge you have be down to earth when you are explaining something to someone." (Participant 1a)
	"I feel like we have to ask whether one is ready to accept the feedback before giving any feedback. It would be very simple things like are you ready? Can I comment on any of your contents and start up with that? And before giving any feedback, I think the one who is giving feedback has to think first how to put it into words which does not sound offensive without destroying one's confidence because one

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	people's words it carries very much weightage where it can destroy another person's confidence so we have to be very careful with our words because it might give the other person a lifelong trauma in performing in future things of and yeah." (Participant 2a)
	"It's important to give feedback but also respect a person's opinion and the person's their state of mind. Some people maybe currently right after presenting they are not open to having negative feedback yet because they just maybe they worked hard on preparing something and all this so maybe we can word things a bit better, a bit more careful with our reactions to this." (Participant 4a)
6. To make feedback two-way interaction	"I think peer feedback should be two way interaction when you are giving feedback I think the person who is giving feedback is also must also be ready to get the clarification from the person you are giving feedback to, so I think it's very important for a two way interaction during a peer's feedback." (Participant 4a)
	"You should choose the right moment for feedback, providing feedback soon after an event, so it can help ensure that the feedback is relevant and clear, while allowing time to reflect on emotions if the situation was sensitive." (Participant 6b)
7. Feedback should be anonymous for mental health	"I feel like you can improve the feedback session by making it anonymous, by doing it in a Google form or giving a paper to anyone, people randomly, and make them write it in a paper and give it to the person who is going to receive the feedback. So in that manner, they wouldn't know who is writing the feedback and they won't be feeling offended or hurt by the people who they have enmity or any misunderstandings before. So being anonymous is a good choice, I think, in improving the feedback session." (Participant 2a)
	"Giving feedback sometimes may be hard if you do it on the spot and face-to-face, so maybe an anonymous feedback can help sometimes in difficult situations. " (Participant 5a)
	"If we were to launch an anonymous platform, there should be people in charge to filter, if there are names involved, we do not display their feedback." (Participant 2b)
8. To use IT	"We can, instead of we can use the old traditional method, we can use the IT help. Like, you know, we create a QR codes or links and all." (Participant 7b)
	"So, my opinion is, after each and every student's presentation, we can keep a QR code or link at the end of the presentation, where a short session, everyone can give their feedback in an anonymous way and they can improvise from that, because they have a recorded data in their phone, where they can refer to it and then they can, like, improvise in their future presentations." (Participant 7b)
9. To provide specific, actionable feedback	"You should provide clear, specific feedback rather than a general comment. Instead of saying good job, say your report was thorough and well-researched. This makes feedback more actionable and easier to understand. And you should be mindful of the timing. "(Participant 6b)
	"I really prefer it to be short and stay to the point, instead of always asking strongly, agree, agree, disagree, you know, because, I mean, it's the point form, the point to it. they will be honest, and keeping it short, like, sweet, it will be more honestly, and also, what they are doing, and the emotions of that moment will be there." (Participant 3b)
10. To encourage the habit of feedback in the culture	"So, we have to, like, you know, as a name of a future generation, we have to, like, encourage this kind of habits among the students, so they can become a better community in the future. " (Participant 7b)

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Discussion

This research sought to investigate students' perceptions of peer feedback, and the challenges that their experience brought forth. The participants feel peer feedback is beneficial and promotes collaborative learning. They described various challenges in providing peer feedback which are affected by the receiver's perception of peer feedback. The themes identified were: 1. tailored feedback, 2. knowledge and experience, and 3. individual perception and cultural acceptability, towards providing and receiving peer feedback.

Considering the multidimensional nature of collaborative learning, different interdependent processes may have influenced these students' experiences of peer feedback such as accountability, interpersonal communications and teamwork (4). The participants' perception of peer feedback benefits, enhancing collaborative learning is similar to the study done locally by Xie *et al.* (19) with higher education undergraduate university students where they found peer feedback enhances collaborative learning by fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility and abroad by Lerchenfeldt *et al.* (3) with medical students concluding peer feedback may aid in development of professional behaviour (19,20).

Tailored feedback

The students' fear of hurting the receiver because of the receiver's negative perception towards the peer feedback provided and spoiling relationship may be due to the Malaysian culture where relationship is vital, extending beyond classroom and communication is implicit and indirect (21).

In addition, the culture (21) where relationship is respected may be the reason some students accepting the feedback received from friends and improving.

The study in the Malaysian context by Husin and Ariffin (22) in line with previous studies on Asian students, found that Malay students are reluctant to give comments on their peers' work because of not wanting to hurt people's feelings (22). Similarly, Vasu *et al.* (23) reported that Malaysian

cultural
36 background is more inclined towards establishing harmony among one another than to criticize
each
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38 other's work (23).
39 Understanding students' culture background is vital as pointed out by Seo and Koro-Ljungberg
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(24) to
41 optimise the main goal of higher education that is quality education (21).
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43 However, similar fears about relationship and social discomfort among medical students while
44 providing peer feedback have been reported in Western studies as well (5,6,8). Learning in
western
45
46 culture is student centered where relationships are limited to class rooms and communication is
47 explicit (21). Therefore, this fear and reluctance in providing peer feedback may also be attributed
to
48 impostor syndrome which is universal (25–27). Impostor syndrome (IS) is manifested in the fear
of
49 failing and being exposed as incompetent, despite exceptional professional performance. IS may
be
50
51 the reason the participants felt incompetent to provide peer feedback which merged into the next
52 theme.
53
54 **Knowledge and experience of the provider**
55
56 The participants felt that they are 'no better than' and not in a position to provide peer feedback as
57 they are in the same course at the same level. This may be due to the IS contributing to this
58 perception. Secondly, it may be due to the limited understanding about peer feedback that it is
about
59 sharing the provider's personal experience of receiver's actions and behaviour. However, Xie *et al.*

(19) study in Malaysian higher education showed that most students lacked experience in providing

feedback, and found it challenging to offer constructive opinions (19).

Similarly peer feedback was found to be overly positive and lacking constructive criticism failing to

offer insufficient guidance on what should be improved (28). Another study by Burgess and Mellis

(29) reported that students perceived the feedback given by their peer co-examiner to be less constructive, less accurate and less helpful than the feedback given by the academic co-examiner (29).

Hence, the need to educate the medical students on peer feedback and the various ways have been proposed and published (1,6).

The literature-based guide by Lerchenfeldt and Taylor (1), to aid peer feedback concluded that peer

feedback is useful as formative assessment to facilitate student learning in a ‘nonpunitive environment’. However, the current study results showed that the participants felt “judged”

contrary
due to
to the “nonpunitive environment” referred to in the Lerchenfeldt and Taylor (1) study. It may be
the Asian culture (21) of not being open, preferring implicit, indirect communication, to sugarcoat
things, i.e. to provide only good comments.

Therefore, the onus lies on the facilitators to create a conducive learning environment which

provides
psychological safety and is inclusive, where the learners do not feel judged based on their

feedback
comments. Psychological safety is defined as individuals' perceptions that they can speak out in

the
learning or working context without consequences for their professional standing or risks to their
status (30).

Individual perception and Culture

29
30 The finding that peer feedback is not welcomed and done because forced to is similar to the
finding of
31 the study by Bader *et al.* (28) that peer feedback was valued less favourably, suggesting that the
role
32 of peer feedback in higher education may need to be reconceptualised to recognise its strengths
and
33 acknowledge its limits.

34
35 The students preferring faculty feedback to peer feedback may be due to the Asia culture of
following
36
37 high power distance (HPD) which is a cultural value that describes how much people accept and
38 expect unequal power distribution. In HPD cultures, people tend to defer to those with more
power
39 and follow strict rules and hierarchies (21).

40
41 Similarly, the study by Vasu *et al.* concluded that peer feedback is least preferred among teacher
42 feedback and self- assessment (23) in Malaysian higher education context.

43
44 Comparably, a Norway study also showed students preferring teacher feedback to peer feedback
45 (28).

46 Thus ‘country- culture’ may not be the only reason to prefer faculty feedback. It may be due to the
47 availability of professional feedback, which is an obvious better choice. It may be argued that the
48 culture apt for encouraging peer feedback in any context may be referred to as the ‘classroom
49 culture’
50 or the appropriate psychologically safe conducive learning environment.

51
52 Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to emphasize the uniqueness of the peer feedback to
keep it
53 relevant in the context of collaborative learning (19) Xie *et al.* reported that peer feedback
54 encouraged a growth mindset, appreciating different perspectives, fostering a willingness to adapt
and
55 improve based on constructive input.

Suggestions by the students

The suggestions provided by the students point to the fact that the participants understand the importance of peer feedback in collaborative learning and are willing to optimize its application in the local context and are similar to the Malaysian literature evidence, like peer feedback training enhances feedback providers' ability to provide more precise and accurate feedback (19) , use of technology (31) and Malaysian culture preferring written feedback (32).

Strengths and Limitations

Being qualitative research, this investigates the 'how' and 'why' (33) of the challenges of providing the peer feedback in the study population through focus group discussion (FGD) drawing from the participants' personal experiences, beliefs, and perceptions (13) making it unique.

The researcher's *positionality* of power, being the participants' lecturer would have impacted the recruitment and data quality. To minimize intimidation, recruitment and data collection was done after the official anesthesia posting ended. In addition, focused group discussions made the participants feel comfortable with their peers' participation (13) and reduced the imbalance of power as compared to one-to-one interviews.

Recommendations

To enhance the quality of constructive feedback provided to team members, a core competency under 'interpersonal and communication skills' (2) of the national standard for undergraduate medical education in Malaysia (2), a brief guide to peer feedback including the benefits, goals and dos and don'ts should be provided (1,34) at the beginning of the course. By doing so the provider and receiver

will be on the same page with the same goals of peer feedback i.e peer improvement, reducing the impostor syndrome and providing a psychologically safe learning environment. Secondly, the peer feedback should be integrated into different activities to make it a culture. Further research may aim to develop a standardized peer feedback template.

Conclusion

Peer feedback has the potential to enhance collaborative learning in the Malaysian context being in line with the core principle of constructivism where students are expected to be fully engaged in their own learning with the support of their peers (23,30,35), provided it is done in a psychological safe learning environment where the students are not judged for their comments. However, training in providing peer feedback by trained faculty may tackle the challenges of providing peer feedback such as affecting peer relationships, feeling inefficient to provide comments and being judged based on the comments. In addition, the onus lies on the facilitators to create a psychologically safe learning environment to optimize the benefits of peer feedback.

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