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Using student voice to enhance students' engagement in the teaching and learning activities of modules taught in the Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECPs)

By

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Presentation layout

Background and Introduction

Aim and Objectives

Description of the project

Caution and Limitations to interpretation

Results and Discussion

Conclusion and way forward

Background

The Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECPs) at UP has four streams:

ECP structure is 1 + 3 years

Sum of Headcount	2021	2022	2023
Ext BSc (NAS)	526	376	365
BSc: Ext Biological and Agric Sci	297	207	230
BSc: Ext Physical Sciences	152	95	85
BSc: Ext Mathematical Sciences	77	74	50
Ext BCom (EMS)	295	245	290
BCom: Extended programme	295	245	290
Grand Total	821	621	655

Background

While preparing ourselves for the external curriculum review (June 2021); the following were established:

- a. The throughput rates of the Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECPs) at UP were very low for the review period (2014 -2020).
- b. If no improvement can be achieved, the programmes could be phased out. Hence the turnaround strategy plan was developed (15 proposals for turning around the performance of ECPs) and submitted along with our self-evaluation report (SER).

2020: External curriculum review by a panel of experts took place:

- a. 7 commendations and 16 recommendations were received. One of the proposed actions is to implement a culture of reflecting and engaging academic staff on using the readily available student reflection data for improvement.
- b. A 2 year improvement plan was developed in 2021 and implemented from August 2022 (change in management)

Introduction

- A new Mamelodi Students' reflection survey (SRS) was developed in 2020 under guidance of colleagues from the Education Innovation (EI) Directorate.
- SRS contains both qualitative and quantitative components.
- The survey was sent to students who successfully completed their first year of studies and have transitioned to other campuses

The survey was sent out in October 2021 and 2022 and students had to:

- a. give their feedback on factors that influenced their success in their chosen field of study and
 - b. state what could have been done differently to improve their experience before transitioning to other campuses and joining the mainstream groups.
- This presentation is based only on the qualitative part of the survey

AIM

To investigate the extent to which management and academic staff should effectively integrate student voice (feedback) to improve teaching and learning as well as in decision-making processes in the extended curriculum programmes (ECPs).

Objectives

The student reflection survey seeks to:

- a. build on existing initiatives such as curriculum re-alignment and transformation and;
- b. incorporate new strategies to promote social and collaborative learning;
- c. discern possible areas of improvement and necessary adjustment and;
- d. tailor the teaching and learning practices in line with the university's approach to student-centeredness;
- e. establish a framework within which the quality of teaching and learning is subject to regular improvement by incorporating the student voice.

Description of the project

The qualitative part had three questions:

Question 1: What do you think is necessary for you to succeed in your chosen field of study?

Question 2: What could have been done at Mamelodi to improve your experience on Hatfield, Prinshof, or Groenkloof?

Question 3: My First Year at Mamelodi could have been improved if _____ was improved. (2021)

The qualitative data was downloaded, processed, analysed using Python (nltk library and

Caution and Limitations to Interpretation

- The survey was deployed by EI, using students' UP email addresses based on the previous' year list.
- There is a $\pm 15\%$ dropout at the end of year one.
- Some students use their private emails despite our regular reminders to use their UP-student email address.
- Students survey fatigue? Low response rate.
- More than 25% of the second year ECPs students took the survey and less than 10% completed the qualitative part.

We share five randomly selected responses to Q1&2

Results and Discussion (2021 & 2022)

Question 1: What do you think is necessary for you to succeed in your chosen field of study?

31 & 51 respondents respectively

"I think that it is important for me to plan for my assessments accordingly. I work best when I know how to prepare for my assessments and for how long. Getting the help I need in the required time, also goes a long way"

"I think to succeed I need contact time and face-to-face learning opportunities."

"a good foundation of understanding human anatomy. learning to reference according to the vancouver referencing method. having a good set of communication skills."

"Determination, hard work, time management and emotional support"

"Hard work, consistency, practice, exposure through application".

"Informative tutorials and mental health support."

"Spend more time engaging with the content. consult more with tutors and lectures. Make sure I understand the content and practice more problems".

"Clear guidelines what is needed to transition from Extended to Hatfield and course to follow (module selection, credit etc.)"

"Gradual increase in difficulty so as to learn about coping with hard work and stress. General knowledge of biology"

"Stability in the teaching environment. Sudden changes from online to in person as well as the change in assessment in the same way throws me completely off with my momentum regarding my studies or more accurately the manner of application."

Results and Discussion (2021 & 2022)

Question 1: What do you think is necessary for you to succeed in your chosen field of study?

Longest & shortest responses/ year

"I think that it is important for me to plan for my assessments accordingly. I work best when I know how to prepare for my assessments and for how long. Getting the help I need in the required time, also goes a long way." (44 words)

"From the lecturer's side, nothing really. I can confidently say that my lecturers are present in making sure that they can help students with whatever they need help with. At the end of the day, it is up to us, the students, to make sure we are asking for help and utilizing all the available resources. We can't expect lecturers to run after us when we need help, reaching out should be the first step. On my side, I need to make sure that I'm always up to date with the content, manage my time wisely and reach out to my lecturers when I need help. I only started taking these steps seriously this semester, and I can say for sure that my marks have improved. I hope to continue with these steps, and do more, next year" (138 words)

The shortest response: "Commitment".

The shortest response: "Hard work"

Results and Discussion (2021 & 2022)

What could have been done at Mamelodi to improve your experience on Hatfield, Prinshof or Groenkloof?

31 & 51 respondents respectively

"Given enough time for due dates"

"Stayed up to date with all the work."

"Study environment, having a proper/ good studying environment and network, having access to a laptop earlier."

"Some of the lecturers could have been chosen better to ensure that we can cope on hatfield or that we can succeed. Some of the lecturers should not have been teaching students at all. To improve the experience, they must make sure lecturers can teach and that they behave professionally."

"Finishing classes earlier around 14:00 or 15:00 and having time to do independent studying in the afternoon. Had weekly class based tests in PHY 133/144. Had revision sessions before tests and exams for WTW 144. Made past papers and additional resources available close to tests and exams."

"Being told that you need to be consistent"

"At Mamelodi, the academic workshops could have taught us effective ways to prepare for lectures and make summaries instead of making a suggestion"

"Nothing. Mamelodi was the best, lecturers were coming everyday, if they were absent, they made arrangements for lectures and tutorials"

"Time management, study method, set goals, adopt and stick to a study schedule, healthy study techniques for proper exam preparation, and develop note-taking skills".

"Pace at which work and assessments are given out is much faster and deadlines are more intense, for example have 3 tests on one day, than in Mamelodi, if it was at a similar pace I could have been able to adjust sooner to Hatfield campus processes"

Results and Discussion (2021 & 2022)

Question 2: What could have been done at Mamelodi to improve your experience on Hatfield, Prinshof or Groenkloof? Longest & shortest responses/ year

The staff were extremely supportive .they helped me transition smoothly into the Hatfield campus even if majority of our studies were online. I think a lot of students in Mamelodi struggle to relate to the university because we don't have activities showcased or an orientation that is similar to other campuses making us feel really left out but other than that i think Mamelodi was a great kickstart that has greatly improved my understanding on content and coping with workload. (80 words)

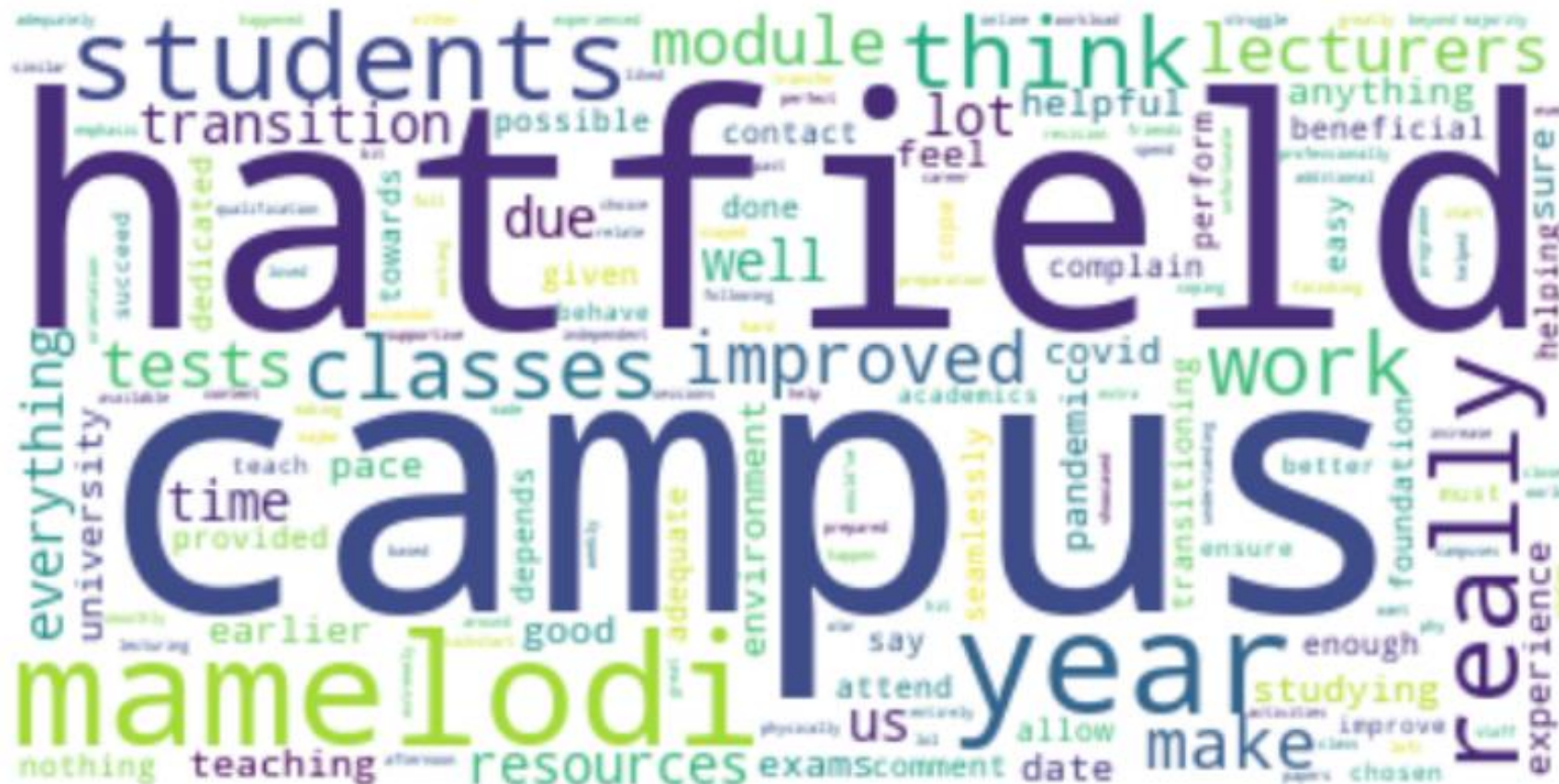
The finance office at mamelodi and hatfield is somehow not helping students. If we don't receive our allowance late, sometimes we don't get it at all. They don't even respond to emails when we try to enquire about this. With the modules, STK should prepare students for practicals. There should be practice practicals that will prepare students on what to expect in the practicals class. As students we come from different backgrounds and schools. Some of us didn't have the privilege of having computers in our schools, so I suggest tutorial sessions for AIM students that will help with the practical components of the module because sometimes what we are being taught in class is not enough to help students I think Mamelodi is the easiest campus to navigate and some students don't know how hard it is to be at hatfield campus as it is big and you might not attend classes on the first or even second week. SRC should not only be available to students when it is time to vote but they should also do monthly check ins on mamelodi campus. (185 words)

The shortest response: "No comment".

The shortest response: "nothing"

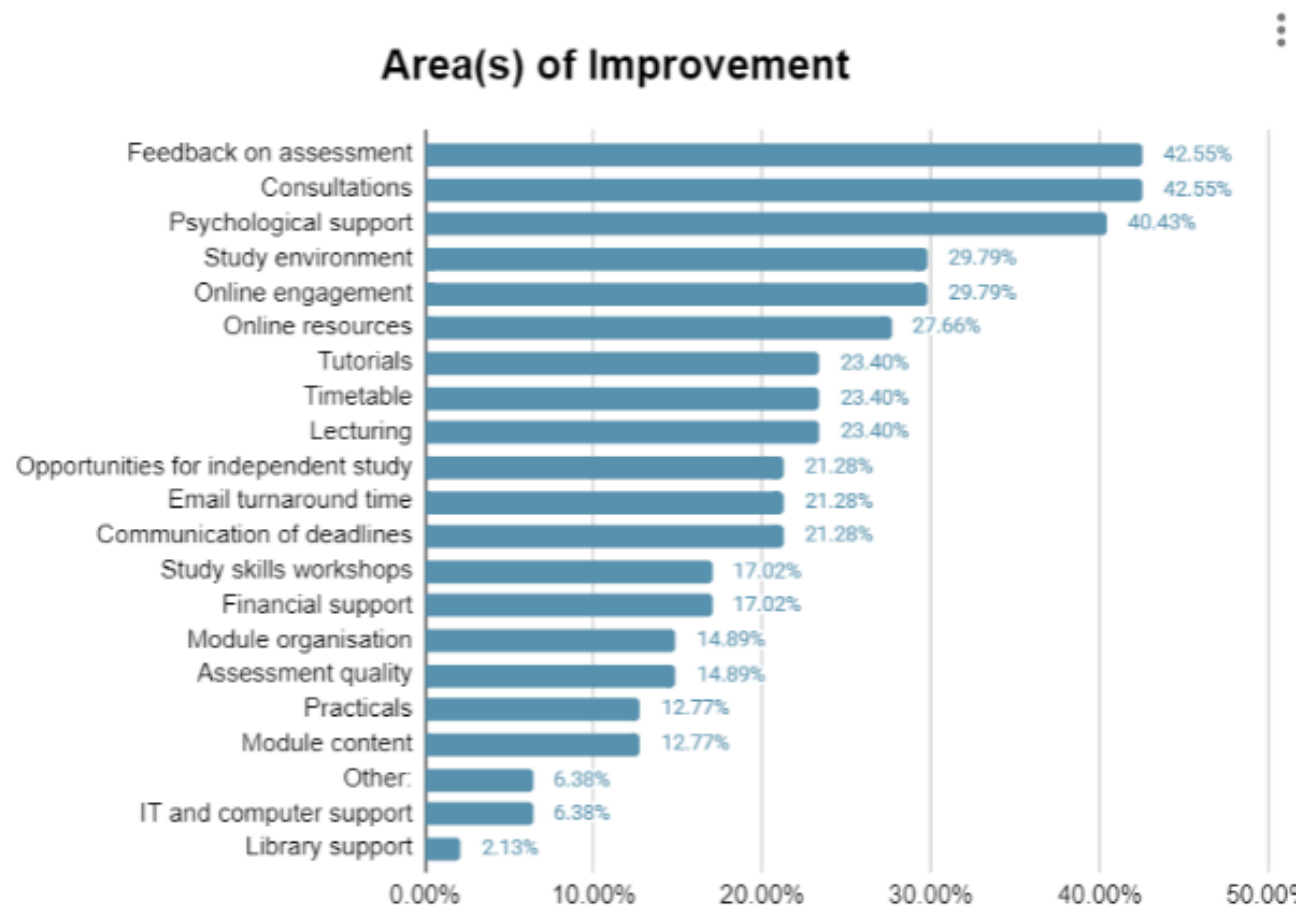
Word Cloud of Words Frequently Used in 2022 Reponses

What could have been done at Mamelodi to improve your experience on Hatfield. Prinshof or Groenkloof?



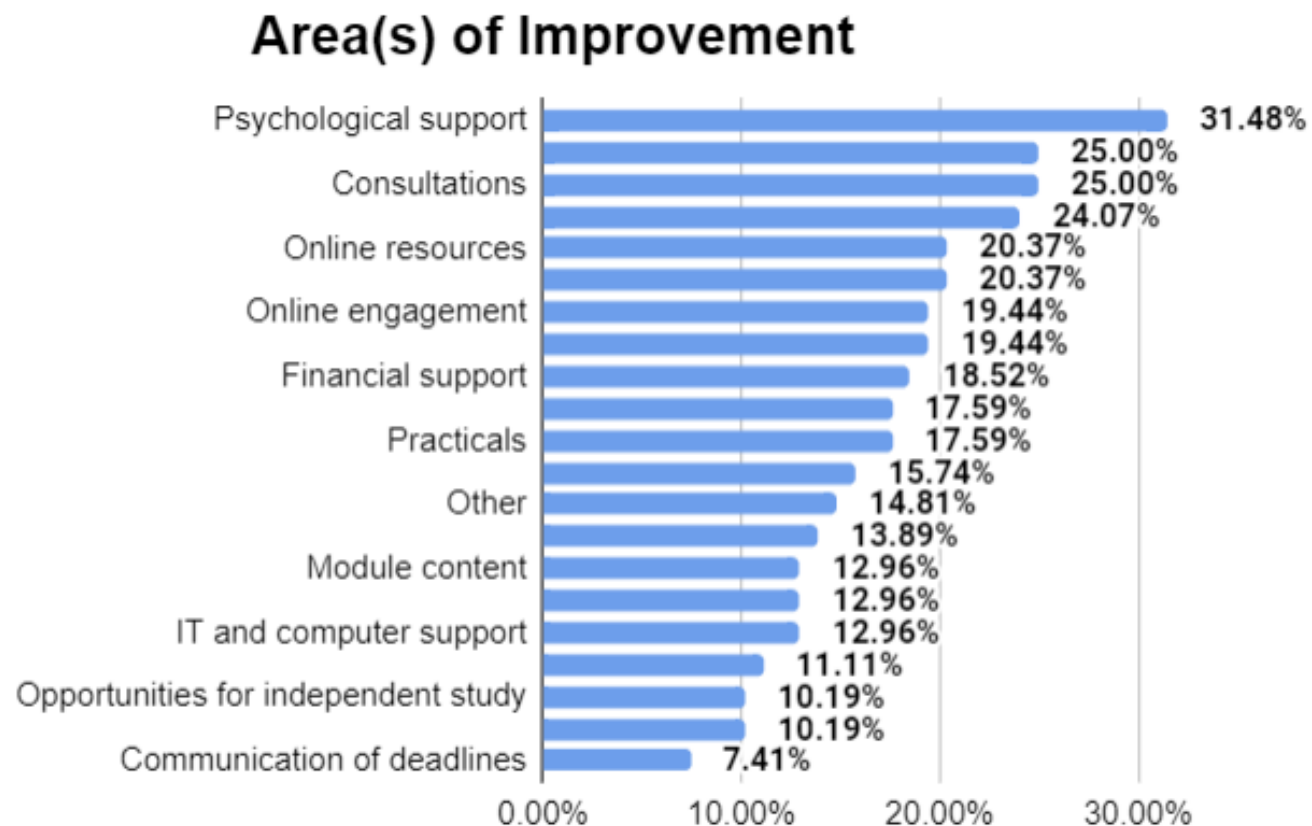
The frequently used words in the responses were: Hatfield, Campus, mamelodi, year, students, work, think, really, classes, improved.

My First Year at Mamelodi could have been improved if _____ was improved. (2021)



Feedback on assessment, consultations, psychological support, study environment and online engagement were ranked top 5 areas to be improved on Mamelodi Campus

My First Year at Mamelodi could have been improved if _____ was improved. (2022)



Feedback on assessment, psychological support, consultations, online resources, online engagement, and financial support were ranked top 5 areas to be improved on Mamelodi Campus

Insights & Learnings

What do you think is necessary for you to succeed in your chosen field of study?

- Less than 10% of students responded to this question. They were not very expressive.
- The overall sentiment proved to be largely positive.
- Students found that the dedication, hard work, planning, preparing for assessment, doing more questions/sample problems and attending all classes could have improved their experience after transitioning to the other campuses.
- Students also highlighted that time management, working consistently on every module daily is crucial for financial sciences.
- Students also need clear guidelines for their transition from Mamelodi to Hatfield and course to follow (module selection, credits...)
- The top words used in the responses being time, work, hard and management

What could have been done at Mamelodi to improve your experience on Hatfield, Prinshof or Groenkloof?

- Students were expressive in their responses
- The overall sentiment was positive
- Students believed that their foundation work was improved in Mamelodi, adequate resources were provided, and everything was generally perfect due to the staff being extremely supportive.
- However, some students also believe they felt left out due to not having similar activities to the main campus, especially during orientation and some expressing some discontent with the lecturers they had.
- And students believe that we should adjust the Pace at which works and assessments are given on Mamelodi campus to prepare them to adjust to Hatfield's pace.
- The top words used in the responses being Hatfield, Mamelodi, campus, year and students.

Conclusion and way forward

Consultation, psychological support, study environment, online resources and online engagement were the five top common areas (2021 & 2022) for improvement in the first year of studies according to the participants.

Lack of various activities on campus for students' engagement and the discontent with certain lecturers expressed by certain participants call attention to the importance of addressing concerns related to inclusivity and ensuring a positive student experience.

Future efforts will be directed towards enhancing the sense of belonging and engagement for students on Mamelodi campus, while also addressing any issues raised regarding specific modules and or a particular academic staff member.

The efficacy of the interventions will be reinforced through continuous reflection, engagement and improvement discerned from the feedback from students around possible areas of improvement and necessary adjustment.

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