

From Student Voices to Praxis: Contextualising the Role of Lecturer Evaluations in Transformative Curriculum Practice

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of students' feedback from lecturer evaluations on curriculum transformation in higher education. Incorporating student voices into curriculum development fosters a more student-centred approach, enhancing engagement and learning outcomes. The aim of this research is to examine how feedback obtained from lecturer evaluations can be used as a tool to promote curriculum changes that respond to student needs and perspectives. Grounded in the frameworks of social realism and critical pedagogy, the study highlights the importance of aligning curriculum with students' lived experiences and involving them as active participants in shaping their education. Social realism emphasises the significance of recognising diverse student contexts, while critical pedagogy advocates for a participatory approach, where student feedback directly influences educational practices. This research was conducted using a mixed-method approach, with data collected from 33 pre-service EMS teachers over two phases: observations and discussions in the first semester, followed by structured lecturer evaluations in the second semester. Thematic analysis revealed key insights, including a strong student preference for interactive and practical learning experiences, as well as the need for a more learner-centred curriculum that enhances critical thinking and engagement. The study concludes that lecturer evaluations, when utilised effectively, are powerful tools for continuous curriculum improvement. Recommendations include developing structured mechanisms in higher education for collecting and implementing student feedback to ensure curriculum responsiveness and foster an inclusive, adaptive learning environment that better serves the needs of students.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers; lecturer evaluations; curriculum practice; student-centred learning; higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum design is important for teaching and learning of students in higher education therefore, integrating the voices of students into the curriculum design process has become a focal point in higher education discourse. Khohliso and Mqgqwashu (2024) assert this integration reflects a shift toward more inclusive, student-centred learning environments. Firstly, student voices through regular lecturer evaluations enable students to influence curriculum practice and improvements, as Weisi and Ahmadi (2024). Secondly, Nkonki-Mandleni (2024) argues that higher education institutions rely on student feedback to investigate the effectiveness of curriculum delivery to provide learning experiences and delivery mechanisms befitting the achievement of their educational goals. This process highlights the relevance of a more active function of students in the process of defining and enhancing educational content to make it more meaningful for learning (Bérubé & Gendron, 2022).

Therefore, curriculum practice and praxis are also particularly important in relation to the application of lecturer evaluation as tools to support educational transformation in higher education. Curriculum practice, as Mphuthi (2023) explains, involves the iterative processes through which academic content is designed, delivered, and continuously adapted to meet the evolving needs of students. If examined as praxis, the curriculum practice suggests a more reflective approach to education that integrates the theoretical and practical context of learning to transform the educational experience (Kemmis *et al.*, 2020). Praxis, therefore, entails not only the application of theory but also an ongoing dialogue between lecturers and students that fosters critical engagement with the curriculum (Weisi & Ahmadi, 2024). By using lecturer evaluations to integrate student feedback, institutions can create a feedback loop that grounds curriculum adjustments in the lived realities and insights of students (Saryanto *et al.*, 2024). Thus, lecturers' evaluations are turned into useful tool to develop curriculum as praxis. Various studies have been conducted on the topic to investigate the role of lecturer evaluations in transformative curriculum practice highlighting the dynamic role of student feedback in shaping inclusive, responsive educational environments. For

example, Naidoo (2023) retraced the lecturer evaluations' significance in South Africa in narrowing the gap between the students' expectations and the institutional curriculum. Naidoo's study addressed the problem of curriculum misalignment, where traditional teaching methods often fail to resonate with diverse student backgrounds, especially within the South African context. .

Similarly, Nsibande (2020) conducted a study focussing on the limitations of current lecturer evaluation practices in South Africa, arguing that evaluations are often focused more on lecturer performance than on curriculum effectiveness. The study revealed that while these evaluations offer valuable insights into teaching approaches, often the time evaluations overlook how well the curriculum itself meets student needs. Nsibande (2020) in the study, recommends that evaluation criteria should extend beyond measuring the teaching process in order to embrace factors affiliated with curriculum flexibility which is in compatible with praxis.

While the above studies have made valuable contributions to understanding the role of lecturer evaluations in curriculum transformation, several gaps remain. Current literature mainly concentrates on the degree of effectiveness of the lecturer evaluation or the ways in which it may correct curriculum misalignment, without fully combining both aspects into one framework of practice. Additionally, many of these studies fail to capture how such evaluations may support curriculum transformations rooted in critical pedagogy in which students are actively involved in shaping the curriculum. Therefore, this study is unique as it posits that lecturer evaluations become agents of change in curriculum practice as theory is connected to student-focused practice for praxis. The aim of the study is to investigate this the research question: how can student voices as praxis be used to transform curriculum practice in higher education? The introduction section will be followed by the problem statement, the theoretical framework, methodology, design, findings presentation of results, discussions, conclusion and recommendations.

Problem statement

Lecturer evaluations have traditionally served as tools used to investigate the teaching

performance, often prioritising lecturer competency over the broader impact of teaching on student engagement and curriculum relevance. Although universities seem to appreciate the value of feedback from students and embrace various systems to assess such opinions, many systems still focus on assessing the behaviour of lecturers thereby failing to capture the valuable feedback regarding the content, organisation and relevance of the courses offered (Young & Jerome, 2020). As a result, Shah and Pabel (2020) argue that such evaluations often fail to inform curriculum adjustments that could enhance the relevance of the taught content to students' backgrounds and experiences, as well as their expectations, especially when coming from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, a reality in many developing countries including South Africa. This limited approach to lecturer evaluations restricts their potential to act as catalysts for transformative curriculum practices, leaving a gap in the capacity of institutions to foster inclusive, student-centred learning spaces that actively reflect student voices in meaningful ways.

Furthermore, Matthews and Dollinger (2023) pointed out that current evaluation methods do not provide ways to use feedback from students to bring changes within the curriculum and consequently a majority of those evaluations do not affect the learning process of the students. Studies contend that the disconnect of students' feedback from curriculum feedback and alteration is contrary to the principles of critical pedagogy and social realism theories, which advocate for students' active participation as active contributors on the education process (Chase, 2019; Winstone & Boud, 2022; Jones & Hall, 2021). Filling this gap is essential for developing curriculum practices that do not just incorporate feedback as a formal process, but also apply it in reshaping the content, strategies, and goals for teaching and learning. Thus, this research will seek to fill this gap by analysing how lecturer evaluations can be embraced as transformative curriculum resource and as a tool to enhance student voice and educational justice in curriculum practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in social realism, a theory developed by sociologist Basil Bernstein, which emphasises

the critical role of social structures and contextual experiences in shaping educational practices (Moore, 2013). Social realism argues that knowledge is context-bound in terms of knowledge production in social cultural milieu hence calling for understanding of students' diverse backgrounds and worldviews in learning (Vollmer, 2024). This theory questions the normality of curriculum fixity, that is, the idea that there is one that fits all, and posit that education content should be reviewed frequently to align to the student's real life experience. Social realism, therefore, emphasises the need to link students' knowledge in their context with the knowledge being taught in school to produce a curriculum that caters for the society's needs as well as students' experiences. By framing this study within social realism, the research underscores the need for lecturer evaluations to serve as a conduit for student feedback that can foster more relevant and inclusive curriculum practices.

Concurrently with social realism, critical pedagogy, championed by Paulo Freire, underpins this study's approach by advocating for an educational model that treats students as active participants in their learning journey (Bello, 2023). Fundamental to critical pedagogy is praxis, the interplay between practice and reflection to enable the students to participate in essential curriculum making processes (Freire, 1970). Freire's concept of 'dialogue' complements the research goal of repositioning lecturer evaluations to cater for student's feedback reforming the curriculum. This framework is supported by social realism and critical pedagogy meaning that there is a strong framework for how student feedback, which is often gathered through lecturer evaluations, can be used to make significant changes to the curriculum to make educational practice aligned with the norms and cultures of the learners.

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The methodology of a study relates to the general philosophy and the systematic processes involved in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data (Creswell, 2021). This study uses a mixed method approach to collect data and capture the entails of how lecturer evaluations can be beneficial in curriculum transformation, as postulated by Mulisa (2022). As a method that employs both observational

and evaluative feedback, this work aims at identifying how students' voices may be used in curriculum practices. This approach is meaningful because it also enables students to be understood in their views and is in harmony with the educational aim of the study concentrating on students' voices and a more equitable student-centered curriculum.

On the other hand, Babbie (2020) defines research design as a structured framework guiding data collection and analysis. This study employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design across two phases during an academic year to comprehensively assess curriculum effectiveness. Phase one was a qualitative exploration which involved participant observations and structured discussions with 33 preservice teachers, allowing researchers to gather initial insights on curriculum implementation. These discussions provided in-depth qualitative data on participants' experiences and perceptions on content relevance and assessment question. Phase two was more quantitative nature and utilised an online survey administered to the same 33 preservice teachers, ensuring consistency in participant responses. The survey generated quantitative data and qualitative feedback on aspects such as content relevance and assessment preparedness.

Population and Sampling

Khoa *et al.* (2023) opine that population and sampling define the process of choosing individuals who produce data that will represent the larger population. Considering that all participants belonged to the same cohort and voluntarily participated in both phases, a convenience sampling method was adopted (Mack *et al.*, 2021). Such an approach was appropriate since the study concerned the same 33 preservice teachers that were easily accessible and directly participated in the curriculum under study. Moreover, as the same participants provided qualitative and quantitative data, this method increased the coherence as well as decreased the variability of the data (Nimbley *et al.*, 2025). The two-phase design allowed a strong exploration of ways of using lecturer evaluations as a measure of curriculum reform, with socially realistic and critical education aims in mind.

Data collection

Data collection involves gathering information through various techniques to answer research questions (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2023). In this study, data were collected in two phases across two semesters. During Phase 1, observational data were obtained as preservice teachers engaged in a classroom assessment, offering insights into the direct impacts of teaching methods on engagement. This was followed by a discussion session where students provided reflective feedback, allowing for an in-depth understanding of their perceptions regarding the curriculum relevance and assessment. In Phase 2, structured lecturer evaluations were administered through the online survey, focusing on content relevance, study guide preparation, content delivery, and assessment preparation. This comprehensive data collection approach ensures that student voices are captured both qualitatively and quantitatively, supporting the study's objective of developing a student-centred curriculum.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations encompass confidentiality, privacy, and ethical research conduct to safeguard the wellbeing of participants (Mezmir, 2020). Therefore, during this study, confidentiality was observed to the highest level and the rights of all participants to privacy was observed. To remove or disguise identities, data were anonymised, and participants gave their consent freely to participate in the study. The study has undergone ethical clearance with Central University of Technology (CUT) Human Research Ethics Committee with a clearance number CUT/HREC 2024/000331, thus being ethical. Subsequently, this ethical justification is significant since it confirms not only trust from the participants but more importantly its credibility from the research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process of analysing data with the aim of understanding a pattern or a theme among other things (Mezmir, 2020). This research employed a method known as thematic analysis which enables researchers to establish broad themes within observational and/or evaluative data. Thus, by coding and categorising data that was gathered from observations, discussions, and planned evaluations the analysis gives a clear insight

into how certain lectures' evaluations can result in enhancements to the curriculum. Thus, thematic analysis is particularly germane to this study as it is inherently aligned with the study's goal of identifying useful applicable strategies for employing students' feedback for transformative curriculum practices to foster a more inclusive environment. While thematic analysis is not typically used in purely quantitative research, it can complement statistical data in mixed-methods studies by providing deeper contextual insights. This narrative is supported by Braun & Clarke (2006) in their assertion that thematic analysis is flexible and may be relevant to the mixed methods.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This section uses the thematic analysis to present the results from both phase one and phase 2 of the data collected. Phase 1 presents more narratives of the discussions and reports on the observed performance of students. while phase 2 presents both narratives and empirical results based on the survey conducted.

Phase 1

Assessment

The last question of the assessment required high-order critical thinking, requiring students to solve an assessment problem by relating it to the external economic scenario. Basically, the students were required to bring the external economic environment into the economic classroom context. Only a small number of students close to 30% were able to cognitively respond to the question correctly. Displaying a reasonably level of critical thinking.

During the feedback session, one of the researchers asked participants to comment on how they could have improved their ability to respond to the question correctly. And most of the students indicated that they could have understood the question and responded better to the question if the curriculum that they were taught was relatable to the external environment. One of the respondents indicated that they should be given an opportunity to comment and ask questions as this will improve their ability to understand the content better.

Student centered learning approaches

Feedback from students during post-assessment discussions emphasised a strong desire for a

more learner-centred approach in the curriculum. Students reported that a shift towards more interactive, student-focused teaching methods could improve their engagement and comprehension of the material. This suggests that the current curriculum may be overly lecturer-focused, potentially hindering students' ability to connect with and internalise the content.

In addition to a request for a more learner-centred approach, students also expressed a need for greater diversity in the curriculum. Specifically, many students highlighted the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives and voices into the material, as it can promote critical thinking and broaden their understanding of the subject matter. This aligns with research that suggests incorporating diverse viewpoints can enhance overall learning outcomes for students from various cultural backgrounds. As such, it may be beneficial to re-evaluate and diversify the current curriculum to better cater to the needs and perspectives of our diverse student body.

Content relevance

Another common presented problem was the lack of relevance in teaching materials, which students advocated that suitable content could improve the context. This feedback shows just how effective and beneficial it is to incorporate the content students come across in the classroom with their real-life experiences.

Further these results seem to suggest that respondents share the same views as the critical pedagogy which advocates for an educational model that treats students as active participants in their learning journey (Bello,2023). Fundamental to critical pedagogy is praxis, the interplay between practice and reflection to enable the students to participate in essential curriculum making processes.

Phase 2

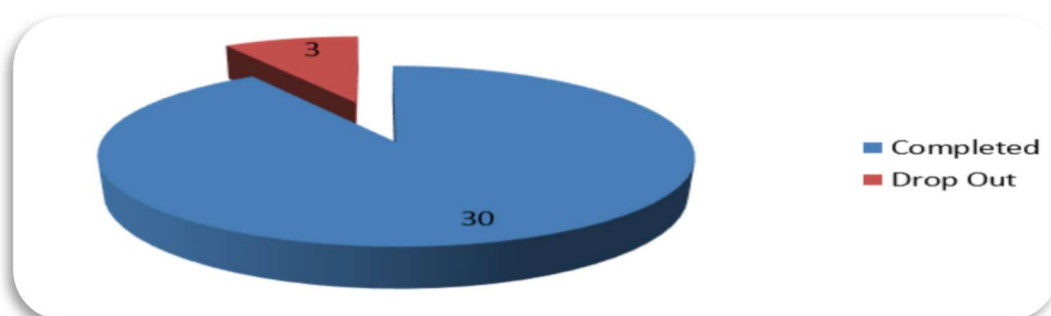
Lecturer evaluations survey

The lecturer evaluations had a total of 33 respondents with 3 of them dropping out halfway through the survey and 30 participants completing the survey. These thematically analysed results indicate that a little over 90% of the participants were able to complete the survey. The survey established that close to 68% of the participants as women while only close to 29% as men. This means that the

outcomes in the analysis hold a powerful potential for women for their voices to be heard as students aspiring to shape the

curriculum. Below in Figure 1 is the graphic display of the respondent's participation in the study.

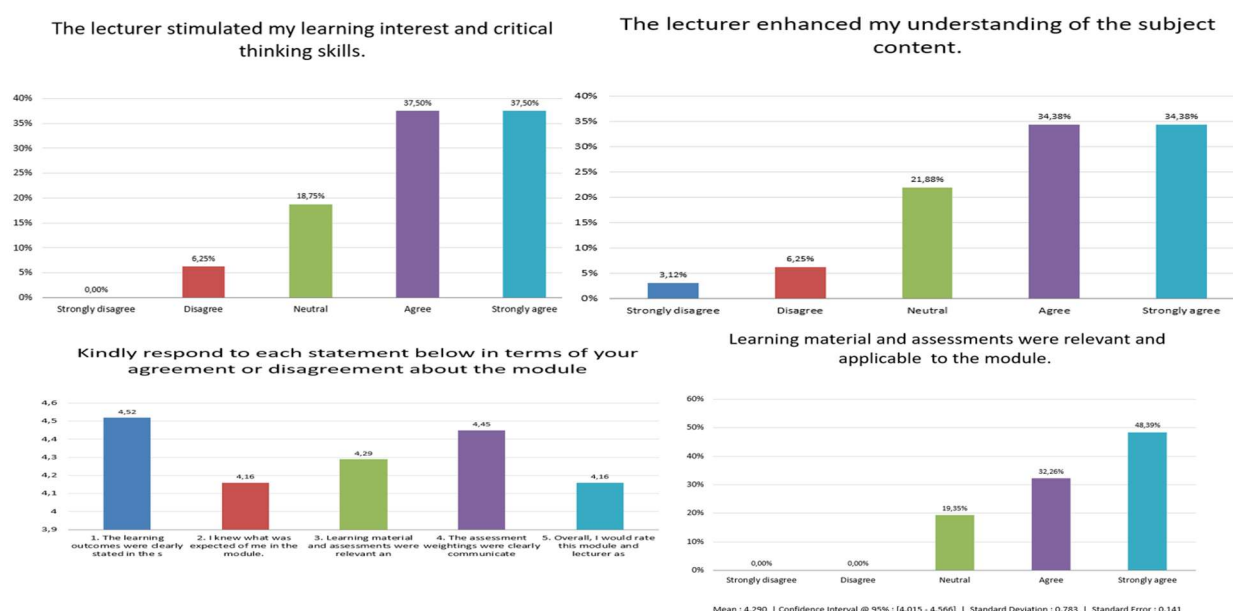
Figure 1. Survey overview (completion /dropout rate)



In this section is the presentation of the statistical depiction of the responses. structured lecturer evaluations were administered through the online survey, focusing on content relevance and its ability to stimulate critical thinking, study guide preparation and its ability to incorporate student centered learning approaches, content delivery focusing on the

relevance and the ability to incorporate relevant external knowledge to the content, and assessment preparation. Figure 2 below shows a combination of graphical responses from respondents.

Figure 2. Graphical data.



Student-centred learning approaches

A better number of respondents reported to have been positively engaged in the learning process if teaching and learning methods were student-centered. Respondents appreciated the lecturer's ability to stimulate interest in the subject. Close to 74% of the students seem to generally agree that the lecturer was able to stimulate their learning interest and enhance their critical thinking skills. This is further supported by Jones and Bubb (2021) in their study that student voices improve schooling. Their findings suggest that there is a positive relationship between student centered approaches and improvement in the cognitive and critical thinking of students.

Furthermore, Students rated the lecturer's content delivery and ability to use practical examples highly. Close to 68% of the respondents seemed to agree the lecturer enhanced their understanding of the content. This was done by linking the content to the outside environment. Students come to class with some level of knowledge, that needs to be scaffolded and made relevant to the classroom content. Ahmadi (2023) suggest that suggests that the ability of the instructor to bring the outside world into the classroom nurtures the curiosity of the students and keeps them interested in the learning.

Content Relevance and assessment Preparedness

Content relevance and assessment preparedness play a critical role in enhancing the effectiveness of learning activities. The respondents affirmed that they were well prepared for assessments and appreciated the organisation of study guide that was availed, whereby 80% noted that the learning materials were relevant to the module. Saryanto et al. (2024) noted that clarity and contextuality contributed to students' achievement by making content easy to comprehend. For similar reasons, Bérubé and Gendron (2022) posit that given the fact that the assessment materials are congruent to the material taught, the students can better understand how to meaningfully approach the content, amping up preparedness and accomplishment levels attained during the assessment. Overall, these conclusions provide coordinated support to the idea that the integration of learning content with the purpose of the assessment is beneficial to construct

student-centered and extensive learning environment.

Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of the study's results align closely with the principles of social realism and critical pedagogy, reinforcing the idea that curriculum should not exist in isolation from students' lived experiences. As identified by Bernstein as cited in Moore (2013) social realism focuses on the relationship between classrooms, curriculum, and learners and calls for curriculum to be developed based on the social and cultural realities of learners. That is why the results of this study, which indicate students' interests are more relevant and students-oriented approach, can be viewed as evidence for this theoretical framework, which states that the higher the match between curriculum content and students' experiences, the higher the chances for curriculum effectiveness. Such a link between theory and practice supports the argument that the content taught needs to be flexible and contextual so that individuals engage with it meaningfully and learn.

In addition, the findings of this study offer practical assistance to Freire's (1970) contentious pedagogy in a way that emphasises the students' responsibility in constructing their curriculum. The need for more creativity in learning confirmed in the students' expressions is the indication of the fruitful potential of critical pedagogy to change the existing paradigm of education, which is based on the paradigm of knowledge transmission and instead create a unique space for knowledge production where students and teachers are equals. This shift has more general implications for educational institutions, which points to a democratisation of curriculum practices. Highlighting the potential of student feedback for bringing essential curriculum improvements, the study reasserts the applicability of critical pedagogy in the contemporary learning environment, particularly the open conversation with students and an active process of curriculum enhancement for student's benefit.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of student feedback revealed several key insights into the current curriculum's effectiveness and areas for

potential improvement. There was quite a conscious interest voiced by students for more active and authentic learning experiences; this underlined the possibility of increasing students' perceptions and engagement through more concrete forms of learning. This is consistent with the provisions of social realism theory that calls for a curriculum that is sensitive to student's experiences and context (Vollmer, 2024). The curriculum could therefore suit the student's needs and promote corresponding engagement and motivation levels for the students if designed with a learner-centred approach (Weisi, & Ahmadi, 2024).

Moreover, the inclusion of students especially their feedback was demonstrated to have a meaningful impact on the performance and quality of the curriculum as well as the learning process (Shah & Pabel, 2020). In line with different studies, using lecturer evaluations to include students' views ensures that feedback is incorporated to maintain a feedback loop that would help in enhancing the curriculum (Young and Jerome (2020). students concern about content relevance, inclusive and participatory approaches and better clarification of assessment needs speak of a responsive learning culture. Hence, this iterative process guarantees that the curriculum stays relevant to the needs of students and thereby contributes to an inclusive atmosphere that fits the kind of learning environment that is expected to grow progressively (Saryanto et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of student feedback in driving meaningful curriculum transformations within higher education. By adopting lecturers' evaluations, institutions are capable of providing a vigorous and efficient curriculum to the needs of students. This study established that students appreciate a student-centred mastery approach, explained interactively, practically, and contextually than the traditional passive methods of teaching since it enables the achievement of better engagement and improved comprehension. The application of social realism and critical pedagogy theories enhances the understanding that students are the audiences in the curricular process and can strategise the learning contexts that reflect their multicultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, and most importantly, the results re-assert that if tapped appropriately, lecturer assessments are strong agents of constant curriculum advancement. If institutions concentrated on student feedback, institutions could establish continuous feedback processes that positively affect adaptability, student engagement, and satisfaction. Besides the improvement of learning outcomes, such sequencing also contributes to the implementation of a student-centred approach stating students' voices as important to shaping the educational process. Finally, the research shows that the use of students' feedback is critical to achieving the reciprocal and transformative model of education. in curriculum improvement and also enables the learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these findings, it is suggested that higher education institutions should establish a better framework of approaching, evaluating, and applying the information gathered from students in a more structured and proper manner. Setting good practices on how students' feedback collected from the lecturers will be utilised and how the curriculum will be modified can be helpful in making sure that the voice of the students is incorporated in the process of learning all the time. These mechanisms should, therefore, specialise in obtaining practical feedback on issues such as content applicability, instructional strategies, as well as assessment materials which are crucial. Duration transformation through innovative curriculum development and implementation that is more student-centred. Additionally, regular training for lecturers on interpreting and applying evaluation data could enhance the practical implementation of student feedback, making the curriculum more responsive.

In addition, institutions should engage in long-term research endeavours to identify innovative ways of addressing voices of students in the evaluation of the curriculum effectiveness. Subsequent research might explore the efficacy of student feedback in curriculum development by observing how the outcomes of feedback over an extended period affect students. Engaging students as contributors and co-researchers of curriculum planning and development teams could take this approach to deeper and more effective levels. In prioritising

these recommendations, higher education institutions would be able to improve upon the responsiveness of curriculum; there will also be an ability to achieve continuous improvement as well as create learning environment, which is more harmonious with the intended quality and dreams of students.

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