

Spring 2020 Mid-Semester Student Feedback
Royal Thimphu College
April-May 2020

1. Overview

Since the first detection of COVID-19 in Bhutan on 6th March 2020, all classes at RTC have been held online. As this was RTC's first experience with fully online remote teaching-learning, the Academic Affairs Department (AAD) conducted the collection of Mid-Semester Feedback in the same formalized manner as the Semester-End Feedback generally done in regular semesters. The objective was to provide the College with an accurate and timely understanding of how students are faring with the online classes held to date, identify practices that are working well, and also identify possible areas for improvement and intervention.

The Mid-Semester Feedback for Spring 2020 was collected on 24th April 2020 (from 4 to 5 pm) using RTC Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This report presents a brief analysis of the feedback collected. From a total of 1,219 students, exactly 1,000 students responded to the survey (the round number was coincidental), making the overall participation rate 82% (79% of full-time regular students and 95% of part-time Continuing Education students). The feedback comprised 3 quantitative/close-ended questions and 7 open-ended qualitative questions (Annexure 1).

2. Survey Findings

2.1. Location of RTC students at the time of participation in the survey

With the exception of Gasa Dzongkhag, RTC students were spread across 19 Dzongkhags at the time of feedback collection. The majority of students (70%) were located in Thimphu and among the western and southern regions of the country at the time of the survey (Annexure 2). Although a few cases are found in more remote places, all were able to connect to the online teaching-learning resources. Specific cases of connectivity issues were followed up on, though these were found to be mostly within Thimphu and not related to rural/remote places.

2.2. Devices used to access VLE

80% of total participants responded that they used computers (laptop/desktop) or a combination of computers and mobile devices to access the VLE (the prime platform used for the delivery of online classes), while 20% stated using only mobile devices (smartphone/tablet) to access the VLE.

2.3. Ratings on overall learning experiences

On a 5-point Likert scale (1 being 'Poor' to 5 being 'Excellent') the mean rating for the College for students' overall online learning experience in the modules students are currently enrolled stands at 3.43; the rating is 3.6 from part-time CE students and 3.37 from regular full-time students. The range is within "Good" to "Very Good". This is a slightly lower mean rating than that received in the usual semester-end feedback collected during 'normal' semesters, which is usually in the "Very Good" to "Excellent" range. However, it is reassuring to note that students have not generally found the experience to be drastically depreciated, considering the very challenging circumstances at present. It seems logical that the part-time CE students gave higher ratings on average than the regular full-time students, as their experience during 'normal' times is closer to the current expectations of them having to take full responsibility for independent learning and juggling their academic and home responsibilities.

2.4. Findings from qualitative open-ended questions:

Analysis of qualitative data was done using the Thematic Classification approach wherein all comments of a similar nature were clubbed together. The survey asked students what their biggest **challenges** were in adjusting to current online classes, **suggestions** to the College for improving online class experiences, and **module-wise feedback** on two things that worked in each module and two suggestions for possible improvements. Details of themes used and overall findings are given in Annexure #3. In addition to the aggregate analysis, raw data was provided to the programmes and tutors for specific follow-ups that are not detailed herein.

Respondents were able to comment on multiple aspects for each survey query, and each response was classified into the appropriate themes. As such, while the percentages represent the unique proportion of the respondent population that indicated a particular theme, they are not mutually exclusive: respondents could freely comment across multiple themes. The detailed tabulations of the responses are provided in Annexure 3.

The most commonly cited challenge faced by the students in terms of adjusting to online classes was technical, i.e., related to network issues, slow internet speed, or lack of network coverage in the location they were currently situated (45% of the total respondents). The second most-cited challenge was similarly related to data, i.e., the data package costs and difficulties in financing these costs when attending online classes (34% of the total respondents). Learning-related issues, as in having difficulty in understanding online classes, and finding online classes not as impactful and effective as face-to-face classes, was cited as the 3rd major challenge, by around 21.5% of the respondents. Note: the percentages are not cumulative, i.e., the same respondents could have cited multiple challenges. Details of other challenges faced by students are given in Annexure 3. Notably, only 3.2% of respondents cited VLE-specific technical issues as challenges, a major improvement over the (anecdotal) feedback in the initial days of the online classes.

For the suggestions to the College to improve the current online class experiences, 25% of student respondents requested the College to increase the amount of data packages provided by the college. Considering the volume of hours' students have to spend online to attend and meet all the requirements of online classes, the majority of students expressed the cost of data/internet to be expensive, so students recommend the College to consider increasing the monthly data packages given to students. Correspondingly, the second round of data top-ups done a few days after the survey were around 3 times the size of the original. The aforementioned feedback clearly indicated that the biggest concerns were on the nationwide internet situation, while issues within RTC's control could be readily addressed.

The second most-cited suggestion (17%) was regarding assignments and online tasks given to students by their respective module tutors. Students expressed the need for tutors to ensure that students are given enough time for all the assignment given, assignments need to be provided with clear deadlines, the need to make assignment deadlines at the night so that students can adjust their day schedule, and the need adjust assignments where there is need for students to go out in the field to collect data. Next most commonly (15% of respondents), students suggested that tutors use certain specific tools for online teaching-learning like PPT with voiceover, video, Google Meet, using a whiteboard for any online classes for calculation / numerical based modules, among others.

For the module-wise queries on what worked well and areas for improvement, the most frequent comments (24% of the total module-student comments) were on the quality of online teaching-learning materials made available to students by their respective module tutors. Within this theme, the majority of the comments, i.e. 83%, referred to this area when mentioning somethings that worked well in the modules, as positive feedback, while 17% of the module-student comments suggested improvements. Some of the feedback in this area included comments on: understandability and abundance of posted materials, whether they were uploaded regularly, the speed or audibility of voiceover PPTs, quality of readings assigned, slides being clear and comprehensive, video recording quality/length, data size of materials shared, and quality of discussions in Zoom, G Meet, or discussions forums. From the variety of materials currently used, 26% of the total comments positively mentioned voiceover PPTs and videos as being very helpful

in terms of making online classes effective. Also, about 17% of the total comments under this section mentioned 'Notes', and the suggestion that tutors give notes for all the online classes held.

The second most commented theme from students (21% of total module-student comments) was on the quality of online classes, as to whether the classes were understandable, enough examples and explanations were provided or not and relevancy of class discussions and content of online classes. Under this classification, the majority (52%) were suggestions for improvement for the module tutors.

The third most commented theme from students (11% of the total module-student comments) was on assessments given in the online classes such as Assignments, Quizzes, Class Participation, Digital Portfolios, Group work and others. Comments related to whether the tasks given were relevant, interesting, helpful, difficult and also on the amount of time & total weights given for the tasks assigned. Students also commented on the clarity of instructions and rubrics on such tasks, as well as the associated timelines/deadlines associated with such tasks. Within this classification, around 58% of comments were positive feedback on the modules, while 42% of the comments suggested improvements needed.

2.5. Follow-up actions from RTC on the findings of the survey

- 2.5.1. To address one of the primary challenges cited by students, data packages were immediately increased from 9.5 GB to 25.8 GB for Bmobile subscribers and from 8 GB to 24 GB for Tcell subscribers, aiming at packages available at approximately comparable costs and data volumes among the two telecom operators. Further follow-ups are being done to take up the issue of data costs with national authorities.
- 2.5.2. Action plans related to Teaching/ Learning issues raised in the mid-semester feedback were generated programme-wise in May and already implemented. These have been communicated back to students at the programme- and module-level. Different programmes have set different action plans based on the issues raised from the student feedback. Some of the common action plans provided by different programmes are captured below.
- 2.5.3. For students who need additional support in understanding online classes delivered, module tutors will hold virtual tutorials either through platforms like structured discussion forums or video conferencing using google meet, hangouts & other tools. All tutors are advised to remind students about their weekly consultation hour details, so that even other students can contact the module tutors to discuss issues related with modules/ online classes.
- 2.5.4. Module tutors at the individual level will make necessary adjustments in the online T/L materials such as:
 - 2.5.4.1. Tutors will continue to ensure that the VLE lessons have clear learning objectives, provide clear instructions, rubrics, weightage and time frame for the assessments.
 - 2.5.4.2. Upload voice-over PPTs/ lessons on audio files and also ensure the quality of recorded audio.
 - 2.5.4.3. Multimedia lessons (videos) will be compressed to reduce size.
 - 2.5.4.4. Save all Google meet sessions recordings and post these on VLE.
 - 2.5.4.5. For any class reading assigned, there has to be a complete feedback loop.
 - 2.5.4.6. Provide more forums for students to communicate with tutors on a regular basis to clarify any module related doubts/ issues.

- 2.5.4.7. To avoid cheating in the online tasks assigned, some module tutors have planned to send different sets of data and assign different tasks to students in a class.
- 2.5.4.8. Use shared excel sheets during Google Meet sessions to demonstrate practical problem solving in relevant modules.
- 2.5.5. Weekly meeting with faculty mentor implemented to provide necessary support for any tutors who need regular guidance & support on teaching-related issues.
- 2.5.6. Assignment submissions:
 - 2.5.6.1. Assignment submission deadlines will be communicated well in advance to students using appropriate online tools.
 - 2.5.6.2. For students who delay submissions due to genuine reasons like technical difficulties & others, tutors and academic support officials will investigate and determine if there is a case for flexibility with submission deadlines, particularly if students have followed the protocols for informing through the support channels about their difficulties. For other late submissions, these will be allowed with appropriate marks deductions.
 - 2.5.6.3. Tutors are required to ensure that there are no clashes in deadlines across multiple assignments in parallel modules.
- 2.5.7. Some programmes have created online class schedules to help students manage their time across all the modules, e.g., the “assigned day” or block is the time(s) in the week students are encouraged to focus on particular modules without clashing distractions from other modules. It should be the day/block on which the tutor schedules virtual office hours and other forms of engagement such as turning in assignments or putting up responses to guided questions.

Annexure 1: Feedback Questionnaire Sample

Surveys were deployed in the Moodle VLE. They were designed with common questions and programme/cohort/section-wise module-specific questions. Participants could submit responses once, and were shown questionnaires specific to their programme/cohort/section after logging in to the VLE, while the system automatically retained only the anonymous responses.

BA in Development Economics, 1st Year

Q1. Please indicate your present approximate location (town and dzongkhag).

Q2. Which of the following do you use to access the VLE?

- Only computer (laptop/desktop)
- Only mobile device (smartphone/tablet)
- Both computer and mobile device

Q3. What have been your biggest challenges in terms of adjusting to online classes?

Q4. If you have any comments/ suggestions to the College in terms of improving your online class experiences, please note them here.

Q5. Rate your overall learning experience with each of these modules in the current online mode on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

	poor	satisfactory	good	very good	excellent
ACS101: Academic Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CET102: Intermediate Microeconomics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CET103: Introductory Macroeconomics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
IPS101: IT and Basic Problem Solving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
QME103: Introductory Econometrics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q6. Please mention two things that are going well in terms of e-learning in the module ACS101: Academic Skills. Also, please mention two suggestions for possible improvements in the module.

Q7. Please mention two things that are going well in terms of e-learning in the module CET102: Intermediate Microeconomics. Also, please mention two suggestions for possible improvements in the module.

Q8. Please mention two things that are going well in terms of e-learning in the module CET103: Introductory Macroeconomics. Also, please mention two suggestions for possible improvements in the module.

Q9. Please mention two things that are going well in terms of e-learning in the module IPS101: IT and Basic Problem Solving. Also, please mention two suggestions for possible improvements in the module.

Q10. Please mention two things that are going well in terms of e-learning in the module QME103: Introductory Econometrics. Also, please mention two suggestions for possible improvements in the module.

Annexure 2: Location of RTC students at the time of participation in the survey

Dzongkhag	No. of Std	%
Thimphu	702	70.2
Paro	51	5.1
Sarpang	39	3.9
Chhukha	30	3
Punakha	26	2.6
Wangdue Phodrang	26	2.6
Bumthang	23	2.3
Samtse	20	2
Trashigang	12	1.2
Tsirang	12	1.2
Mongar	11	1.1
Dagana	10	1
Trongsa	9	0.9
Lhuentse	8	0.8
Haa	7	0.7
Zhemgang	6	0.6
Trashi Yangtse	4	0.4
Samdrup Jongkhar	3	0.3
Pema Gatshel	1	0.1
Gasa	0	0
Total	1000	100

Annexure 3: Themes & sub-themes for qualitative questions and overall college-wide summary

Summarized Qualitative Feedback - Classification Analysis		
Total number of students who participated		1000
	Total Comments	% of Student Respondents
Q3_Challenges		
Teaching-Learning Issues		
Learning issues: Difficulty in understanding online classes	215	21.5
Speed of lesson coverage is faster online	12	1.2
Other online teaching-related comments	30	3
Teaching-Learning (T/L) Materials		
'Expensive' T/L Materials (data cost of lengthy videos, materials with huge file sizes, etc.)	42	4.2
Quality of online T/L materials provided by the tutors (PPT slides/ Reading materials/ Videos/ Online discussions / Online Classes)	21	2.1
Multiple Online Tools & Platforms used by different module tutors causing confusions	11	1.1
Assessment-Related Issues		
Student workload-related issues arising from too many CA tasks assigned	81	8.1
Other assessment (assignments / quizzes / projects / group discussions, etc) issues - instructions clarity/ limited time/ submission timing/ etc.	78	7.8
Clashes in assignment deadlines - same deadlines for multiple CA tasks	41	4.1
Grading related issues: strict grading, class participation grading, auto grading from VLE, etc.	9	0.9
Tutor-Related Comments		
Tutors not available to clear doubts / lack of adequate communication with the tutor/ Tutor's responsiveness over email query/ Discussion Forums	15	1.5
Inadequate tutor support (motivation /guidance/ push to do the work) in the online class mode	6	0.6
Tutors not having scheduled online classes, ad hoc online classes organized by tutors & others	28	2.8
Technical Issues		
Network / internet speed & stability / other connectivity issues	450	45
Data package & its costs; related comments	340	34
VLE-related issues	32	3.2
Device-related issues (compatibility, availability, etc.)	34	3.4

Student Personal Management Issues		
Student time management (between household work vs. academic work for Day Std; Office work for CE Std)	118	11.8
Online classes being stressful; causing anxiety; impact on health (eyes) due to constant need to be on screen & other related issues	27	2.7
Lack of self-motivation & discipline / procrastination / distractions / not able to take online classes seriously	20	2
Family-Related Issues		
Family financial issues	5	0.5
Lack of conducive study environment at home for online classes	23	2.3
Q4_Suggestions	Total Comments	In % of Student Respondents
Teaching-Learning Issues: Online Classes		
Required-Practical Classes/ Need for detailed & clear Explanations with examples while delivering online classes/ suggestions for improvement of online classes for Practical Numeric module	56	5.6
Need to adjust Curriculum to Suit the online mode	18	1.8
Need for a class schedule/ Revisions/ Rests on regular intervals	72	7.2
Teaching-Learning Materials		
Suggestions on Quality of online T/L Materials	46	4.6
Suggestions for specific Tools (Video/Gmeet/ PPT VO/ Notes/ whiteBoard/Youtube) to be used for online classes	147	14.7
Suggestion on Tools that shouldn't be used (youtube/ video/etc..)	12	1.2
Assessment-Related Issues		
Suggestion to make all modules 100% CA based	12	1.2
Assignment related suggestions- provide: enough time/ clear deadlines/ deadlines at night; adjust the assignment requirements to suit the current situation	165	16.5
Suggestion to remove online tests - concerns over cheating / fairness issue / plagiarism issues / students not able to complete the tasks on time, etc.	35	3.5
Publish grades for the CA tasks submitted in a timely manner; Avoid Group work due to freerider issues / online coordination issues with group members; Provide students with correct solutions after the work is submitted / Relax the strict grading standards under current situation	22	2.2
Tutor-Related Comments		
Need for clear instructions and expectations from tutors	16	1.6
Tutors need to inform in advance for any time bound activities	26	2.6

Other tutor-related issues such as: volume of tasks to be assigned; need to be available to clear students' doubts; online classes need more Q&A Forums	13	1.3
Positive Experience from online classes (<i>No specific suggestions as students mentioned having very positive experiences from online classes conducted</i>)	77	7.7
Technical-Related Suggestions - increase in data package provided by the College & suggestions for improvements on VLE	248	24.8
Comments to the management- Resume regular classes; Refund of fees/ Cancel online classes/ Thank you comments/ etc.	34	3.4
Others- <i>Suggestions that are beyond college control such as - home environment, time management issues, individual student issues, etc.</i>	21	2.1

Annexure 4: Themes & sub-themes for the open ended questions for each module. Students were required to mention two things that were going well in terms of e-learning in the module and two suggestions for possible improvements.

Q6-Q10_Module & Tutor Comments classifications		
Total number of student comments across modules offered online	3297	
	# comments	%
Online Teaching Related Issues:		
Teaching approaches (variety/ same approach used; interactive/ interesting class; Any other approaches used for online classes)	308	9%
Whether online classes are understandable/ Quality of explanation/ Usage of examples/ Relevancy of discussions/etc..	687	21%
Positive experiences from online classes- "All Good " comments	307	9%
Tutor's communication with students- responding to students email; sharing of info about online classes/ giving general instructions about online classes/ available to clear doubts	293	9%
Tutor's personality; fairness (biasness); motivating/ supporting students; Gets irritable when asked about doubts	60	2%
Assignments & Assessment:		
Assignments & Assessments- Relevancy/ Difficulty/ Instructions/ Amount of time given/ Weights of the CA tasks assigned; Group work related issues	379	11%
Grading of CA & Feedback from tutors on CA work assigned	164	5%
Overall workload (CA tasks) from the module tutors -too many or ok-manageable/	202	6%
Online T/L Materials & Tools Suggested:		
Online T/L Materials such as PPT VO, Notes, Videos, etc.,: Quality/ Understandabilty/ Availability/ Size of the materials shared/	805	24%
VLE-related comments (VLE discussion forums: quality of discussions; suggestions for tutors to use it for class participation/VLE issues: uploading of materials; Urkund; Server down)	86	3%
Suggested Online Tools to be used (Gmeet/PPT-VO/PPT/Videos/ Live Lectures/Fbook Page/ etc.	271	8%
Other minor comments which are not within above area of classification:		
Need for online class schedules/ Reminder to follow online class schedules/ Data costs/ Time management/ Not having the right devices/ others	79	2%