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Designing ePortfolios to improve midwifery education in practice: what's the best feedback format?

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Background: Electronic (e)portfolios are crucial tools for workplace learning and feedback. The latter is a key element for a personalised learning process. However, feedback often lacks quality due to poor implementation. Research on how workplace feedback should be incorporated into an ePortfolio design is scarce, but nonetheless, imperative.

Objective: This study aims to answer the research question "Which feedback format do students, mentors (workplace), and teachers (university) find most appropriate to include in an ePortfolio design to improve the quality of feedback at the workplace?

Method: A usability testing method was employed with nursing and midwifery students (n=25), mentors (n=27) and teachers (n=20) in Flanders (Belgium). Data collection took place between February and April 2022. A feedback prototype was designed with three different formats: 1) blank box, 2) structured boxes with questions and 3) speech-to-text. Participants had to provide feedback on videos with simulation-based scenarios, where students provided midwifery care. All participants used the three formats. After the test, participants completed a web-based survey with close and open questions to measure perceived 1) ease of use, 2) usefulness, and 3) attitude. Quantitative data were analysed with SPSS27 and qualitative data with NVIVO12.

Results: Most participants preferred the structured feedback format. Although participants claimed that the blank box was equally easy to use, the structured format scored higher for increasing feedback quality. More than 75% of the participants perceived the structured questions as a convenient guide to improve their feedback quality. The speech-to-text format scored slightly worse in all three variables due to technological issues. Nevertheless, this format was recommended as a tool for setting quick reminders of a case or for recording conversations during busy working days.

Conclusions: All participants preferred structured feedback, followed by the blank box. Speech-to-text received the lowest score, mainly because the technology was not yet up to scratch. More research on incorporating feedback formats in ePortfolio designs is recommended.

Key message: ePortfolios are valuable tools to improve the feedback quality in clinical education. The feedback format matters and users in this study preferred structured feedback.

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Application to Midwifery Education