

**EDU WORLD 2022****Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues****STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FEEDBACK IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

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camelia.staiculescu@dppd.ase.ro**Abstract**

Feedback is an essential element in the teaching-learning-assessment process. Effective feedback helps students reflect on learning and learning strategies so that they can adjust progress in learning. Providing frequent and effective feedback helps to improve student learning outcomes. Information on aspects of comprehension and learning performance can be provided by both teachers and colleagues or the student himself. The main purpose of this paper is to formulate recommendations, addressed to teachers, on ways to provide feedback to streamline learning activities and increase students' academic performance. In this regard, we have applied the semi-structured interview to a sample of 10 students and questionnaire-based survey method to a sample of 102 students, with the objectives of: identifying students' perceptions of the usefulness of several forms of feedback; identifying the characteristics of efficient / inefficient feedback, from the students' perspective; identifying the benefits of feedback from the perspective of students; identifying the advantages and disadvantages of several types of feedback, from the perspective of students; identifying ways in which students feel they can be helped by teachers to capitalize on feedback; identifying student behaviours frequently associated with feedback. The data obtained from the application of the questionnaire were processed and interpreted quantitatively and qualitatively and gave us the opportunity to formulate recommendations on how teachers can provide feedback to students in order to streamline learning activities and increase academic performance.

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## 1. Introduction

Feedback is a fundamental factor within the learning process for students (Ghilay & Ghilay, 2015). Providing frequent and continuous feedback is a significant means of improving academic performance in the learning process. This involves providing information on aspects of understanding and performance. The sources of feedback are varied: it can be from teachers, colleagues or even the learner himself. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2018) distinguishes feedback as a measure of teaching quality. Effective feedback should help the student to reflect on his / her learning and the learning strategies he / she uses so that he / she can make adjustments for progress. The purpose of feedback is to determine the level of understanding and development of a student's skills, so that the teacher and / or the student can plan the next steps towards achieving the learning objectives. In the same way, Bloom, 1976, as cited in Al-Hattami (2019) suggested that feedback can reveal errors in learning shortly after they occur ... a self-correcting system so that errors made at one time can be corrected before they are compounded with later errors.

We can look at the feedback from both the teacher's and the students' perspective. For both the teacher and the students, the feedback provides information about the current knowledge and the level of development of the students' skills. Understanding students' progress and level of accomplishment allows the teacher to make appropriate decisions about the next steps to plan in the curriculum. At the same time, students can reflect on the learning strategies used, to confirm their effectiveness or to make changes to improve learning.

In the educational process, the assessment followed by constructive feedback should try to highlight the extent to which learning outcomes are achieved and, consequently, the objectives of the course are achieved. The importance and effects of feedback are not limited to the context of school activities. If the learning objectives are not achieved, not only students will suffer, but also educational programs that will train graduates who can harm the community in which they live, economically and socially.

## 2. Problem Statement

This study explores students' perception of feedback in higher education aiming to formulate recommendations, addressed to teachers, on ways to provide feedback to streamline learning activities and increase students' academic performance. Feedback is an important element of the continuous learning and assessment process.

In educational practice, different types of feedback are used, each with its own benefits and limitations. We can mention the following types of feedback (which we also investigated in this research) oral / written feedback, video / audio, provided by the teacher / offered by colleagues, evaluative (focused on evaluating / grading the answer) / formative (focused on suggestions for improvement), offered frontally (face to face with other colleagues) / individually (face to face).

It is difficult to capture all aspects of feedback due to its complexity, but in an attempt to clarify the concept, Price et al. (2010) put feedback into five interdependent categories: correction, reinforcement, forensic diagnosis, benchmarking and longitudinal development (forward-looking). From

another perspective, Carless (2006) identifies several functions of feedback: advice for improvement of the current assignment; advice for improvement of future assignments; explaining or justifying a grade; an act by which the tutor demonstrates characteristics, such as expertise, diligence or authority.

Literature review showed that student preferences for feedback includes the following: a balance between positive and negative feedback, direct feedback, providing feedback to help students to progress academically in future assignments, and feedback which is personalised to them (Paterson et al., 2020).

According to Walker (2009), one of the most neglected issues in educational practices is giving constructive feedback to students. Providing constructive feedback is one way to help reduce the gap between current and desired student performance. This should be one of the main concerns of teachers who want to practice student-centered education. Providing constructive feedback to students is essential to encourage deep learning and help achieve the goals set. Constructive feedback is the most beneficial support that teachers can provide to their students so that they can progress. Quite often, teachers tend to score students' work and give them grades, but constructive feedback is rarely provided to students to make sure the intended learning outcomes are met (Al-Hattami, 2019).

In terms of peer feedback, Nicol et al. (2014) consider that it helps learners develop their evaluative judgement, the ability to make judgements, first, about the quality of peers' work and later their own. Peer dialogue also exposes students to alternative perspectives / strategies (Di Costa, 2010).

A thing we should keep in mind is the limitations of feedback and how they can be mitigated or offset. Among the limitations we can mention: the limited time which does not allow teachers to provide a complete, consistent feedback; the students' ability or willingness to interpret the feedback they receive (Di Costa, 2010); students do not consistently engage with feedback or recognize the value of it (Glazzard & Stones, 2019); students do not understand the feedback given by tutors (Price et al., 2010), or may misunderstand teachers' intentions when they receive written comments; sometimes, students become overloaded with feedback and choose to ignore it. A potential solution to reduce the limitations of the feedback is to train students to use feedback effectively. In this respect, Banister (2020) refers to four distinct yet overlapping features which define student literate feedback: appreciating feedback processes, making judgments, managing affect, and taking action.

### **3. Research Questions**

As we mentioned in the previous sections of the paper, feedback is an essential and complex element of the educational process. The research started with a series of questions that emerged as a result of the desire to better understand how students relate to feedback and what we can do, as teachers, to help students progress in the process learning as a result of capitalizing on several types of feedback. Thus, the questions that this research has tried to answer are: What is students' perception of feedback?; What types of feedback do students identify?; What is the students' perspective on the several types of feedback?; What does effective / inefficient feedback mean from students' perspective?; What are the benefits of feedback from a student perspective?; What are the advantages and disadvantages of several types of feedback?; What students think teachers should do to help them capitalize on feedback?; What are the most common behaviors associated with feedback?; How would students like to react in feedback situations?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this paper is to formulate recommendations, addressed to teachers, on ways to provide feedback to streamline learning activities and increase students' academic performance.

The following objectives are subordinated to this main purpose: identifying students' perception of feedback; identifying students' perceptions of the usefulness of several forms of feedback; identifying the characteristics of efficient / inefficient feedback, from the students' perspective; identifying the benefits of feedback from the perspective of students; identifying the advantages and disadvantages of several types of feedback, from the perspective of students; identifying ways in which students feel they can be helped by teachers to capitalize on feedback; identifying student behaviours frequently associated with feedback.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The research conducted employs both quantitative and qualitative approach. As a first step, we used semi-structured interview to identify the major themes and issues that make up the perceptions of students regarding feedback. The interview was applied to 10 students enrolled in the Department for Teacher Training at the University of Economic Studies in Bucharest. Having as a starting point the theoretical approaches identified in the literature, we addressed general and specific aspects of feedback in teaching such as: feedback concept, types of feedback, usefulness of several types of feedback, times when it is useful to provide feedback, sources of feedback and their relevance, advantages and disadvantages of several types of feedback, characteristics of effective feedback and inefficient feedback, ways in which teacher can help students capitalize on feedback, and student behaviour in different situations in which they receive feedback.

The information obtained from the interviews helped us to formulate the questions and response options that were included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 22 questions, of which the first 6 address identification elements such as: university and faculty where they study, level of education and year in which they are enrolled, form of education, gender. We have applied the questionnaire-based survey method to a sample of 102 students. The sample of students was diverse: bachelor's degree students, master' degree students, doctoral students, in order to identify as many opinions as possible about the objectives of our research.

#### **6. Findings**

A total of 102 students completed the questionnaire (83 girls and 19 boys). The sample of students was diverse, not only in terms of the faculties and specializations (Business Administration, Public Administration and Management, Business and Tourism, Cybernetics, Statistics and Economic Informatics, Accounting and Management Information Systems, Environmental Economics, Theoretical and Applied Economics, Finance, Insurance, Banks and Stock Exchanges, Management, Marketing, International Economic Relations, Law), but also in terms of the year of study (bachelor's level - 63,7% first year, 7,8% second year, 5,9% third year, master - 4,9% first year, 17,6% second year).

The data obtained from the application of the questionnaire were interpreted in accordance with the research objectives.

Regarding students' perception of the concept of feedback, we present the answers in the table below (see Table 1):

**Table 1.** Students' perception of the concept of feedback

Statements that describe the concept of feedback	To a very large extent (percentage of answers)	To a large extent (percentage of answers)
Appreciation of what was done right / wrong	52,0%	26,4%
Encourages dialogue between teacher and students	48,1%	27,4%
Indicates where further study is required	42,1%	30,3%
It involves evaluating the answers	41,1%	25,4%
Provides information to students about their own learning	39,2%	21,5%
Provides information on assessment requirements and criteria	36,2%	26,4%
Facilitates student self-assessment	35,2%	28,4%

The results show that students most often associate feedback with appreciation of what has been done right or wrong (to a large extent – 5.0%) and with the encouragement of dialogue between teacher and student (to a large extent - 48.1%), the last two places being associated with the provision of information on assessment requirements and criteria (to a large extent - 36.2%) and the facilitation of student self-assessment (to a large extent - 35.2%). Thus, we find that students associate feedback with teacher validation of learning outcomes, rather than with aspects that may be associated with increasing the level of autonomy in their own learning and self-assessment process.

In terms of usefulness of various types of feedback, the most useful is considered the feedback provided by teachers (to a very large extent – 52.0%), the feedback provided by colleagues being considered useful only by 33.6% of respondents. Also referring to the usefulness, students consider verbal feedback more useful than written (58.1% for the first compared to 41.8% for the second). An interesting perspective is given by the appreciation by the students of the usefulness to a very large extent of the formative feedback (focused on suggestions for improvement - 45.9%), compared to the evaluative feedback (focused on the evaluation / grading of the answer), considered useful into a very large extent only by 30.6% of respondents. The lowest utility is attributed by students to audio (recorded) feedback - 20.4% and video feedback - 18.3%, most likely because these two types of feedback are used very little by university teachers. The highest utility is attributed by students to one-to-one feedback (provided by the teacher to the student) - 61.2%, compared to the frontal feedback (in front of colleagues) considered useful by only 22.4% of students.

We get an interesting perspective by analysing the frequency with which students appreciate that the forms of feedback that they consider to be particularly useful in supporting the learning process are used (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** The usefulness of the types of feedback and the frequency of their use – students' perspective

Types of feedback	Usefulness (percentage of answers)	Frequency of using (percentage of answers)
One-to-one feedback (provided by the teacher to the student)	61,2%	11,2%
Feedback provided by teachers	59,1%	27,5%
Verbal feedback	58,1%	34,6%

Although students consider that one-to-one feedback (provided by the teacher to the student) is most useful in the learning process (61.2%), the students' answers show that teachers do not use this type of feedback frequently. A more balanced situation of the usefulness (58,1%) / frequency ratio of use (34,6%) is observed in the case of verbal feedback.

Another aspect related to the usefulness of providing feedback focused on the moments when students consider useful to receive it. The moments appreciated as being useful to a very large extent are - at the end of the project / work task (60.1%); when they get a low grade of (56.1%); at the beginning of a project / work tasks (clarification questions on evaluation requirements and criteria) (55.8%); during the realization of the project / work task (45.9%); when they get a high grade of (42.8%). Again, we notice that the need for validation, for correcting the behaviour by the teacher is stronger than the desire for autonomy or focus on self-evaluation, on understanding the evaluation criteria.

Asked in what situations feedback can help, students chose the option "to a very large extent" as follows: to improve my performance knowing what I did wrong - 66.3%; to evaluate my performance in relation to the objectives I set myself - 59.1%; to improve my learning (it is a support in identifying what I have to learn and how I have to learn) - 57,1; to improve my performance knowing what I did right - 53.0%; to evaluate my performance in relation to that of my colleagues - 34.6%. We notice from the analysis of the obtained results that the evaluative feedback has a higher weight in relation to the formative one (improve my performance knowing what I did wrong - 66.3% versus evaluate my performance in relation to the objectives I set myself - 59.1%).

In terms of the advantages and disadvantages of several types of feedback students mentioned:

- i. *Advantages of feedback from teachers* are as follows: clarifies misunderstandings (81.4%), it helps me to correct myself along the way, until the end of the task (78.4%), a teacher has experience (62.7%), and a teacher knows what it is about / is an expert (60.8%). Students also had the opportunity to provide free answers to this question. Only two such answers were recorded: "the teacher has the ability to adapt the feedback to the personality of the receiver" and "after years of activity, the teacher naturally acquires an overview and an analytical spirit of finesse that we (students) lack due to age".
- ii. *Disadvantages of feedback from teachers* are as follows: I don't always understand what feedback is about (51%), feedback is delayed (37.3%), teacher puts too much emphasis on criticism (31.4%), after receiving the grade, feedback no longer matters (23.5%), and I get too much feedback along the way, and I don't read it anymore (9.8%). From the category "free answers" we mention: "there are no disadvantages of feedback from teachers" (7 answers) and one answer each: "it depends on the level of teacher experience", "there may be biases (personality data, previous negative experiences)", "if teacher is pressed by time or other

responsibilities, will not give you the best feedback”, ”there are situations when I need more advice / guidance from teachers, but the time allotted for consultations is limited”.

- iii. *Advantages of feedback from colleagues*: students consider that the most relevant advantage of feedback received from colleagues is that it “gives them ideas” (68.6%), followed by “they are in the same situation as me” (54.9%), “makes me to think better” (42.2%) and “I don’t feel pressured / stressed” (35.3%). From the free answers we selected "it is more diverse, being offered by more people, with different experiences and different concerns", "sincerity" and "it is a way to develop together".
- iv. *Disadvantages of feedback from colleagues*: in the first place is the answer “I’m not sure if what I’m saying is right / correct” (81.4%), followed by "they may not know more than me" (54.9%) and "It's a waste of time" (4.9%). In the case of free answers, 2 students mention that there are no disadvantages and another two that the feedback "can be influenced by personal feelings or opinions towards that colleague".

Another objective of this research was to identify the characteristics of efficient / inefficient feedback, from the students' perspective. In this respect, to the question "What are the characteristics of effective feedback?" students expressed the following opinions: “it is given in a timely manner” (81.4%), “includes suggestions for correction” (75.5%), “it is encouraging” (69.6%), “it is detailed” (65.7%), “is correlated with the evaluation criteria” (63.7%), and “is personalized” (62.7%). Regarding the characteristics of inefficient feedback, the students mentioned: “it is unclear / incomplete” (81.4%), “it is given late” (74.5%), “it does not specify what was not done correctly” (67, 6%), “is non-specific / general” (61.8%), “is not correlated with the evaluation criteria” (59.8%) and “is critical” (48%).

An aspect that we set out to clarify is to identify ways in which students feel they can be helped by teachers to capitalize on feedback. The answers given by the students show that they consider that the teacher's support in the sense of capitalizing on the feedback can be materialized as follows: “clearly explain the work tasks” (79.4%), “provide examples of similar tasks solved / model solutions” (78, 4%), “clearly explain the evaluation criteria” (71.6%), “comment on poor / good performance” (65.7%), “not changing assessment criteria along the way” (62.7%) , “check homework” (45.1%), “give students the opportunity to assess homework based on given criteria” (43.1%), “giving grades after assessment” (31.4 %).

Interesting results were obtained in terms of identifying students’ behaviours frequently associated with feedback, from the perspective of the comparison we can make between the actual behaviour in the situation of receiving feedback and the desired behaviour in the situation of receiving feedback. The results can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Students’ behaviours frequently associated with feedback

Students’ behaviours in feedback situations	Actual behaviour (percentage of answers)	Desired behaviour (percentage of answers)
I listen to / read the teachers' comments	99%	98%
I look at the requirements again	89,2%	93,1%
I read again the solved topic / application	86,2%	95%
I note remarks for the next topic	81,3%	93,1%
I am looking at the next topic	58,8%	84,3%

I use feedback to see what I have done well	83,3%	92,1%
I read what teacher recommends me	89,2%	96%
I talk about feedback with colleagues	71,5%	74,5%
I request clarifications where I did not understand what the teacher's remarks referred to	80,3%	97%
I write down what I should ask next time	65,6%	92,1%
I identify the feedback that I thought was incorrect and then ask for clarification from the teacher	68,6%	93,1%

Analysing the data in the table we notice that the real behaviour in feedback situations does not overlap with the desirable behaviour. In 9 of the 10 situations, students want to behave more responsibly in feedback situations (the exception is "listen to / read teachers' comments", where the actual behaviour exceeds the desirable behaviour by one percent).

## 7. Conclusions

According to Chokwe (2015), feedback is considered a cornerstone of sound pedagogy. Important for students, for teachers, for educational institutions, feedback can take many forms and can be used as an important resource to increase the quality of educational activities. Although many studies and articles have been written on this topic, it is always up to date, and it is useful to be aware of its importance and the need for efficient, constructive use of feedback. While feedback is widely considered central to student learning, students across the higher education sector commonly report dissatisfaction with the feedback they receive (Mulliner & Tucker, 2015). Based on the articles consulted and the results obtained from the research, we consider useful to make some recommendations addressed to teachers, on ways to provide feedback to streamline learning activities and increase students' academic performance.

The main aim of formative feedback is to increase student knowledge, skills, and understanding in some content area or general skill (e.g., problem solving), and there are multiple types of feedback that may be employed toward this end (e.g., response specific, goal directed, immediately delivered) (Shute, 2008). Feedback on learning tasks should be regular and provided as soon as possible after their completion. Written comments should be understood by students and should refer to established learning objectives and assessment criteria that have been communicated to students. Effective feedback should provide specific guidance on how to improve learning outcomes and allow students to think about the learning process involved in the learning task and not just the completion of the task. In order to be effective, feedback must be provided in a timely manner (as evidenced by the responses provided by the students surveyed). It must be given while there is still time for students to act and adjust their learning. Feedback expressed only by grades or ratings should be avoided. Students' responses indicate that they are not necessarily concerned with the grade itself, but rather with the comments, questions, and discussions that are frequently provided during learning, which encourage involvement and motivation to succeed. Understanding these aspects, accompanied by the concern to help the student to progress and gain autonomy in learning can be considered premises for a teacher-student relationship based on effective, constructive feedback.

At the institutional and personal level, there should be a concern for understanding the importance of feedback in the educational process and promoting among teachers behaviours and actions that



encourage and support the student, such as: explaining to students that feedback is provided to help them understand how learning is valued; providing feedback, on a regular basis, individually or in small groups; providing prompt feedback, immediately or shortly after the completion of learning tasks; providing specific feedback, accompanied by examples and explanations; encouraging students to ask clarification questions about the feedback they received; involving the student in discussions about what they think should be improved in the learning process; providing directions, tips, to improve performance; encouraging students to discuss the learning process or the difficulties they face.

The research conducted is limited by the small number of participants, which does not allow an extensive generalization of the results obtained. However, we can say that our findings are consistent with the results obtained in similar research, on larger samples, which encourages us to consider our research as a starting point for future developments and a source of inspiration for teachers who want to know more about feedback and ways to use it effectively in dealing with students.

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