

Citation: Misbah, & Dilshad, M. (2023). Effectiveness of Teachers' Feedback at Universities: Analysis of Students' Perspective. *Global Educational Studies Review*, VIII(I), 341-349. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2023\(VIII-I\).30](https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2023(VIII-I).30)

Effectiveness of Teachers' Feedback at Universities: Analysis of Students' Perspective

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Abstract: *This quantitative survey design research study focuses on factors which influence the effectiveness of instructional feedback. The main objective of the study, therefore, was to analyze university students' perception about effectiveness of their teachers' feedback. Researchers themselves developed questionnaire based on the five point Likert rating scale consisting of six factors with forty-eight (48) close ended questions to collect data. The questionnaire was administered to 1260 BS students of six universities selected through multistage random sampling technique from 21 general public universities of Punjab. The data was analyzed using both the descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Results revealed that overall students had a slightly positive perception regarding effectiveness of teachers' feedback and least slightly positive perception regarding the aspects transparency, constructiveness and time frame of feedback. In contrast, the positive perception was recorded on the aspects goal referenced, comprehensive and feed forwarding feedback. Results also revealed significant differences in university students' views based on gender, faculty, department and university.*

Key Words: Effectiveness of Feedback, Feed Forwarding, Transparency, Students' Perspective

Introduction

In the process of teaching and learning, feedback holds immense significance. It is crucial for learners to make sense of what they have learned, as highlighted by Sadler (2010). The term "feedback" encompasses numerous concepts that can vary in meaning depending on the contextual sense within different fields. In an academic context, feedback is described as information provided by an agent, which can be a teacher, parent, peer, or a learning resource such as a book. The feedback is aimed at enhancing a student's understanding and

performance. Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasize that various tools such as speaking, writing, tests, or digital technology serve as powerful means to deliver feedback. Feedback can be provided by teachers, peers, or individuals in a teaching role.

In educational settings, feedback is commonly categorized as both "educative" and "evaluative" (Dochy & McDowell, 1997). From an evaluative perspective, feedback provides students with information about their performance on a given task or piece of work (Hounsel, 1987). On the other hand, the educative perspective views feedback as a

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facilitator for students, aiding in their task improvement and development (Hester, [2001](#)). Feedback serves as a significant source for enhancing the quality of learners' experiences (Higgins et al., [2002](#)). Students recognize the importance of feedback in identifying their strengths and weaknesses while also motivating them to improve their future grades (Hyland, [2004](#)). Ultimately, feedback is a form of information provided to students with the intention of guiding their thinking and actions towards the purpose of learning (Shute, [2008](#)).

Effective feedback plays a crucial role in the process of teaching and learning, and the research supports the idea that it holds significant importance in facilitating learning and progress. It is vital for encouraging students' active engagement in learning and essential for enhancing the overall quality of teaching. As both teachers and students share the responsibility for learning, they should strive to achieve optimal learning outcomes collectively (Black & William, [2004](#)). These scholars also acknowledge various factors that can either facilitate or hinder the feedback process. The realm of literature offers numerous recommendations regarding the constituents of effective feedback. The opinions may vary regarding what constitutes strong feedback, this discussion will focus exclusively on the relevant aspects, namely appropriateness, specificity, and clear identification of features that characterize strong feedback.

While opinions on strong feedback vary, only relevant, specific, and identifiable aspects of strong feedback are considered here (Mory, [2004](#); Poulos & Mahony, [2008](#); Winstone; [2016](#)). Feedback is seen as personalized for students (Ferguson, [2011](#)), serving as encouragement, constructive criticism, and motivation (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, [2006](#)). It should also be easily understandable (Ferguson, [2011](#)), and provided in a timely manner (Gibbs, [1999](#); Gibbs & Simpson, [2005](#); Poulos & Mahony, [2008](#)). Effective feedback is descriptive and specific. It emphasizes the need for appropriate strategies to facilitate improvement and allows sufficient time for

action to be taken. Effective feedback is seen as a communication and conversation that revolves around the outcomes resulting from the feedback provided.

Feedback plays a crucial role in the educational process, as it enables individuals to acquire knowledge and skills. It occurs during coaching and early stages of study, allowing recipients to assess their performance and make necessary adjustments or continue with successful practices. Individuals have the ability to modify, reject, or accept feedback based on their own judgment. Therefore, effective feedback should be carefully crafted and delivered in a manner that offers meaningful assistance to the learner (Effective Feedback-Teaching and learning, [2020](#)). Providing feedback that learners can understand, apply, and demonstrate their competence and efficiency in the future can be quite demanding. Boud and colleagues ([2010](#)) argue that in order to achieve this, feedback should enhance the learning process in a positive manner. It should be timely, focused on others' work and learning, specific, and delivered consistently to guide learners in both their work and learning endeavors.

One of the characteristic of effective feedback is that it should be informative and supportive. An essential attribute of effective feedback is its informative and supportive nature. It provides learners with specific and detailed information to enhance their learning process. Through conversations or remarks, it imparts valuable insights and guidance to students, highlighting areas for improvement and suggesting actionable steps they can take. This aspect of feedback holds significant value as it contributes to the formative assessment process, helping students progress in their educational journey (Stiggins et al., [2004](#)). The language and tone used by teachers have the potential to either support or harm a student, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Additionally, the timely delivery of feedback is crucial as it allows students to implement the feedback and learn from it. This aspect holds great significance as it is highly beneficial for

students' progress and development (Feedback for Learning, 2021).

Prior to the final deadline, students can incorporate feedback into their comprehensive revision process. Feedback that promotes learning is characterized by being frequent, concise, focused, and action-oriented. Importantly, it should also be manageable for students to handle effectively. Providing opportunities for practice can further assist learners in gaining mastery over the course material. According to Sadler (1989), there are three critical situations that enable students to benefit from feedback. Firstly, students need to have a clear understanding of the reference level or standard that is being targeted. This allows them to compare their actual performance to the desired standard or goal and identify any gaps that exist. With this knowledge, students can then take appropriate actions to bridge the identified gaps.

Feedback and formative assessment play a crucial role in cultivating students' self-regulated learning abilities, as highlighted by Carless (2006). It is important to recognize that the requirement for receiving feedback cannot be separated from the thoughtful planning involved in delivering it. Considering both efficacy and effectiveness as ongoing considerations, it is crucial for feedback to be appropriate in nature and feasible within the available resources, particularly the time constraints faced by educators. The feedback should align with the natural expectations of students while also being suitable for their development. This has prompted research efforts to explore effective methods for constructing feedback (Duncan, 2007) and analyzing students' responses to feedback (Walker, 2009).

Another aspect that demands attention in the academic process is the management of feedback within the context of marking and delivering high-quality feedback. Striking the right balance between effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of feedback and marking is a significant challenge. According to Race (2014), achieving a balance between the effectiveness of learning outcomes and the

associated workload is of paramount importance. While feedback generally yields positive effects, it is important to note that it can also have negative consequences on learning outcomes, as evidenced by approximately one-third of research studies (Kluger & DeNisi, 1998). The variability in the impact of feedback dispels the notion of a simple recommendation that increasing feedback will automatically enhance learning. This research, therefore, specifically aimed at examining the factors that influence the effectiveness of instructional feedback.

The Current Study

The current study mainly examined students' perceptions about the effectiveness of teachers' feedback and compared the differences in their perceptions based on different demographic factors i.e. gender, faculty, department and university. The study was based on the following five research questions.

1. What are university students' perceptions about effectiveness of teachers' feedback?
2. Are there any gender-based differences in university students' perception about effectiveness of teachers' feedback?
3. Are there any faculty-based differences in university students' perception about effectiveness of teachers' feedback?
4. Are there any department-based differences in university students' perception about effectiveness of teachers' feedback?
5. Are there any university-based differences in university students' perception about effectiveness of teachers' feedback?

Research Methodology

Research Design, Population and Sample

The quantitative survey research design was used as the study was descriptive in nature. There are twenty-one (21) general public universities in Punjab. All the BS students enrolled in six universities were considered as a population from the province of Punjab. The

overall population of these six universities was consisted of 139, 626 students. The multistage sampling method was used in the study. Primarily the six universities were randomly selected from the province of Punjab. Then the two faculties (i.e., the faculty of science and the faculty of social science), three departments from each faculty and the BS 8th semester students were selected through the stratified random sampling technique. Three departments selected from faculty of sciences were Botany, Chemistry and Physics while Education, Psychology and Sociology were selected from faculty of social sciences. The total sample comprised 1260 students out of which 960 (74.28%) students responded, of which 221 (23.6%) respondents were male and 715 (76.4%) respondents were female.

Research Tool, Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher self-developed questionnaire through the extensive review of literature which was comprised of six factors consisted of forty-eight close ended questions related to the effectiveness of teachers' feedback. Questionnaire was based on the five point Likert type scale. The sub scale one based on the six statements measures the provision of goal referenced feedback, the sub scale two also consist of six statements measures the transparency of feedback, the sub scale three consist of nine statements measures the comprehensiveness of feedback, the sub scale four consist of seven statements measures the feed forwarding aspect of feedback, the sub scale five consist of twelve statements measures the provision of constructive feedback and sub scale six consist of eight statements measures the time frame of feedback. The questionnaire was validated in view of expert opinion of department of Education, Bahauddin Zakaryia

University, Multan. The reliability of the tool was also calculated factor wise and overall, the overall reliability of the tool was 0.938. Factor wise factor one goal referenced reliability was 0.747, factor two transparency reliability was 0.929, factor three comprehensiveness reliability was 0.757, factor four feed forwarding reliability was 0.579, factor five constructive reliability was 0.802 and the factor no. six time-frame reliability was calculated 0.785. All of the factors reliability was higher than 0.70 except the factor no. four feed forwarding reliability

The twelve hundred and sixty (1260) questionnaires were administered out of which nine hundred and thirty-six (936) questionnaires were returned. The overall response rate of students was 74.28%. The data was analyzed through the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Initially the descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean, SD and percentage) were computed. To test the students' perception of differences on effectiveness of teachers' feedback by gender, department, faculty and university wise the t-test and ANOVA were applied to analyze the data.

Results

The results are reported in three sections according to the hierarchy of research questions.

Perception of Students on Effectiveness of Feedback

This section presents analysis of students' perceived effectiveness of teachers' feedback in whole scale and six sub-scales separately. Researchers calculated percentage, mean score and SD to reach the conclusion. Table 1 presents results with its interpretation.

Table 1

Students' Perception on the Six Subscales of Effectiveness of Teachers' Feedback

S.No	Factor	N	R	S	O	A	Mean	SD
		%	%	%	%	%		
1.	Goal Referenced Feedback	5.6	13.81	23.65	27.43	29.5	3.61	1.19
2.	Transparency of Feedback	11.71	14.58	24.35	22.65	26.71	3.38	1.31

S.No	Factor	N	R	S	O	A	Mean	SD
		%	%	%	%	%		
3.	Comprehensiveness of Feedback	12.21	15.86	28.12	26.31	28.23	3.78	1.43
4.	Feed-Forwarding Feedback	6.28	10.6	21.68	29.22	32.25	3.70	1.19
5.	Constructive Feedback	13.62	15.07	23.27	24.4	23.61	3.30	1.28
6.	Time Frame of Feedback	10.05	16.1	25.13	26.36	22.37	3.34	1.25
	Total Scale						3.51	1.27

Table 1 shows analysis of students' perception on the six subscales of effectiveness of teachers' feedback was shown as the very slightly positive, slightly positive and positive. The students showed the positive perception on the reception of goal referenced feedback with a mean value 3.61. On the dimension transparency of feedback, the students showed the very slightly positive perception with a mean value 3.38 which also indicates the students concerns about that aspect of feedback. The two aspects comprehensiveness of feedback and the feed forwarding feedback the students showed the positive perception with a mean value 3.78 and 3.70 respectively which also shows the students satisfaction on these aspects. In contrast on the other two aspects of feedback constructive feedback and timeframe of feedback the students showed the

very slightly positive perception with a mean values 3.30 and 3.34 respectively. The overall mean value of 3.51 showed the students slightly positive perception on all the six subscales of effectiveness of teachers' feedback.

Comparison of Students Perception Based on their Gender, Faculty and Department Wise Differences

This section of the study presents the comparison analysis of student perception by different demographics such as gender, faculty and department wise on the whole scale effectiveness of teachers' feedback. The researchers applied the t-test and ANOVA to reach the conclusion. Table 2,3 and 4 presents the results with its interpretation.

Table 2

Independent samples t-test for gender-based differences on effectiveness of teachers' feedback

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	p-value
Effectiveness of teachers feedback	Male	221	163.39	30.320	-.607	934	.544
	Female	715	164.82	30.679			

Table 2 showed the mean values of male students 163.39 and female students 164.82 respectively, on the effectiveness of teachers' feedback. Both the mean values of male and female students were very close to each other on the scale effectiveness of teachers' feedback. The difference of perception between male and female students was also found statistically

non-significant because the p-value was greater than 0.005 (i.e. .544). Thus it could be concluded that gender wise there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of the both male and female students regarding the teachers' effectiveness of feedback.

Table 3

Independent Samples t-test for Faculty-based differences on Effectiveness of Teachers' Feedback

Variable	Faculty	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	p-value
	Science	470	161.66	30.320	-2.842	934	.005

Variable	Faculty	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	p-value
Effectiveness of teachers feedback	Social	466	167.33	30.679			
	Science						

Table 3 showed the mean values of students of faculty of science 161.66 and faculty of social science 167.33 respectively on the effectiveness of teachers' feedback. The mean values indicate that the students of faculty of social science shows the more positive perception on the effectiveness of teachers' feedback than the

students of faculty of science. The difference of perception between both the faculties was also found statistically significant as the p-value was 0.005. So it is concluded that the students of social science have a more positive perception on the effectiveness of teachers' feedback than the students of faculty of science.

Table 4

ANOVA test for Department-based differences on Effectiveness of Teachers' Feedback

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	25371.509	5	5074.302	5.546	.000
Within Groups	850938.218	930	914.987		
Total	876309.726	935			

Table 4 showed the mean values of students of six departments of six universities of Punjab respectively 169.31, 165.55, 166.91, 165.63, 153.19, 166.31 regarding the effectiveness of teachers' feedback. The ANOVA indicated that p value was less than 0.05 (i.e. 0.000) at df 5. The difference between the mean values was significant. The students of department of education showed the more positive perception among all the six departments and students of department of chemistry showed the least positive perception among all the six departments regarding effectiveness of teachers' feedback. However, from the science departments the students of department of

biology showed the more positive perception regarding effectiveness of teachers' feedback than the other two science departments.

Comparison of Students' Perception based on Universities Wise Differences

This section of the study presents the comparison analysis of student perception by different universities of Punjab on the whole scale effectiveness of teachers' feedback. The university names were coded as university 1,2,3,4,5&6. The researchers applied the ANOVA test to reach the conclusion. Table 5 presents the results with its interpretation.

Table 5

ANOVA test for university-based differences on effectiveness of teachers' feedback

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11213.868	5	2242.774	2.411	.035
Within Groups	865095.859	930	930.211		
Total	876309.726	935			

Table 5 showed the mean values of students of six universities of Punjab respectively 164.04, 163.04, 168.22, 160.45, 161.28, 169.87 regarding the effectiveness of teachers' feedback. The ANOVA indicated that p value was less than 0.05 (i.e. 0.035) at df 5. The difference between the mean values was

significant. The students of university no. 3 and 6 showed the higher positive perception among all the six universities of Punjab and students of university no. 4 showed the least positive perception among all the six universities of Punjab regarding effectiveness of teachers' feedback.

Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to examine the students' perspective about the effectiveness of teachers' feedback at higher education level in Punjab. The study results revealed that the students slightly positive perception has been recorded on effectiveness of teachers' feedback. The lowest slightly positive perception was recorded by students on subscales transparency of feedback, constructive feedback and time frame of feedback. Weaver (2006) also identified the four major areas related to feedback which were proven very less useful in improving students learning: the feedback which were not related to the predetermined assessment benchmarks, lacks direction, comments which were too vague or unclear and the feedback which focus were more on negative. This study also suggests that availability of feedback which fulfills the above identified four concerns and make sure the feedback delivery in a timely manner it can strengthen the teachers' feedback effectiveness in an immense way. The results are in accordance with an earlier study conducted by Mulliner and Tucker (2008) in which students' lowest positive perception was recorded regarding reception of an effective feedback in comparison to the perception of teachers. The results are also aligned with the study of Maclellan (2001) and Carless (2006) in which students reported the reception of lack of useful feedback from their teachers.

The study results also revealed that the students showed the positive perception regarding the reception of goal referenced feedback, comprehensiveness of feedback, and feed forwarding feedback which supports the idea of developmental focus of feedback presented by Lizzio and Wilson (2008). The study conducted by Lizzio and Wilson (2008) also highlight the reception of feedback comments from teachers considering it the helpful or unhelpful both by students. Habibah (2016) also highlighted the accounting students' agreement on the preference performance to receive the constructive, detailed and personalized and timely feedback from different accounting teachers.

Demographically gender wise no difference was found in the perception of students, faculty wise students of social sciences reported more positive perception than faculty of science regarding effectiveness of teachers' feedback. The results of study by Lizzio and Wilson (2008) has also endorsed the reception of an effective feedback from assessors reported by the psychology, law and arts students. Moreover, the students of department of education showed the highest positive perception and the students of chemistry showed the least positive perception regarding the reception of an effective feedback from their teachers. The university wise analysis revealed that the students of university no. 3 and 6 had higher positive perception among all the six universities of Punjab and students of university no. 4 had least positive perception among all the six universities of Punjab regarding effectiveness of teachers' feedback.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that the students had a slightly positive perception regarding effectiveness of teachers' feedback and least slightly positive perception regarding the aspects transparency constructiveness and time frame of feedback. However, the students show the positive perception regarding the reception of goal referenced, comprehensive and feed forwarding feedback. Moreover, the significant differences were found by gender, faculty, department and university wise analysis between students' perception regarding effectiveness of teachers' feedback. This study recommends that the feedback learning sessions should be arranged for teachers to enhance the feedback effectiveness. The teachers should follow equitable evaluation criteria in marking assignments and giving feedback and also should ensure the feedback delivery and return of assignments within the given time frame schedule. The teachers should also highlight a specific skill or area which needs improvement in giving feedback.

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