

THE VALUE OF TEACHERS' OPINIONS REGARDING USING POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND THE IMPACT ON STUDENTS' ATTITUDE

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Abstract

This study presents the results of the positive feedback influence on students' motivation and involvement. Studying teachers perceptions about the effect that positive feedback has on the learning involvement and motivation of students, is the purpose of this research. A significant part of it is focused to studying feedback in general, as well as positive feedback and how it should be presented. The main objective of the study was to investigate whether or not there is a statistical significance correlation between the providing of positive feedback during educational activities and the motivation displayed by students. The analysis has demonstrated that feedback from teachers is significant to students' motivation and involvement.

Keywords: *feedback, positive feedback, students engagement, BETTER direct feedback model, teachers' opinion regarding positive feedback*

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout every learning process, feedback is amongst the most helpful inputs (Kuchinke, 2000; Lipnevich, Panadero, 2021; Salas, & Rosen, 2010). According to other researchers, the impact of feedback on enhancing performance and motivating the student, has achieved widespread support (Alder, 2007; Bartram & Roe, 2008; Eckert, Ekelund, Gentry, & Dawson, 2010; Gregory and Levy, 2015; Salas & Rosen, 2010). The concept of feedback is used for a variety of purposes in various disciplines, management, medicine or sports. However, it gained significant research attention especially in educational contexts. Researchers in this field, have been trying for almost a century to understand how feedback can be optimized to maximize value for students and lead them towards growth-oriented development, motivation and involvement (Adelman, 1981; Kluger and DeNisi, 1998; Lipnevich et al., 2016; Wang, Gong, Xu, & Hu, 2019; Wisniewski, Zierer & Hattie, 2020).

Feedback is "a mechanism for regulating the learning process considered at the micro-level of education, which requires the receiver of the messages transmitted by the sender to provide the sender with answers and information about the messages received" (Bocoș, Răduț-Taciu, & Stan, Dicționar praxiologic de pedagogie, 2016, p. 215). Learning happens continuously, based on the effects of our decisions and actions. To achieve our goals, we constantly evaluate feedback received from those who have a pertinent opinion, update our knowledge and adjust our behaviour. When we reflect on these conclusions (feedback), we take into consider the goals we are trying to achieve as well as the results of our previous experiences. In addition, information is updated based on the pair choice-outcome, ensuring adjustment of future behaviour.

Feedback is recognised by many teachers for encouraging students to acquire knowledge and increase their performance in learning activities however, feedback techniques are intricate and sometimes fail to deliver a significant result on the resources and time spent (Carless & Boud, 2018).

The research and implementation of feedback are supported by a variety of theoretical approaches. In order to bridge gaps between present and intended performance levels, students must process feedback they obtain, analyse it, and take measures. This is the focus of cognitive techniques (Thurlings et al., 2013). Esterhazy & Damșa (2019) capture the social and cultural perspectives towards feedback. This ambivalent process, manifested as action and interaction between teacher and student, emphasize the importance of cooperation and relevance transmitted through action within social environments and cultural circumstances ingrained in the principles of various disciplines. According to socio-constructivist feedback studies, shared and individual perceptions are constructed through participant

interaction and conversation, collective experiences or sense-making theory, and co-construction of selves (Allal, 2021).

Furthermore, the concept and interpretation of feedback are both contentious and controversial. A traditional perception is that feedback largely consists of details regarding one's performance, comprehension or knowledge that are given by a teacher. The information-based view refers to this interpretation of feedback as information offered by a teacher. According to Winstone and Carless (2021), conceptualizing feedback as an information-sharing process underplays current innovations that emphasize the learner's role in creating, perceiving, and using feedback in various ways. We observed that it would be more beneficial to emphasize on evidence of student responsiveness to feedback rather than teacher contributions when improving the quality of feedback processes, emphasising a new paradigm feedback mechanisms approach.

We have identified several examples of feedback approaches from the scientific literature that could be applied to student learning processes and performance-related inputs yet we have not identified a unique pattern of implementation by which the feedback mechanism could be used in a uniform way in the Romanian educational system. For this reason, we propose a brief taxonomy of feedback according to its nature, in order to establish a model for its implementation:

- *Direct feedback* (during two-way communication, during an evaluation process or not)
 1. *Descriptive feedback* (detailed description of educational behaviour)
 2. *Prescriptive feedback* (information that helps the student to correct his or her educational behavior)
 3. *Positive feedback* (communicating the educational aspects observed in a positive way)
 4. *Negative feedback* (communication of negative educational behaviours, mistakes and dysfunctions and we note that we wish to be avoided this type of feedback)
- *Indirect feedback* (the teacher points out an error but does not offer a solution).

The classification intends to highlight the fact that feedback can be effective when is provided directly, both within the evaluative process and during the learning activities. Owing to this, we will now propose a paradigm for the implementation of direct positive feedback that reinforce the role of the learner perceiving and using feedback, in a constructive way.

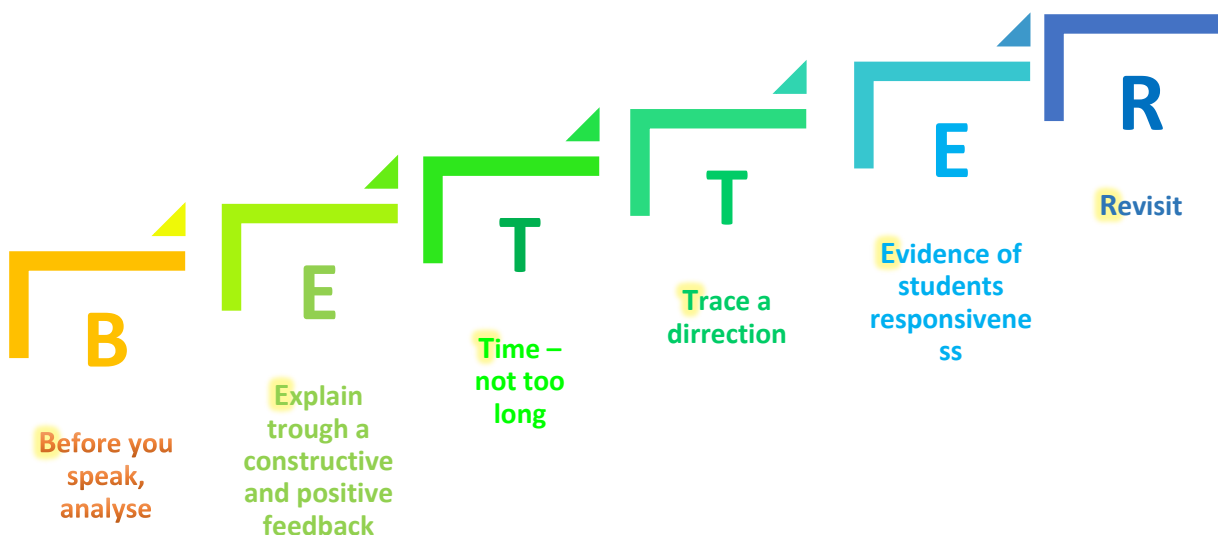


Fig. 1. BETTER direct positive feedback model (personal design)

Traditionally, the responsibility for providing feedback has been entrusted to teachers. Furthermore, we provide a concise explanation of each of the aspects presented and described in Figure 1.

BETTER direct feedback steps	Description
Before you speak, analyse	The teacher uses evidence to substantiate observation. Praise is not the feedback
Explain through a constructive and positive feedback	The teacher focuses on behaviour, describes instead of judging, indicates what is desirable, discusses the implications from a positive perspective, provides direction, and summarizes comments
Time	The teacher should determine an acceptable moment to provide feedback. The delayed or disrupted feedback reduces its significance, resulting in sentiments of resentment and guilt
Tracing direction	The teacher continues the discussion as it was initiated, reinforcing desirable educational behaviors by engaging the student by proposing solutions to the observed situation (Bocoş, Răduţ-Taciu, & Stan, 2016)
Evidence of student responsiveness	The teacher must assist the student to understand the complexity of a task in order to respond positive to further feedback. Also, a student can be encourage to identify the strengths so he/she could transfer them to areas where he/she need to progress.
Revisit	The teacher should revise feedback by making changes, adjustments, or improvements, if the student responsiveness is negative

Table 1. A concise explanation of BETTER direct feedback steps

The way that teachers manage the entire classroom group and the individual student, is the primary reason of some of the challenges that come in the classroom due to student misconduct. In addition to this, the atmosphere of the classroom, the attitude of the teacher is another essential component that should be thoroughly examined in order to facilitate effective learning. Students could benefit significantly through positive feedback and praise from their teachers. The approach wherein teachers manage students' undesirable educational behaviour should be positive and constructive. Guiding and managing students' educational behaviors positively in undesirable contexts involves exposure to a number of risks.

In consequence, it is essential that positive feedback be encouraged throughout the feedback sessions, it should be acknowledged that praise is not synonymous with positive feedback, highlighting only positive aspects of student behaviour does not constitute positive feedback and that teachers must have a common view regarding feedback in general, its implementation mechanisms and the effect it generates.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objective of offering students positive feedback, in a broad sense, is to provide information about their performance and learning activities, in a constructive way and to facilitate for students to continue learning after initial guidance has been provided (Bocoş, Răduţ-Taciu, & Stan, 2016; Wang, Gong, Xu, & Hu, 2019; Wisniewski, Zierer & Hattie, 2020). In a broad sense, the purpose of offering students positive feedback, is to provide information about their performance and learning activities, in a constructive way and to facilitate for students to continue learning after initial guidance has been provided (Bocoş, Răduţ-Taciu, & Stan, 2016; Wang, Gong, Xu, & Hu, 2019; Wisniewski, Zierer & Hattie, 2020).

But, even when using this approach, there is no certainty that students will actually engage with the feedback that is provided (Ali et al, 2018; Zhang & Hylang, 2022). Teachers play a key role in enhancing student involvement with feedback according to Zhang and Hylang (2022). The researchers note that

this is attributable to the fact that teachers have a significant impact on the manner in which students perceive feedback.

We recall that feedback is a mechanism for regulating the learning process. It can refer to the action by which educators (teachers) obtain information about the effects of their pedagogical approaches and to the action by which learners obtain information about the effects of their learning efforts. Positive feedback is a type of feedback accompanied by reinforcement of the positive aspects of the learners' work, in order to develop a constructive relationship between teacher and learner that will enable the setting of desirable objectives to be achieved (Bocoş, Răduţ-Taciu, & Stan, 2016; Wisniewski, Zierer & Hattie, 2020).

Thus, the research strategy and design were developed to investigate the following **research questions**:

- Exists any statistical significance correlation between positive feedback in educational activities and students motivation?
- How frequently do teachers apply positive feedback and does this frequency have any significance in relation to student engagement and motivation?

The objective of the present study is to investigate the role of teachers' perception of positive feedback regarding their overall engagement of the students with feedback.

Another objective of this paper is to investigate if the students are more motivated in the learning process when positive feedback is provided.

An educational undesired behaviour can be improved if the way of giving feedback is well-known, if the consequences of applying this regulation mechanism are understood and if a constructive and meaningful communication is expected. In this manner, we intend to determine what are the attitudes and beliefs of teachers with regard to professional competencies, training and professional development that enable effective teaching and learning. Also, we intend to investigate are teachers' practices with regard to giving feedback and positive feedback and how often teachers provide positive feedback and the way how teachers perceive students' attitudes towards feedback.

The strategy for conducting the research consisted in one stage, based around the abovementioned research question. During this phase, we conducted a quantitative analysis to investigate the teachers' perceptions regarding the using of positive feedback during the learning educational process.

As a research method, we opted for a survey questionnaire based, distributed online among pre-university teachers. There was a total of N=106 teachers who took part in the research; 42.5% of them are teachers at the primary school level and 57,5% are secondary and high school teachers. Participation was voluntary. The questionnaire was structured in two sections: demographic items and items related to the feedback topic. For the first section of the questionnaire, we designed and analysed 11 nominal variables to build a comprehensive picture of the statistical data received from respondents as we revealed in table number 3, detailed below. The second section of the questionnaire consists of closed-ended questions designed to measure two variables: utilization of positive feedback (the independent ordinal variable) and motivation of the students to actively participate (the dependent ordinal variable) - indicating whether or not the students are more engaged.

The answers to the questions were given using the five-step Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree). Google forms was used to collect the applicants' responses to the questionnaire, which were submitted online. There was a total of N=106 teachers who took part in the research; 42.5% of them are teachers at the primary school level and 57,5% are secondary and high school teachers. The statistical processing of the data was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0.

To measure internal consistency of the questionnaire we utilized the statistic Cronbach's Alpha, which calculates the pairwise correlations between items in our survey. The value for Cronbach's Alpha, α , is 0,869. We obtained a value falling in the range $0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$, thus fulfilling the criteria of reliability as good.

Scale	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Likert Scale	34	,869

Table 2. Reliability of items

The primary hypothesis from which this study arose is that teachers consider that positive feedback can be used constructively during educational activities to motivate and engage students. From the demographic point of view, the following information is revealed:

Categories	Data collected
Gender	94,3% feminine, 5,7% masculine
Age rage	between 19-65 (50,9% are between 40-49 years old)
Level of studies	pedagogical college– 0,9%, Bachelor’s degree– 45,3%, Master’s degree– 47,2%, Doctorate’s degree– 5,7%, Post-doc. Degree– 0,9%
The city where they graduated	Romania: Alba Iulia, Bacău, Braşov, Bucureşti, Cluj-Napoca, Constanţa, Craiova, Galaţi, Iaşi, Ploieşti, Oradea, Târgu-Jiu, Timişoara Republic of Moldova: Chişinău
Experience	1-5 years– 12,3%, 6-10 years– 13,2%, 11-15 years– 7,5%, 16-20 years– 20,8%, 21-25 years– 20,8%, 26-30 years– 15,1%, more than 30– 10,4%
Area	Urban– 65,1%, rural- 34,9%

Table 3. Demographic data collected

3. RESULTS

For the first set of statements, we considered an interval score, of Linkert scale with five points is considered to be. The mean is very significant for the analysis that we are conducting. A score between 1 and 1.8 indicates strongly disagree. From 1.81 to 2.60, it means disagree. From 2.61 to 3.40, it means neutral; from 3.41 to 4.20, it means agree; from 4.21 to 5, it means strongly agree. The mean is reported 4.61 in the first statement. As a result, it indicates that the vast majority of respondents are strongly agree of providing feedback. In the second statement, the mean is 4,76. Hence it means the majority of participants are strongly agree that the feedback is a tool that motivates and increase students’ involvement during the educational activities. The second statement gives us a holistic view of how teachers perceive feedback in relation to student motivation. The fourth item reveals that teachers not only provide feedback to students, but also that the feedback is positively constructed and has a positive effect on students, considering that the mean is 4.69. All 11 statements were within a range of 4.36 to 4.76. where 4.36 represented an extended item, beyond the educational activities, and means like 4.75 and 4.76, indicate that the initial assumption is validated.

<i>Descriptive Statistics regarding using the positive feedback</i>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
12.1. In the teaching-learning process I constantly give feedback to my students	106	3	5	4,61	,611
12.2. I consider that feedback is a tool that can motivate and increase involvement in the activities I develop	106	3	5	4,76	,544

12.3. I provide feedback to students even in situations not related to my teaching activities	106	1	5	4,36	,958
12.4. I have noticed that when I structure feedback positively, my students are more receptive	106	3	5	4,69	,607
12.5. In the assessment process I provide feedback to my students	106	3	5	4,73	,578
12.6. I believe that positively constructed feedback enhances the progress of my students	106	3	5	4,73	,544
12.7. Most often I use positive feedback over negative feedback	106	1	5	4,50	,759
12.8. Positive feedback is not just about highlighting positives, but reflects my educational objective opinion, in a constructive way	106	2	5	4,70	,604
12.9. Positive feedback needs to be provided consistently for teachers to see noticeable results in student behaviour	106	2	5	4,62	,668
12.10. Positive feedback increases student engagement	106	2	5	4,69	,653
12.11. Positive feedback is a motivating factor and increases students' self-esteem	106	2	5	4,75	,582
Valid N (listwise)	106				

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of using positive feedback by teachers

For the second set of statements, we clarify that a score between 1 and 1.8 indicates strongly disagree. From 1.81 to 2.60, it means disagree. From 2.61 to 3.40, it means neutral; from 3.41 to 4.20, it means agree; from 4.21 to 5, it means strongly agree. In the first statement, the mean is 3.84. Thus, according to the ranges indicated it means agree, interpreted as a level of agreement. Even so, being very close to neutral, we cannot consider that positive feedback has a significant influence on whether students know where they are academically positioned. A number of additional questions can be identified, that can be used to determine the direction of possible new research. Does positive feedback support or mislead when it comes to identifying the educational level of students?

The second and third statements, identified in the bellow table as 14.6 respectively 14.7, reveals that the students, according to the teachers observation, feel motivated and get involved through answers and active participation in lessons. The means reported are 4.41 and 4.28. The statements indicate a significant meaning, showing also that the initial assumption is validated. In the last statement, the mean is 2,68. This statement has been constructed to indicate possible automatic response by respondents, which would invalidate previous responses. If the teachers wouldn't offer positive feedback, the students would experience feelings of sorrow. The mean reveals that is not the case and Respondents completed answers with responsibility which indicate that the initial assumption is validated.

<i>Descriptive Statistics regarding students' motivation</i>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
14.5. My students know exactly where they position themselves academically and what they need to improve.	106	1	5	3,84	,997
14.6. My students feel motivated by me, by giving concrete positive feedback on aspects of the instructional and educational process	106	2	5	4,41	,790
14.7. Most students get involved through answers and active participation in lessons	106	1	5	4,28	,870
14.8. My feedback sometimes causes upset among my students	106	1	5	2,68	1,239
Valid N (listwise)	106				

Table 5. Descriptive statistics regarding students' motivation

5. CONCLUSIONS

According to the findings of the study, providing students with relevant positive feedback is meaningful for the purpose of motivating and engaging students when they are participating in educational activities. The quantitative analysis of the responses from the teachers led us to the conclusion that, in accordance with their observations, the positive feedback has a beneficial influence on the motivation and involvement of the students during the activities. For the first set of statements investigated, all eleven statements scored within the range of 4.36 to 4.76, with 4.36 indicating an extended item that went beyond the educational activities and 4.75 and 4.76 indicating that the initial assumption is validated. As a result, it indicates that the vast majority of respondents are strongly agree of providing feedback.

For the second set of statements, we observed that the students, according to the teacher's observation, feel motivated and get involved through answers and active participation in lessons. The means reported are 4.41 and 4.28. The statements indicate a significant meaning, showing also that the initial assumption is validated. However, we cannot consider that positive feedback has a significant influence on whether students know where they are academically positioned. A number of additional questions can be identified, that can be used to determine the direction of possible new research. Does positive feedback support or mislead when it comes to identifying the educational level of students? Learners will be guided in the future, by their teacher's knowledge, understanding and positive feedback, to get involved and to be motivated during the activities.

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