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Editorial: Student voices in formative assessment feedback

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Editorial on the Research Topic
Student voices in formative assessment feedback

The Research Topic, "*Students' Voices in Formative Assessment Feedback*", explores students' experiences and emotions regarding formative assessment feedback. The nine articles in this Research Topic contribute valuable new insights. This editorial provides an overview of the studies included and summarizes their contributions.

Article overview

Andersson et al. investigated how students engaged with assessment feedback in an intervention study involving Swedish 10th-grade students. Their findings showed a positive association between the implementation of formative assessment through ongoing feedback cycles and students' autonomous motivation.

Brooks et al. examined the effects of a teacher professional learning intervention that used a student-centered feedback model in Australian primary schools on students' perceptions of the helpfulness of feedback. Their findings highlight the value of combining strategies that help students self-regulate their learning using feedback.

Brandmo and Gamlem conducted a systematic review examining student perceptions of feedback and its impact. The authors found that feedback quality had the greatest impact on student learning outcomes. Their findings point to the value of providing students with tailored, informative and action-oriented feedback.

Lipnevich et al. examined the choices made by higher education students in the United States when rejecting feedback provided to them. Reasons for rejecting feedback were mainly related to the "message," which was perceived as unclear or overwhelming.

Moltudal et al. studied writing in the 8th-grade in Norway, investigating students' perceived usefulness of AI-feedback compared to peer feedback. Their findings highlight the role of trust in digital devices and how social class hierarchy affects students' perceived competence in providing peer feedback.

Rienits investigated how medical students assess their peers during formative clinical assessments. The findings indicate that students report learning as much or more from being the assessor as they do from being assessed. However, the author questioned whether this experience leads to deeper learning or merely deepens knowledge about the test and the assessment process.

The systematic review by Solis Trujillo et al. examined graduate students' perceptions of formative feedback. The findings highlight the crucial role of formative feedback in potentially strengthening both learning and academic engagement.

Westphal et al. investigated the perceptions of first-year university students in Germany on oral assessment and their view of oral grading as a reliable measure of their competence. Their findings suggest that a lack of transparency reduces students' perceptions of oral grading as being valid.

To et al. conducted an action research project involving three teachers in six classes of 10th-grade students in Singapore. Their findings indicate that feedback tools stimulate students to verbalize their understanding of the feedback, thereby enhancing their autonomy.

Main contributions

Feedback design

Several common findings can be identified from the nine studies, highlighting students' views on constructive assessment feedback. Students want feedback that is clear, understandable, and action-oriented, provided in dialogue with a teacher or a peer they trust personally and academically (Brandmo and Gamlem; Brooks et al.; Solis Trujillo et al.; To et al.). Moreover, the use of multiple strategies to engage students, along with fostering a deep understanding of success criteria, appears to substantially impact students' perceptions of feedback helpfulness (Andersson et al.; Brooks et al.; Lipnevich et al.; To et al.). Anchoring feedback in familiar success criteria may also influence students' perceptions of assessment validity (Westphal et al.).

Feedback engagement

When teachers encourage students to actively engage with formative feedback, it can increase students' autonomy and promote deeper learning (Andersson et al.). Being able to learn autonomously is particularly crucial for students who are approaching graduation and entering the workforce (Solis Trujillo et al.).

Empowering feedback targets cognitive and metacognitive processes, offering feedforward to enhance students' self-regulation skills (Solis Trujillo et al.). This aligns with Brooks et al., who advocated for meta-conversations with students about the purpose of feedback, encouraging them to view themselves as agentic learners. Furthermore, several studies have linked student engagement with feedback to teacher sensitivity to students' psychological needs (Brandmo and Gamlem; Lipnevich et al.; To et al.).

Peer feedback

Findings from the studies in this Research Topic indicate that peer assessment can enhance students' familiarity with assessment conditions and improve their feedback strategies (Moltudal et al.; Rienits). However, implementing peer assessment can be challenging, as students may feel uncomfortable or lack trust in their peers' competence or intentions (Lipnevich et al.; Rienits). Moreover, Brooks et al. found that peer feedback was sometimes preferred by students over teacher feedback. They emphasized the importance of clearly defining success criteria and ensuring that students understand what constitutes success before engaging in peer assessment. Both Brooks et al. and Solis Trujillo et al. identified links between peer assessment and the development of self-assessment skills.

Technology provided feedback

Furthermore, the published articles offer new insights into the application of AI in providing assessment feedback. To a certain degree, AI can offer timely, personalized feedback (Solis Trujillo et al.). In addition, Moltudal et al. demonstrated that AI-generated feedback facilitates dialogic feedback interactions to a greater extent than traditional peer feedback. However, personalized teacher feedback is not replaceable (Brandmo and Gamlem; Moltudal et al.), as personal relationships and shared understandings between participants in the feedback process are essential (Brandmo and Gamlem; Lipnevich et al.). AI does not possess the sensitivity or ability of teachers to interpret student needs within specific contexts. Nevertheless, Moltudal et al. found that students trusted computer software, differing from the findings of Lipnevich et al., who noted the importance of personal trust in feedback sources. Similarly, Solis Trujillo et al. reported that technology-based feedback supports self-assessment and fosters autonomous learning.

Further research

Based on these study findings, we identified three areas needing further research: (1) the relationship between AI-assisted feedback and student emotions, (2) the long-term impacts of changes to formative classroom practices, and (3) improving the integration of formative feedback into assessments using various modes, including oral participation. Future work should extend the findings of this Research Topic, placing the student voice at the center to ensure that formative assessment research continues to be driven by the needs of learners.

Author contributions

PF: Writing – original draft. FV: Writing – review & editing. WR: Writing – review & editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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