

Feedback as a formative tool beyond grading.

Retroalimentación como herramienta formativa más allá de la calificación.

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Abstract. Feedback is key in education because it helps students improve, self-regulate, and learn meaningfully. It should not be confused with grading, as it involves explaining performance and guiding progress. It should be a continuous, dialogical, and constructive process between teacher and student, promoting reflection, motivation, and autonomy. Its proper application fosters the development of skills and better future professional performance.

Keywords: training tool, medical education, feedback

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1. Introduction.

Feedback is a relevant element in educational processes, as it allows students to understand the strengths and weaknesses identified in the activities and assessments (formative or graded) carried out within the context of a subject. It is important to highlight it as an essential component of instructional design. As such, it has general characteristics, such as being objective, constructive, and providing guidance to overcome weaknesses (1).

Feedback significantly influences learning, allowing students to self-evaluate their academic performance and fostering self-regulation. This empowers them to play a leading role in knowledge construction and remedial actions, strengthening the student-centered learning model. Traditional discourse links feedback to assessments, especially graded ones. The expectation is to obtain a general statement highlighting positive elements (from the students' perspective) or negative ones (from the perspective of academics with limited training in teaching skills) regarding the origin of the results. Given this, three common scenarios emerge: feedback is provided, emphasizing negative aspects; it highlights both positive and negative aspects—which is the ideal scenario; or it is not provided at all due to various factors: lack of teacher knowledge, lack of dedicated time for providing feedback, or insufficient understanding of its importance.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on the importance of feedback, from a comprehensive perspective – going beyond its traditional conceptualization – to ensure effective student learning and the achievement of the competencies and learning outcomes established in the curricula.

2. Development.

Feedback is a process that should be implemented in scenarios of positive or negative student performance in relation to completed activities and assessments. Feedback can be mistakenly confused with grading. While grading certainly reflects student performance, it is not conclusive. Grading as such originated in the 1930s, a time when schools of thought emerged that sought to measure and quantify characteristics of objects or subjects in order to establish comparisons, this being the sole purpose of evaluation at that time (2). If we consider the origin of grading, it could serve to stratify performance across educational levels, but if we delve into the meaning of a given grade, the arguments can be reduced to simply assigning insufficient, good, or very good grades. Therefore, if feedback is mistakenly understood as the grade obtained without analyzing the quantitative data and the reasons for the result, we are faced with an incomplete and even imprecise conclusion. In this sense, if we consider written tests, an example that articulates both concepts is the analysis of item difficulty and discrimination. Feedback, then, is an integral process that has special importance in the training of health professionals.

From a more constructivist and student-centered paradigm, feedback is viewed as an educational partnership, where quality and credibility between teacher and student are paramount (3), aiming to generate a result that fosters meaningful learning. This perspective identifies characteristics that must be present in this dialectical process for feedback to fulfill its true objective: guiding each student on how to improve and develop the competencies involved in their training. These characteristics relate to key aspects such as empathy, communication, appropriate context, protected time, and a constructive approach.

Bood's contributions are relevant when analyzing the importance of feedback. The author introduced the concept of sustainable feedback, whose function is to empower students to learn, but prospectively, in their lives and professional careers (4). This perspective is substantive, as it goes beyond the traditional concept of feedback associated with immediate moments or those close in time to the activity carried out with the students, giving it greater significance in the achievement of the competencies and learning outcomes committed to in the curricula.

Following the above approach, sustainable feedback is characterized by: involving students in dialogue about their learning; facilitating feedback processes that encourage students to develop capacities to monitor and evaluate their own learning; improving students' capacities for learning and evaluating their own lifelong learning, supporting them in setting goals and planning their learning; designing assessment tasks that facilitate student participation over time, in which feedback from various sources is generated, processed and used to improve performance at different stages of the tasks (4).

Nicol and Macfarlane raise the importance of formative assessment and self-regulated learning, proposing a model and seven principles of good feedback practices, based on a synthesis of research literature: they help clarify what constitutes good performance (objectives, criteria, expected standards); they facilitate the development of reflection in learning; they provide high-quality information to students about their learning; they encourage dialogue between teachers and peers about learning; they promote positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem; they offer opportunities to reduce the gap between current and desired performance; and they provide information to teachers that can be used to guide teaching (5).

Several studies on effective feedback (6) have shown that students need to develop feedback literacy skills to adapt to, recognize, identify, value, and truly understand the value of this dialogic

communication between teacher and student regarding their performance. The constructive value of feedback enhances students' long-term ability to evaluate their own learning and, above all, to regulate their actions toward a specific goal. This not only contributes to their professional development but also to their future performance, maintaining motivation and proactivity.

3. Discussion.

Feedback is a process that should not be limited to a specific moment or activity, but rather should be ongoing, since well-executed feedback impacts the achievement of competencies and learning outcomes, leading to effective future professional practice. Furthermore, it is a process that requires the coordination of multiple efforts, from both a bidirectional (students and teachers) and multidirectional (among classmates) perspective. A significant challenge is the creation of operational procedures that standardize the minimum requirements for providing feedback, integrating different theoretical perspectives applicable to both national and international contexts. Establishing these procedures is crucial to avoid a lack of consistency in feedback styles, offering teachers and students a common set of possible alternatives that should be included in teacher training programs.

To ensure the sustainability of feedback, it is essential to foster self-regulation of learning in students, which highlights their autonomy and responsibility in managing their learning project. This is expressed in the prefix "self," emphasizing the role of the learner's agency in their learning process (7). A key activity for realizing this agency is to incorporate critical and reflective thinking into teaching strategies regarding the content of the activities. This involves students proposing new conceptualizations or identifying strengths and weaknesses in the existing content.

Furthermore, feedback is an action that should be emphasized in both formative and summative assessments, as both contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes. Teacher and course evaluations are both quantitative and qualitative instruments that should include questions assessing the feedback processes implemented, since objective information will allow for the adoption of remedial actions within the framework of teacher professional development.

4. Conclusions.

- Establishing and maintaining continuous feedback spaces in the curriculum architecture, in a permanent and high-quality manner, is essential for the competency-based model currently declared in the different educational realities.
- Similarly, this would not be enough without enhancing teaching and student skills to achieve the much-desired effective feedback.

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