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## Teachers' Feedback: Exploring Differences in Students' Perceptions

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### Abstract

Perception plays a key-role in how feedback is processed. Individual and situational characteristics can potentially influence how students perceive teachers' feedback. Our main goal is to study if students' gender and/or the type of education program they attend may influence how they perceive teacher feedback in a class that they like. For this study we used 13 items from the *Feedback, Identification, School Trajectories Questionnaire* that measure students' perceptions about teachers' effective feedback (EF) and ineffective feedback (IF). Data from 178 students were randomly selected from a larger data base (89 attending the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of an academic education program and 89 attending courses in vocational education). No differences were found in the perceived feedback regarding a main effect of the type of education program attended, neither for the combined effect of type of education program attended and the student gender. However, results revealed a student gender main effect, with girls perceiving more effective feedback than boys. Future studies should continue exploring how learners' individual and situational characteristics may relate or affect their feedback perceptions, as well as how these perceptions relate to learning. This will allow us to compare results and fully grasp the practical significance of the magnitude of the effects found.

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**Keywords:** Teacher feedback, Students' perceptions, Education programs

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### 1. Introduction

This paper is part of a larger ongoing research project, entitled *Feedback, Identity and Trajectories in Education: Dynamics and Consequences* (FITE) (Contract PTDC/CPE-PEC/121238/2010), which is being developed in the

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Education Institute of the University of Lisbon, seeking to understand the nature of teacher feedback, and the dynamics and consequences in the development of the identity of the students and their school trajectories. Teachers' formative discourse emphasizes the central role of students' learning (Hattie, 2003). When providing feedback to a student, a teacher is essentially giving information about the student's performance or understanding (Hattie & Timperlay, 2007). Teachers should use feedback to try to reduce the gap between the student's understanding and actual performance and how the teacher wants him to perform or develop (Hattie, 2009). Research has shown feedback to be among the most powerful and effective influences on student achievement (Hattie, 2009), as well as an important component of the pedagogical process (Brookhart, 2008), since it links teachers' practice to students' learning needs (Bayley & Gamer, 2010). However, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that about a third of the reported effects of feedback on learning, were in fact negative. There is a vast amount of research that identifies the characteristics of effective feedback and feedback that is not effective or has a negative effect on learning (e.g. Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Hattie, 2003; Sendziuk, 2010; Brookhart, 2012; Hattie, 2012; Wiggins, 2012; Thurlings, Vermeulen, Bastiaens & Stijnen, 2013). Many teachers claim to provide its students lots of feedback, however, the real question is whether the students receive, understand and act on it. As stated by Hattie (2003), "the key is feedback that is received and acted upon by students" (p. 174). Since perception plays a central role in the feedback process (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979), it is somewhat surprising to see that only a few recent empirical studies have focused on how learners perceive feedback and how these perceptions relate to learning (Srijbos, Narciss & Dunnebie, 2010; Havnes, Smith, Dysthe & Ludvigsen, 2012; Rakoczy, Harks, Klieme, Blum, & Hochweber, 2013). Students are active agents in the feedback process. Different students can interpret teachers' feedback in different ways. In this sense, individual and situational characteristics can have a potential effect on how students perceive the teachers' feedback (Havnes, et al., 2012; Rakoczy, et al., 2013). In this paper, our main goal is to determine if the student gender and/or the type of education program they attend may influence how they perceive teacher feedback in a class that they liked. Specifically our questions are: a) Is there any difference in the amount of perceived feedback between boys and girls?; b) Is there any difference in the amount of perceived feedback between academic education students and students in vocational education programs?; c) Is there any combined effect of student gender and type of education program in the amount of the perceived feedback? These questions generate two analytical categories: student diversities (gender), and program diversities (academic versus vocational).

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Participants*

The data used in this study was taken from a larger representative sample of the students in Portugal (only in the continent territory) attending the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade in Basic Education and the 10<sup>th</sup> grade of Secondary Education, collected within the FITE project. For our sample, we've selected 178 students between the ages of 13 and 19 years ( $M = 15.3$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) where 34.5% were girls and 65.5% were boys. Students were from eighteen Portuguese schools. Eighty nine students attending the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the third cycle of Basic education were randomly selected from the larger sample. Basic education is compulsory and free, intended for children aged between six and fifteen, and, although incorporating some elements of vocational training, the program is mostly of an academic nature. The other 89 students were also selected from the larger sample, and were attending courses in vocational programs, which are intended for students within the age of 15 or more, without any professional qualifications, and with a risk or an academic history of dropping out of compulsory school (Ministry of Education and Science, 2012). Regarding gender distribution according to the type of education program, there were 40 girls and 49 boys attending the academic program, and 21 girls and 67 boys attending vocational courses.

### *2.2 Instrument and Procedure*

In order to evaluate our students' perceptions about teacher feedback, we used the Questionnaire Feedback, Identification, School Trajectories (QFIST; Carvalho, Conboy, Santos, Fonseca, Tavares, Martins, Salema, Fiuza, & Gama, 2014). QFIST measures student identification with the school, student behavioral engagement in the school and student perceptions about teacher feedback. For this study we used only the 13 QFIST items that measure student perceptions about the teacher feedback. The following nine items evaluate effective teacher feedback

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