Teacher Feedback and Student Perceptions: Variations in Inclusive Classrooms

B. Umesh Kumar Sharma

North East Regional Institute of Education (NERIE)NCERT, Shillong, India

ABSTRACT

Teacher feedback is a critical component in enhancing student learning, yet students' perceptions of this feedback can vary significantly due to individual and contextual factors. This article examines variations in students' perceptions of teacher feedback in inclusive classrooms, with a focus on differences influenced by gender and educational level. Drawing on empirical studies, including a survey of 576 students from grades six through eight in Kendriya Vidyalaya schools in Chennai, India, the findings highlight that female students and non-Children with Special Needs students exhibit more positive perceptions of feedback compared to their male and CWSN counterparts. The study also reveals preferences for detailed, step-by-step feedback and identifies challenges in feedback delivery. Implications for teachers in inclusive settings include the need for balanced, timely, and personalized feedback to support diverse learners effectively.

Keywords: teacher feedback, student perception, inclusive classrooms, gender differences, educational level

INTRODUCTION

Teacher feedback is a basis of effective pedagogy, serving to bridge the gap between students' current performance and their learning goals (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, the efficacy of feedback depends on how students perceive and interpret it, which is influenced by factors such as gender, educational level, and individual experiences (Carvalho et al., 2014; Putri et al., 2021). In inclusive classrooms, where students with and without disabilities learn together, understanding these perceptual variations is critical in promoting equitable learning environments (Sharma & Rositta, 2023). This article synthesizes findings from recent studies, including a survey conducted in inclusive classrooms in India, to explore how students perceive teacher feedback and the implications for effective feedback practices.

Aim

The aim of this article is to explore variations in students' perceptions of teacher feedback in inclusive classrooms, with a specific focus on differences influenced by gender and educational level. By synthesizing empirical findings, including a survey of 576 students from grades six through eight in Kendriya Vidyalaya schools in Chennai, India, the article seeks to understand how these perceptual variations impact feedback effectiveness and to propose strategies for adapting feedback practices to meet the diverse needs of all learners, including Children with Special Needs (CWSN), thereby promoting equitable learning outcomes in inclusive educational settings.

Teacher Feedback and Its Role in Learning

Teacher feedback encompasses information provided by teachers about students' performance, including praise, constructive criticism, and suggestions for improvement (Sadler, 2010). Effective feedback clarifies performance expectations, promotes self-assessment, and enhances student motivation (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). However, feedback must be comprehensible and relevant to be actionable (Selvaraj et al., 2021). If students misinterpret or reject feedback due to perceived irrelevance, its potential to enhance learning diminishes (Sharma & Rositta, 2022).

Student Perceptions of Feedback

Student perception involves how learners select, interpret, and make sense of feedback, shaped by their prior experiences and emotional context (Widianingsih, 2019). Students' perceptions of teacher feedback are shaped by their academic background, emotional responses, and contextual factors (Harris et al., 2014). Misalignment between teachers' intentions and students' interpretations can lead to feedback being ignored or misunderstood (Carvalho et al., 2014). This is particularly relevant in inclusive classrooms, where diverse learner needs necessitate personalize feedback approaches (Sharma & Rositta, 2023).

1) Variations by Gender: Gender influences how students perceive teacher feedback. Studies indicate that female students often perceive feedback as more effective than male students, particularly in academic settings (Carvalho et al., 2014; Guo & Zhou, 2021). For instance, a study of 178 Portuguese students found that girls in academic programs reported receiving more effective feedback than boys, though the reverse was true in vocational programs (Carvalho et al., 2014). Similarly, a survey of 1,121 Chinese secondary students revealed that female students received more constructive feedback and less criticism in language classes, possibly due to their tendency to complete more tasks diligently (Guo & Zhou, 2021).
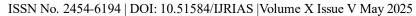
In inclusive classrooms, a study of 576 students in grades six through eight in Chennai, India, found that female students were more likely to understand feedback (M = 1.84, SD = 0.57) compared to male students (M = 2.06, SD = 0.77) and received more praise for their performance (Sharma & Rositta, 2023). These findings suggest that female students may be more attentive to feedback quality, potentially due to higher engagement in academic tasks (Huang, 2013).

2) Variations by Educational Level: Perceptions of feedback also vary across educational levels. In primary schools, younger students prefer praise for effort, while older students value recognition of skills (Burnett & Mandel, 2010). Secondary students interpret feedback based on personal needs and interests (Peterson & Irving, 2008). A study of 193 New Zealand students found that primary and secondary students generally accepted teacher-led feedback, perceiving it as positive and constructive when it supported improvement (Harris et al., 2014).

In higher education, students prioritize opportunities to discuss feedback and seek detailed, verbal input over written comments (Glazzard & Stones, 2019). A study at the University of Muhammadiyah Purwokerto found that students in writing classes valued verbal feedback for its clarity and motivational impact (Widianingsih, 2019). These preferences highlight the need for feedback to be personalized and interactive, particularly at higher educational levels.

Feedback in Inclusive Classrooms

Inclusive classrooms present unique challenges for feedback delivery due to the diversity of learners, including Children with Special Needs (CWSN). Sharma and Rositta (2022, 2023) investigated students' perceptions and preferences for teacher feedback in inclusive classrooms using a survey method. Their primary study (Sharma & Rositta, 2023) involved 576 students (294 males, 282 females; 549 non-CWSN, 27 CWSN) in grades six through eight from Kendriya Vidyalaya schools in Chennai, India, selected via random sampling. Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire, "Student Perspectives on Teacher's Feedback," with 10 items across seven subscales (Perception: Legibility, Timing, Valence, Presentation; Preference: Audience, Mode, Amount), rated on a 4-point scale (Cronbach's α = .715–.738). Administered with informed consent, the questionnaire took 8–10 minutes to complete, with assistance provided for clarity. Using SPSS 21, the researchers conducted descriptive analysis, Mann-Whitney U tests for gender and category differences, and Spearman Rank-Order Correlations to examine perception-preference relationships, employing a non-parametric approach due to non-normal data distribution confirmed by Shapiro-Wilk's test. This methodology strongly captured feedback perceptions in inclusive settings. Finding revealed that 89.4% of students found feedback clear, but 10.6% struggled to understand it (Sharma & Rositta, 2023). Notably, CWSN students reported receiving less detailed feedback and fewer positive remarks compared to non-CWSN students, which may contribute to feelings of discouragement (Sharma & Rositta, 2023).

Challenges in Feedback Delivery

Delivering effective teacher feedback in inclusive classrooms is fraught with challenges, as student perceptions vary significantly due to gender, educational level, and individual needs, such as those of Children with Special Needs (CWSN). These variations necessitate personalized approaches to ensure feedback is equitable and impactful. This section explores key challenges in feedback delivery, highlighting how perceptual differences influence its effectiveness.

1) Misalignment Between Intent and Interpretation: A primary challenge is the disconnect between teachers' intentions and students' interpretations of feedback. Perceptions are shaped by past experiences, academic engagement, and emotional responses (Widianingsih, 2019). Gender-based differences are notable; female students often perceive feedback as more constructive than male students. For example, a study of 1,121 Chinese secondary students found that female students received more directed feedback and less criticism in language classes, likely due to higher task completion rates (Guo & Zhou, 2021). In contrast, male students may view feedback as overly critical, leading to disengagement. In the findings of Sharma & Rositta (2023), female students (M = 1.84, SD = 0.57) found feedback clearer than male students (M = 2.06, SD = 0.77), underscoring gender-driven perceptual gaps. This misalignment can result in feedback being ignored if it does not align with students' perceived needs.

2) Timing of Feedback Delivery: The timing of feedback is critical but challenging to optimize, particularly in diverse classrooms. Feedback is most effective when delivered while students are engaged with the task (Brookhart, 2008). However, in inclusive settings, only 50.5% of 576 surveyed students received immediate feedback post-task, with 49.5% experiencing delays (Sharma & Rositta, 2023). CWSN students, in particular, reported less timely feedback, which can promote feelings of neglect. Variations by educational level further complicate timing; primary students value immediate praise, while higher education students prefer feedback that supports discussion (Glazzard & Stones, 2019). Delayed feedback reduces its relevance, hindering learning progress.

3) Mode of Feedback Delivery: The mode of feedback—verbal, written, or demonstrative—poses another challenge, as preferences vary across student groups. CWSN students often prefer written feedback to avoid public embarrassment, while non-CWSN students may favor verbal feedback for its immediacy (Sharma & Rositta, 2023). A study at the University of Muhammadiyah Purwokerto found that students in writing classes valued verbal feedback for its clarity and motivational impact (Widianingsih, 2019). However, time constraints and large class sizes limit teachers' ability to provide personalized feedback, exacerbating disparities in how feedback is received (Selvaraj et al., 2021).

4) Emotional Responses to Feedback: Emotional reactions to feedback further complicate delivery. Negative or vague feedback can evoke shame or frustration, particularly among CWSN students, who may internalize criticism (Taggart & Laughlin, 2017). In the Chennai study, 45.2% of students reported not receiving praise, with CWSN students receiving less positive feedback, potentially undermining motivation (Sharma & Rositta, 2023). Balancing constructive criticism with praise is essential but challenging in diverse classrooms where emotional sensitivities vary.

Implications for Feedback Practices in Inclusive Classrooms

The variations in student perceptions of teacher feedback, as highlighted by Sharma and Rositta (2022, 2023), have significant implications for educators in inclusive classrooms. These implications address the need for personalized feedback strategies to accommodate diverse learner needs, ensuring equitable and effective learning outcomes.

1) Personalized Feedback for Diverse Learners: Feedback must be customized to account for gender, educational level, and individual needs, particularly for Children with Special Needs (CWSN). Female students often perceive feedback more positively, receiving more praise, while CWSN students report less detailed feedback, which can hinder progress (Sharma & Rositta, 2023). Teachers should provide explicit, step-by-step guidance for CWSN and balance praise and criticism across all students to promote motivation (Brookhart, 2008).

2) Timely and Relevant Delivery: Timeliness is critical, yet only 50.5% of students in inclusive classrooms receive immediate feedback (Sharma & Rositta, 2023). Delayed feedback reduces its impact, especially for CWSN students who need prompt reinforcement. Teachers must prioritize delivering feedback while students are engaged with tasks, aligning with primary students' preference for immediate praise and higher education students' need for discussion (Glazzard & Stones, 2019).

3) Flexible Feedback Modes: Feedback mode preferences vary, with CWSN students favoring written feedback to avoid public discomfort, while others prefer verbal input for clarity (Sharma & Rositta, 2023; Widianingsih, 2019). Teachers should offer a mix of verbal and written feedback, using individual delivery for sensitive cases to enhance understanding and reduce emotional barriers.

4) Teacher Training and Awareness: Teachers need training to recognize perceptual variations and adapt feedback accordingly. Misalignment between teacher intentions and student interpretations, often due to vague or critical feedback, can lead to disengagement (Selvaraj et al., 2021). Professional development should focus on crafting clear, constructive feedback to bridge these gaps.

Recommendations for Effective Feedback Practices

To enhance feedback effectiveness in inclusive classrooms, teachers should consider the following strategies, informed by Brookhart (2008) and empirical findings:

- **Timeliness:** Deliver feedback while students are still engaged with the task to maximize its relevance and impact.

- **Clarity and Detail:** Provide step-by-step guidance on correcting errors, particularly for CWSN students who may require more explicit instructions.

- **Balance:** Ensure equitable distribution of praise and constructive criticism across genders and student categories to avoid discouragement.

- **Mode of Delivery:** Offer a mix of verbal and written feedback, with individual feedback preferred by CWSN students to address their specific needs.

- **Engagement:** Encourage dialogue about feedback to clarify misunderstandings and promote student self-learning.
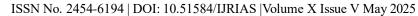
DISCUSSION

The findings from Sharma and Rositta (2022, 2023) highlight that student perceptions of teacher feedback in inclusive classrooms are shaped by gender, educational level, and individual needs, aligning with prior research (Carvalho et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2014). Female students exhibit more positive perceptions, often receiving clearer and more constructive feedback than male students, potentially due to greater academic engagement (Guo & Zhou, 2021; Huang, 2013). Non-CWSN students also perceive feedback more favorably than CWSN students, who report receiving less detailed and positive feedback, which may contribute to discouragement (Sharma & Rositta, 2023). This disparity highlights a critical gap in inclusive practices, as CWSN students require explicit, supportive feedback to succeed (Brookhart, 2008).

Educational level further influences perceptions; primary students value praise, while higher education students prefer interactive feedback (Glazzard & Stones, 2019). Timing and mode of delivery are key, yet challenges like delayed feedback and public delivery for CWSN students hinder effectiveness (Sharma & Rositta, 2023; Widianingsih, 2019). These findings suggest teachers must adapt feedback to diverse needs, ensuring clarity, timeliness, and emotional sensitivity. Future research should explore cultural and teacher training factors to enhance feedback practices in inclusive settings.

CONCLUSION

Teacher feedback is a vital tool for enhancing learning, but its success hinges on students' perceptions and acceptance. Variations in perception due to gender and educational level necessitate personalized feedback strategies in inclusive classrooms. By addressing challenges such as timing, clarity, and emotional impact,

teachers can promote a supportive learning environment that meets the needs of all students, including those with special needs. Future research should explore additional factors, such as cultural influences and teacher training, to further refine feedback practices in diverse educational settings.

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