

## Lecturers' perceptions on the student voice on quality in tourism higher education in Brazil

*Percepções de docentes sobre a voz dos estudantes em relação à qualidade no ensino superior em turismo no Brasil*

*Percepciones de docentes sobre la voz de los estudiantes con respecto a la calidad en la educación superior en turismo en Brasil*

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### Abstract

The importance of the student voice on education is offered and the peculiarities of the research on the topic in the context of quality in tourism higher education are addressed. An empirical study with Brazilian lecturers was conducted to verify their perceptions about the issue. Telephone interviews were carried out using a predefined framework and the results showed that lecturers are receptive to the idea of listening to the student voice. However, some of them demonstrated little awareness of what that really meant. Very few use a systematic and formal approach to listening to their students. Lecturers believe that is the institutions' responsibility, not theirs. However, lecturers' comments indicate that institutions do not make good use of the data collected through self-evaluations. As such, the student voice is often overlooked. In the very rare cases where action is taken based on the student voice, little effort is made to show students that their voices originated such actions.

**Keywords:** Student Voice. Quality in Tourism Higher Education. Lecturers' Perceptions. Brazil.

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## **Resumo**

*A importância da voz do estudante na educação é apresentada e as peculiaridades da pesquisa sobre o tema no contexto da qualidade do ensino superior de turismo são abordadas. Um estudo empírico com professores brasileiros foi conduzido para verificar as suas percepções sobre esta questão. Entrevistas telefônicas foram realizadas utilizando um quadro teórico pré-definido e os resultados mostraram que docentes são receptivos à ideia de ouvir a voz do estudante. No entanto, alguns deles demonstraram pouca consciência do que isso realmente significava. Muito poucos usam uma abordagem sistemática e formal para ouvir seus alunos. Professores acreditam que seja responsabilidade das instituições, não deles. Todavia, os comentários de docentes indicam que as instituições não fazem bom uso dos dados coletados por meio de auto-avaliações. Como tal, a voz do estudante é muitas vezes negligenciada. Em casos muito raros em que ações são empreendidas com base na voz do estudante, pouco esforço é feito para mostrar aos alunos que as suas vozes deram origem a tais ações.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Voz do Estudante. Qualidade na Educação Superior Turismo. Percepções de docentes. Brasil.*

## **Resumen**

*La importancia de la voz del estudiante en la educación se presenta y las peculiaridades de la investigación sobre el tema en el contexto de la calidad en la educación superior en turismo son tratadas. Un estudio empírico con profesores brasileños se llevó a cabo para verificar sus percepciones sobre el tema. Entrevistas telefónicas fueron realizadas utilizando un marco teórico predefinido y los resultados mostraron que los profesores son receptivos a la idea de escuchar la voz del estudiante. Sin embargo, algunos de ellos demostraron poco conocimiento de lo que eso realmente quiere decir. Muy pocos utilizan un enfoque sistemático y formal para escuchar a sus alumnos. Profesores creen que eso sea responsabilidad de las instituciones, no de ellos. Sin embargo, los comentarios de profesores indican que las instituciones no hacen un buen uso de los datos recogidos a través de auto-evaluaciones. Como tal, la voz del estudiante es a menudo renunciada. En casos muy raros en que acciones son tomadas a partir de la voz del estudiante, se hacen pocos esfuerzos para mostrar a los estudiantes que sus voces han dado lugar a tales acciones.*

**Palabras clave:** *Voz del Estudiante. Calidad en la Educación Superior de Turismo. Percepciones Docentes. Brasil.*

## **1. Introduction**

There have been waves of discussions about the concept of the student voice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century education literature (FIELDING, 2001). From the early work of Dewey in the 1930s



to much more recent publications on the topic, a great deal has been discussed and advocated by researchers. However, the student voice in tourism higher education has not been the focus of most researchers, who have concentrated their effort on the curriculum (TRIBE, 2002). The number of studies about this issue is very limited. A search on the topic has produced only four results (WICKENS; FORBES, 2005; WICKENS; FORBES; TRIBE, 2006; LEAL, 2010a; LEAL, 2010b). The first two texts present the results of an investigation on leisure and tourism first-year undergraduates' experiences in a British University College. The other two studies are the result of a doctoral investigation on the quality of tourism higher education in Brazil as perceived by the students.

The small number of investigations shows that much more research on students' voices in tourism in higher education is needed. The lack of publications means that there are several gaps to be fulfilled and research opportunities to be taken.

Given the above, the main aim of this investigation was to analyse Brazilian lecturers' standpoint on the debate about the student voice on quality in tourism higher education.

The text starts by presenting the importance of the student voice in higher education. Then, the specificities of the student voice on quality in tourism higher education are highlighted. After that, the methodology applied in the study is offered. Finally, the results are presented and discussed.

## **2. The Student Voice in Higher Education**

In his seminal work entitled *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1987) highlights the importance of the student voice in the context of adult primary education. He argues the oppressed are domesticated, resulting in the development of a false consciousness. This domestication takes place through what Freire (1987, p. 58) refers to as "banking education", an approach where "[...] 'knowledge' is a donation from those who consider themselves knowledgeable to those they consider to know nothing" (free translation). In such scenario, students are limited to receiving, memorising and repeating information, having their voices silenced. The author advocates an 'education for liberation', where students are perceived as

active subjects not only in the education process but also in society. As education takes place through dialogue, students are stimulated to voice their views.

Other education authors have also researched the topic, either in depth or transversally. Cook-Sather (2006), for example, working with young students, highlighted that, in order to achieve success, there was a need for cooperation and open dialogue between teachers and students. Biggs (2001) argued that interviewing students about the quality of their learning experiences would be beneficial, as they could identify what they see as best performances.

It is important to note that the concept of voice itself is not unanimous. Britzman (198 apud BROOKER; MACDONALD, 1999) highlights there are three main meanings to it: 1) the way the speech and perspectives of the speaker are represented; 2) the manner and qualities of the words being spoken, know as the ‘metaphorical’ meaning; and 3) the right to be heard and represented in society, know as the ‘political’ meaning. The third meaning is the one closer to discussion presented in this paper, as the focus here is on the students’ right to be heard and represented in their educational environment.

In order to evaluate the conditions for student voice, the framework developed by Fielding (2001) was adopted in this study. The framework is structured into nine clusters (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Framework for evaluating the conditions for student voice**

<b>Speaking</b>	Who is allowed to speak? Are all stakeholders able to express their views? Even if the students are allowed to speak, who are they allowed to speak to and what kind of language can they use?
<b>Listening</b>	Who is listening? Why are they listening? In whose interest are the students’ voices being heard?
<b>Skills</b>	Students need to be encouraged to develop the required skills to engage in a dialogue. Such skills should encourage democratic values, so that the students understand the value of their political voice.
<b>Attitudes &amp; Dispositions</b>	Issues related to power may shape the attitudes and dispositions of those listening to the student voice. Developments in the field of student voice tend to fail because, too often, teachers do not believe that the student voice really is important.



<b>Systems</b>	How do the systems defending the need for the student voice to be heard fit together with other organisational arrangements? “How often does dialogue and encounter in which student voice is centrally important occur?” (Fielding, 2001, p. 105).
<b>Organisational Culture</b>	The day-to-day routine and traditions of the organisation must support the expression of the student voice. Its importance must be a common practice, not just a periodical exercise aimed at improving performance.
<b>Spaces and the Making of Meaning</b>	The meanings the voice might have are key to the success of implementing a culture where the students are heard. Data are widely available at institutions at present. However, “much is only partially understood by those to whom it refers and is too often an impediment to furthering the very things it intends” (Fielding, 2001, p. 106).
<b>Action</b>	It is essential that action takes place through the student voice movement. New structures and new ways of relating to each other may be required.
<b>The Future</b>	Fielding (2001, p. 107) foresees two possible trends: 1) a conformist approach, where the teacher is limited to a pedagogic technician trying to attend the demands of the consumers (students) in a culture dominated by performance; or 2) what he calls “prefigurative practice, [... where] teachers and students are not confined by agendas set by governments or markets”.

Source: adapted from Fielding (2001)

The analysis of these nine dimensions, together, enables to build awareness to whether “[...] something genuinely new, exciting and emancipatory that builds on rich traditions of democratic renewal and transformation” is really emerging or if “[...] the further entrenchment of existing assumptions and intentions using student or pupil voice as an additional mechanism of control” is reigning, in the words of Fielding (2001, p. 100). However, it is noteworthy that the author recognises that it could be premature to say whether or not the present attention given to the student voice is the starting point to realising a transformation.

### 3. Methodology

In order to investigate the perceptions of lecturers about the student voice on quality in tourism higher education, telephone interviews were conducted with ten lecturers from five

Brazilian institutions. They were chosen at the researchers' discretion and to represent as most far as possible the types of public and private tertiary-level institutions (faculties, integrated faculties, university centres and universities) offering tourism education in different regions of Brazil. As a result, institutions with the following characteristics were selected:

**Table 2: Sample characterisation**

	<i>Public or private</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Region</i>
<b>Institution 1</b>	Private	University	Northeast
<b>Institution 2</b>	Private	Integrated faculty	Northeast
<b>Institution 3</b>	Public	University	South
<b>Institution 4</b>	Private	University centre	Southeast
<b>Institution 5</b>	Public	University	Southeast

The main reason for choosing telephone interviews as the instrument for data collection was that the nature of the research, and its methodological approach, required an instrument capable of allowing researcher/researched interaction and of producing qualitative data (LINCOLN; GUBA, 2000). The geographical distance between the three Brazilian regions where the institutions investigated are located made face-to-face interviews not viable in terms of costs.

Telephone interviews are similar to face-to-face interviews, i.e., “[...] an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest [...]” (COHEN *et al.*, 2000, p. 267). The main advantages of conducting interviews over the phone include low cost and speed of return, especially because the interviews are made synchronously (FONTANA; FREY, 2005). As researcher and participant engage in a conversation, there is no need to send questions for later return. On the other hand, there is no possibility of face-to-face interaction. As Fontana



and Frey (2005) comment, it is extremely difficult to establish a relationship between interviewer and interviewee while gathering information.

The data from the interviews are analysed and presented in categories. Such categories were brought forward from Fielding's (2001) framework. The data from the telephone interviews are presented following the same structure used to conduct them, comprised of the first eight clusters presented by Fielding (2001). The last one, about the future, was not investigated because it did not relate to what was being researched.

#### **4. Lecturers' Perceptions on the Debate about the Student Voice on Quality in Tourism Higher Education in Brazil**

The perceptions of the lecturers are presented in the light of Fielding's (2001) framework. An analysis and several verbatim quotes from what the lecturers had to say about the student voice debate are offered.

#### **5. Speaking and Listening**

Lecturers were asked if they were used to listening to the student voice and, if so, how they did it. Overall, they showed a predisposition to listening to the student voice. However, some limitations were evident in their speech, as will be discussed.

For most of the respondents, the practice of listening to the student voice seems to be restricted to the physical environment of the classroom.

As the institution already has a formal written evaluation, I believe the time in the classroom is a time for more informal conversations.

During my classes, I am very open to their comments. Not only I ask them about how things are going but let them speak about anything they feel is important.

Although I have time to meet students in my office, I tend to hear their voices in the classroom much more frequently.

Most participants commented that they only used an informal approach to doing:



I do listen to the students regularly [...] I do it in a more informal way.  
It's informal... always informal.

This informal approach may be considered either positive, when it allows students to use their own language and express their opinions, or negative, when students take it for granted and do not perceive that it is an opportunity to voice their views.

Occasionally, teachers complemented the informal approach with a more formal, but not systematic, written comment from the students. The combination of informal and formal ways of listening to the students is represented in the quotes below:

I like having students to write what we call a “one-minute paper” after the end of some classes. I ask them to write in one line: What was the most important issue discussed today? What was the biggest doubt you had? Do you have any suggestion on how the class could be different?

After the first few classes, I ask them to write on a piece of paper three positive and three negative things about the class

I always try to hear what students have to say during the class through informal conversation, but in written form at the beginning and the end of the class as well

Although trying to appear receptive to the student voice debate and stating that they listen to the students, one lecturer revealed an authoritarian approach to teaching and also a conception of student as an empty repository where content can be deposited, such as Freire (1987) criticises.

I believe the teacher has the knowledge about the content of the subject and the students can't have a say about that, but I ask them if they understand what I'm saying and if they are happy with the way the classes go

Developments in the field of student voice tend to fail because, as Fielding (2001) pointed, teachers, very often, do not believe that the student voice really is relevant. As indicated in the speech below, the validity of listening to students is called into question.

I try to listen to them, but sometimes I wonder if it's worth... we change things, but the students do everything as they want

In short, lecturers tend to listen to the student voice in an informal and non-systematic way, not providing a forum for the student voice to be heard on a regular basis. Some lecturers, unintentionally or not, use their position in the classroom to impose their views.

## 6. Skills

Lecturers were asked to comment on what they considered essential skills for students to engage in a debate on quality in higher education. The following quotes show some of their responses:

Skills? I don't know... maybe critical ability, knowledge of the industry...

They have to have the ability to critically analyse things and reflect on their experiences

Culturally, I believe teenagers tend not to read much, especially about what is going on in the world, and that is important if they are to discuss anything critically

Undoubtedly, the most commented skill was the ability to critically read, understand, speak and write, which interviewees believe students lack because of the low-quality pre-university level education they had before.

They sometimes lack the basic abilities to understand things and that is a problem caused by their previous education, not by the institution

The basic abilities to critically read and understand as well as to express themselves in written form are essential to engage in a debate about quality in education and they often lack these because of the poor basic education they had

According to the lecturers, students have to understand the systems and structures that shape up their education experiences, they have to understand the role of each stakeholder, so that they can better criticise the teacher and institution and provide suggestions for improvement.



They have to know what education should be about

They need to understand what is expected from them and what to expect from us

Sometimes students don't take into consideration everything that's involved in giving a class... all the preparation.... assessment... the rules we have to follow... those who know the structure a bit better are more likely to make proper complaints and requests

They have to understand what their role in the university is, especially because they are in a public institution and all tax payers are paying for their studies. If they can't understand that they are being paid to be there, how can they demand anything about the quality of their programme?

The lecturers argued that, because of how broad tourism is as a subject area, students are not completely sure about what to expect from their education and from their future career.

We get students that are not sure if they want to study tourism... they come thinking they will travel, have fun...

They need to have a holistic view of the programme and the relationship the subjects have with each other

The student has to be interested in the programme... has to be mature... has to be frustration-resistant – and I explain – they want to get to the top of their career very quickly, they want to get lots of money without much work, they don't want to study

Overall, lecturers believe the students should have better critical skills for engaging in a debate on quality in tourism higher education. Such skills should come from previous education, from a better understanding of the structures of the education system and from the recognition of how complex tourism as a subject area is.

## **7. Attitudes and Dispositions**

Interviewees were asked about the importance of listening to the student voice and how they deal with students' complaints, compliments, requests, comments, etc. All lecturers gave different reasons to support their initial views that listening to the student voice is important.



Listening to the student voice is indispensable, especially because we can better identify what their difficulties are

It's important because it can help assess the quality of the lecturer

It's important because you're dealing with your public, so it's important to take their viewpoint into consideration

Every time they stop to think in order to voice their views they are developing their critical and reflexive abilities, which is very important. So, I think it's essential that we give them this opportunity

Some lecturers argued that the idea of listening to the student voice unrestrictedly may not be so positive. Although they feel it is important to listen to the student voice, it is also important to consider other factors.

I think we have to listen... and some of their demands have some fundamentals... but I try to hear the two sides of the story

It's important to attend to their requests, but rules, regulations and common sense have to come first

The views of the lecturers affiliated to private institutions were somewhat different from those of lecturers working in public institutions. The ones in private institutions were often less receptive to the idea of attending to the students unrestrictedly, as shown in the following quotes:

As a teacher in a private institution, several issues have to be taken into consideration... for example... some students' immaturity... they see the teacher as an employee of theirs that has to attend to all of their demands

In private institutions, you commonly see teachers in the hands of the students... students think they can do anything because they are paying for fees

It is essential to listen to students, especially at a private institution, where students are also customers... but, sometimes, their interests as customers clash with the aims of the programme

In contrast, a lecturer affiliated to a public institution highlighted that the student voice should be treated more seriously by the institution.



I believe it is fundamental to hear what students have to say, but the institution – as a public one – doesn't always analyse the data as it should

Overall, lecturers are receptive to the idea of the students expressing their views in their voices. However, especially in the view of those working in private institutions, those voices cannot be heard unrestrictedly.

## 8. Systems

All institutions have some kind of formal instruments for self-evaluation. However, these instruments do not necessarily allow the student voice to be heard, as most are quantitative in nature and developed by “experts”, i.e., a group of teachers/researchers, with no collaboration from other stakeholders. Some examples of the existing systems are described below:

The evaluation takes place through an internet-based questionnaire. An internal marketing campaign through teachers aims at getting the highest possible number of students to give their views on several aspects of their experience

The institutional evaluation takes place with academic and non-academic staff and students... It is available on the intranet for a week and the institution's self-evaluation commission is responsible for it, from development to analysis...

There is a written questionnaire including both objective and subject questions [...] it encompasses issues varying from infrastructure – labs, library, etc – to teachers

The questionnaire is mostly quantitative and tries to encompass both the infra-structure aspects and the pedagogical issues

Most questions are objective, but, in the end of the questionnaire, there is always an open-ended question

Once a year, students take part at the institutional evaluation, which is highly quantitative

Some interviewees were critical about the current systems, especially with regards to the circulation of the results and the lack of debates about them with the academic staff.



There is a formal structure in the institution that changes almost every year... I don't even know why... some years students are asked to fill in questionnaires... sometimes teachers have access to their responses, sometimes not

The institution organises formal evaluations, but sometimes the teachers are not even aware of the results

There are only rare cases where students have the opportunity to express their views in their own words. Such situations are demonstrated in quotes below:

Teachers' evaluation is made through qualitative questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the academic semester

A nice thing is the "Talk to the Vice Chancellor" section on the institution's website, where the students can send their views on any issue they want

In general, there are institutional instruments that allow the students to offer their views on both academic and non-academic issues. However, such systems are sometimes a mere response to legal requirements. In most cases, the results of the evaluations are not worked clearly and little do the students and teachers know about what is made of them.

## 9. Organisational Culture

According to the lecturers, all institutions have tools for communicating their achievements. However, these are generally aimed at the promotion of the institution among the general public, not a specific instrument/system for sharing the achievement with the stakeholders of the organisation.

All institutional achievements are advertised by the communications' sector in the format of a newsletter, which is accessible to all students. Besides that, there is a one minute news bulletin that is aired on TV that promotes the institution's achievements

The institution's achievements are promulgated among members of the academic community, including the students, but I think it could receive a greater attention



There is a tradition of communicating the achievements... for example... an increase in the number of students, number of awards... these are always publicised through the institution's newsletter

Some interviewees believe the institutions should be more concerned with sharing achievement directly with the students, not only promoting them with society.

We often hear students saying that a friend from another institution commented on something our institution offers and our students aren't aware... there should be a stronger internal marketing

We try [to share achievements]... to be fair, I'm not sure we're successful though

Some colleagues and I try to show the achievements of a student to the others... if a student is successful in the work placement in a big company or somewhere out of the state or the country, I think we have to share that with the others

According to the lecturers, institutions normally fail in sharing their achievements with the students. However, students have to feel that they are an important piece for the institutional achievements in order to value the habit of voicing their views within the institution.

## 10. Spaces and the Making of Meaning

Lecturers were asked to explain how they and their institutions interpreted what the students said. Speaking of how to distinguish between pertinent and irrelevant comments and criticism, the lecturers said they use their experience and the extent to which they know the student voicing their views.

It's hard to know what is pertinent and what isn't, but I try to take into consideration the student's academic history as a basis for listening to what they are saying

I hear what they have to say and try to compare to what takes place in the classroom through observation

Throughout the years, I learned to first listen to what they say, then confirm what I understood and finally try to find out if that was what they really wanted to say... because sometimes they say one thing meaning another



It's a day-by-day thing, so we know the way they speak, the way they look... these subjective things... posture, gesture... this emotional side and the everyday things

Interestingly, some lecturers are not aware of what listening to the student voice really means, as their own viewpoint is used to establish what they think is relevant and what is not. In doing so, they end up filtering the voices of the students.

Obviously, we sometimes have to filter what they say... there are things we can't change. But when it can be changed, we try...

I filter what they say based on what I already know about them

In relation to their institutions' approach to interpreting the data collected through evaluation instruments, most lecturers are not aware of how the process takes place.

I know they are taking the students' views very seriously at an institutional level, but how they do it I don't know

Institutions tend to run statistical tests with the data and present the results to the staff without a major interpretation of what they really mean.

At an institutional level, the students choose a grade in a scale and afterwards descriptive statistics are run and the results forwarded to the head of programme, who discusses them with teachers

The results from the closed questions in the questionnaire are presented in graphs and the teacher's evaluation is offered to each teacher

An important initiative is being taken by one institution, which is discussing the preliminary results with students. Another successful initiative was the creation of a students' commission to improve the instrument at another institution.

After the data from the [institutional evaluation] questionnaire are analysed, a teacher presents the results to the students in order to validate their views



The institution has noticed that some of the questions in the questionnaire do not offer the students the opportunity to really evaluate the institution. For that reason, they have created a students' commission to evaluate the questionnaire and suggest amendments

Making sense of the students' voices is a big challenge for both lecturers and institutions. It is difficult for lecturers because of the lack of a systematic way of listening to the students. Institutions, on the other hand, prefer to run descriptive statistics rather than to make a deeper analysis of the student voice, as their systems concentrate on quantitative measures. When more open-ended questions and/or instruments are used, the access to the results is not easy.

## 11. Action

Initially, lecturers were asked to explain what was made of the student voice both in their classes and at an institutional level. Then, they were asked to provide examples of actions that took place based on what students had to say. Finally, they were asked if the students were informed of such actions.

One lecturer commented on how the Pro-Vice Chancellor of their institution dealt with the student voice in a first instance.

In a staff meeting, the Pro-Vice Chancellor mentioned that a student that had sent a message was invited to give more detailed information, so that actions could be taken

Several examples of actions at the institutional/programme level were provided.

Based on the institutional evaluation, changes have happened to the infrastructure, to events... new projects were developed... the quality of service provided to students and parents was improved... that is to say that, whenever possible, students' requests are heard and acted on

In relation to the infrastructure, everything the students complained about the institution tried to solve the problem as soon as possible

We had a selection process for volunteers for specific community projects and a student criticised the process and we noticed it really wasn't the best way of selecting students and changed that



One of the groups wanted to organise an event as part of their assessment in the events subject, but they didn't have the knowledge about cost management, marketing, etc at the time to host a conference or something like that, so they didn't organise it. They complained a lot about it and now, a year later, they have the skills to do it and we are planning an event for the end of the semester

A group on F&B management came to us saying that the management issues were being treated too conceptually and that they wanted a more practical approach. We changed the content of the programme to include issues on entrepreneurship and other tools

Likewise, lecturers offered examples of how they made changes to their classes based on what the students had to say.

One thing that I have changed based on what students had to say about my subject was in relation to assessment. I now have far less written exams than before

I used too many PowerPoint slides and the group complained. I changed that and told them that it was a request of theirs

When I return their exams, I ask them to single out the points where they think the assessment was not fair and talk to them afterwards... eventually, I make changes to the marks if they can convince me

In relation to the institutional feedback on actions based on the student voice, most lecturers were critical about how their institutions handled the subject.

There's no attention to feeding back students with what actions took place based on their views... this could be better

The institution, as a public one, is not much business oriented... they are not very worried about showing students the changes that have happened

The institution doesn't give students any feedback on actions. For instance, the students complained about the number of books in the library, the institution purchased more books and put them in the library. Students noticed that, but weren't informed about it

Some interviewees, on the other hand, highlighted that some progress was taking place in this respect.



The increasing number of people taking part in the institutional evaluation, I think, can be attributed to the fact that students see change happening after they voice their views

At the departmental level, we try to respond to the students in the plenary meetings, where the complaints were first put to us

When actions are taken, the director reports to the plenary meeting, where student reps are present. As such, they are aware of the actions taken in response to their requests

Most lecturers reported that they let students know about what actions were taken in their classes and why.

The students are not always aware that changes have happened, but I try to show them what has changed and why it's changed

In my class, when students make a complaint and I feel it deserves an action, I try to tell them what I have done in response to their requests

As soon as I identify a problem and a solution to that problem, I try to let them know that their voice was heard and the problem solved

Institutions state that action is taken in response to students' voices. However, most of them fail to show the students that their voice is being heard and acted on. This is a missed opportunity, as students' participation could become more significant if they felt they are an important stakeholder to the institutions' success. Lecturers say they take this opportunity and not only act on the student voice but also show them how their voices triggered the changes.

## 12. Conclusions

The data, in the light of Fielding's (2001) framework, showed that, on the whole, lecturers demonstrated a positive attitude towards the student voice debate. In their opinion, it is important to allow students to voice their views on any issue related to their educational experience. Nevertheless, some showed little awareness of what listening to the student voice really means. They use their position of authority in the classroom to listen to what they feel is important, not giving the students the opportunity to express their view on any issue they consider important.



Although all institutions have formal systems for listening to the students' opinions, most are highly structured and quantitative, leaving little space to the student voice to be heard. Lecturers stated they do not have a systematic way of listening to the students, even though they do it informally. In doing so, they believe the students are given the chance to voice their views much better than through the formal avenues. Examples of actions taken by the teachers and/or their institutions based on the student voice were presented, showing that the practice of listening to the student voice is becoming more than a rhetorical one.

This paper was not aimed at discussing all the issues related to the student voice debate. On the contrary, it was intended to stimulate new discussions on the topic among academics. By presenting a small empirical study, it is expected that other researchers will become more interested in and aware of the student voice.

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