

From Feedback to Partnership: Enhancing Student Voice in Higher Education Quality Processes

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Abstract

Student participation is increasingly recognized as a key component of quality assurance and institutional development in higher education. Nevertheless, student involvement often remains confined to consultation mechanisms, satisfaction surveys, and formal representation structures, limiting its potential contribution to educational improvement. This paper explores how student voice can evolve from a consultative function into a more active form of partnership that supports quality enhancement and institutional learning. Drawing on a qualitative analysis of policy documents, quality assurance frameworks, and international literature, the study examines the Italian higher education experience and discusses it in relation to participatory approaches developed within European peer-review practices. The analysis focuses on the conditions that enable meaningful student engagement in quality processes, moving beyond representation towards shared responsibility for improvement. Findings suggest that effective participation depends less on the existence of formal representative bodies than on the quality of engagement mechanisms that connect students to decision-making and institutional learning. Access to evidence, targeted training, continuity of participation, transparent feedback mechanisms, and visible follow-up actions emerge as key factors in transforming student voice into a driver of educational quality. The paper argues that higher education institutions can strengthen innovation, inclusion, and continuous improvement by adopting more collaborative and partnership-based approaches to student participation. In this perspective, student voice becomes not only a source of feedback but also a strategic resource for enhancing educational quality and fostering a stronger culture of institutional learning.

Keywords: institutional learning; learner engagement; participatory governance; quality culture; student voice.