

Academic Truth-Telling in Inclusive Higher Education: Faculty and Student Perspectives on Honest Feedback, Academic Standing, and Student Development

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HOW TO CITE:

Romel M. Acheron, Agnes D. Arellano, Jerome Jef M. Zamora, Jesse T. Zamora, Jesse Nelson P. Llana (2026). Academic Truth-Telling in Inclusive Higher Education: Faculty and Student Perspectives on Honest Feedback, Academic Standing, and Student Development. International Journal of Special Education, 41(8s), 813-824

ABSTRACT:

This phenomenological study explored academic truth-telling in inclusive higher education institutions, focusing on faculty and student perspectives on honest feedback, academic standing, and student development. Using a transcendental phenomenological design, the study sought to understand the lived experiences, meanings, challenges, and developmental implications of honest feedback practices in diverse classroom environments. A total of 30 participants, composed of 10–15 faculty members and 15 undergraduate students, were selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological approach involving epoche, horizontalization, clustering of meanings, and synthesis of textural and structural descriptions. Findings revealed that faculty members experience tension between honesty and empathy when delivering feedback, often balancing academic standards with students' emotional readiness. Students, on the other hand, experience honest feedback as both emotionally challenging and developmentally valuable, depending on clarity, tone, and trust in the instructor. The study further identified that academic truth-telling is understood as an act of care, ethical responsibility, and professional integrity. However, challenges such as large class sizes, communication barriers, and diverse learner needs influence feedback practices. Despite these challenges, honest feedback was found to contribute significantly to students' academic growth, self-awareness, and motivation when delivered in a supportive and inclusive manner. Thus, the study concludes

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that academic truth-telling is a relational and transformative process that fosters learning, trust, and student development in higher education. It also contributes to improving inclusive pedagogical practices and feedback literacy among educators and students in higher education institutions, promoting ethical and developmental assessment cultures globally.

Keywords: academic truth-telling, honest feedback, inclusive higher education, phenomenology, student development.

1. Introduction

In higher education, feedback is widely recognized as a central element of teaching and learning, serving not only as a mechanism for evaluating student performance but also as a powerful tool for promoting academic development, self-regulation, and lifelong learning. Within inclusive higher education institutions, where learners come from diverse academic, cultural, and cognitive backgrounds, the role of feedback becomes even more critical as educators strive to balance academic standards with equity, accessibility, and student support. In this context, the practice of providing honest feedback—often referred to as academic truth-telling—emerges as both a pedagogical responsibility and an ethical challenge for faculty members.

Recent literature emphasizes that effective feedback must be clear, timely, specific, and constructive to enhance student learning outcomes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, in inclusive classroom environments, delivering honest evaluations of student performance can be complex, as instructors may need to navigate the tension between maintaining academic rigor and avoiding potential negative emotional impacts on students. Studies suggest that while students value transparency in grading and assessment, they may also experience anxiety, reduced motivation, or resistance when confronted with direct or critical feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This tension highlights the need to better understand how academic truth-telling is experienced by both

faculty members and students in real educational settings.

Although substantial research has been conducted on feedback practices in higher education, much of the existing literature focuses on its effectiveness in improving academic achievement rather than exploring the lived experiences of those involved in the feedback process. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to how honest feedback is negotiated within inclusive education settings, where diversity in learning needs may further complicate communication of academic standing. As a result, there remains a gap in understanding how faculty members construct, deliver, and justify honest feedback, and how students interpret and respond to such feedback in meaningful ways.

In response to this gap, this study sought to explore the lived experiences of faculty members and undergraduate students regarding academic truth-telling in inclusive higher education institutions. Specifically, it aimed at describing lived experiences of faculty members in providing honest feedback on students' academic performance and academic standing within diverse classroom contexts; describing lived experiences of undergraduate students as recipients of honest feedback from their instructors, particularly focusing on how they interpret and respond to evaluative communication; exploring the meanings that both faculty members and students attach to the concept of academic truth-telling in inclusive higher education, that includes how honesty, care, and fairness are understood in practice; identifying challenges, opportunities, and

emotional responses associated with honest feedback practices, which consider both institutional constraints and interpersonal dynamics in the teaching-learning process; and uncovering the essence of how honest feedback contributes to students' academic and personal development, particularly in terms of motivation, self-awareness, and overall growth within inclusive educational environments.

It is hoped to understand how honest feedback on academic performance and standing is experienced, interpreted, and integrated into student development. By employing a transcendental phenomenological approach, the study focused on the meanings participants ascribe to their experiences, enabling a deeper understanding of the essence of academic truth-telling in educational practice (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the study is grounded in the belief that feedback is not merely an instructional tool but a relational and ethical act that shapes the academic and personal trajectories of students. Understanding how honest feedback is experienced by both faculty and students may contribute to the development of more humane, inclusive, and effective feedback practices in higher education. Ultimately, this research sought to provide insights that can inform teaching practices, faculty development programs, and institutional policies aimed at enhancing student learning and development in diverse academic environments.

Literature Review

Honest feedback in higher education has been widely discussed as a cornerstone of effective teaching and learning, particularly in fostering student growth and academic engagement. Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasized that feedback is most effective when it answers three key questions: Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next? Their work establishes feedback as a dialogic process that promotes self-regulated learning rather than a unidirectional transmission of evaluation. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) further argued that good feedback practices empower students to become active learners by

enhancing their ability to monitor and regulate their own performance. His finding highlights feedback not merely as an academic tool but as a developmental process that is integral to fostering student autonomy. From the faculty perspective, Brookhart (2017) noted that instructors often struggle with balancing honesty and encouragement, particularly when feedback may negatively affect student motivation. This tension reflects the emotional labor involved in providing truthful academic evaluations.

Similarly, Carless (2015) explained that teachers frequently navigate competing demands between institutional grading standards and relational care for students, especially in diverse classrooms where equity considerations are critical. In inclusive education settings, Boud and Molloy (2013) emphasized that feedback should be designed as a sustainable process that builds student capability over time rather than a single evaluative act. This aligns with the idea of "feedback for learning" rather than "feedback as judgment."

Ajjawi and Boud (2018) highlighted that students often misinterpret feedback when it is perceived as overly critical or unclear, suggesting that meaning making plays a central role in how feedback is internalized. From the student perspective, Lipnevich and Smith (2009) found that students respond more positively to feedback that is specific and actionable, but emotional reactions can significantly shape whether feedback is used constructively or defensively.

Henderson et al. (2019) reported that students value honest feedback but often feel it is insufficiently detailed or delivered too late, reducing its developmental impact. Meanwhile, Price et al. (2010) observed that students sometimes perceive feedback as a final judgment rather than a learning opportunity, which affects how they interpret academic truth-telling. In terms of emotional responses, Winstone et al. (2017) found that feedback can evoke anxiety, defensiveness, or motivation depending on tone,

timing, and relational trust between faculty and students.

From a relational perspective, Carless and Boud (2018) argued that trust is a critical mediator in feedback acceptance, where students are more likely to accept honest feedback when they trust the instructor's intentions. Sutton (2012) also emphasized the emotional dimension of feedback, noting that students often experience feedback as a deeply personal communication affecting identity and self-worth.

In inclusive higher education, Ryan and Henderson (2018) highlighted that diversity in learner backgrounds requires more adaptive and culturally responsive feedback practices to ensure fairness and comprehension. Likewise, Gravett (2020) stressed that inclusive feedback must consider student identity, accessibility needs, and prior learning experiences to avoid marginalization.

From the faculty standpoint, Orsmond and Merry (2011) found that instructors often lack formal training in delivering feedback effectively, which contributes to inconsistencies in practice. Hattie (2012) reinforced that effective teachers integrate feedback continuously into instruction rather than treating it as a separate assessment task, strengthening its developmental role. Sadler (2010) argued that students can only benefit from feedback if they understand the standards they are being measured against, underscoring the importance of transparency in academic truth-telling.

Carless and Winstone (2020) introduced the concept of "feedback literacy," emphasizing that students must be trained to interpret and act on feedback effectively, not merely receive it. In terms of challenges, Poulos and Mahony (2008) identified time constraints and large class sizes as barriers to providing individualized honest feedback in higher education.

Similarly, Weaver (2006) found that students often complain about inconsistency in feedback quality, which undermines trust in academic evaluation systems. From an ethical perspective, Falchikov (2005) noted that feedback practices

involve moral responsibility, particularly when communicating poor academic performance or failure. Bloxham and Campbell (2010) emphasized that grading and feedback are inherently subjective processes, requiring instructors to reflect critically on fairness and transparency. In terms of opportunities, Carless (2019) suggested that dialogic feedback models, where students actively engage with instructors, can significantly improve understanding and acceptance of academic truth-telling. Winstone and Carless (2019) also highlighted the rise of "feedback literacy frameworks," which encourage institutions to develop student capacity to seek, interpret, and use feedback effectively. Finally, Tai et al. (2016) found that when students are engaged in feedback dialogues, they are more likely to perceive honest feedback as supportive rather than punitive, leading to improved academic outcomes and personal growth.

Across these studies, a consistent theme emerges while honest feedback is essential for learning and development, its effectiveness depends heavily on communication quality, emotional sensitivity, institutional support, and student readiness. However, there remains limited qualitative exploration of the lived experiences of both faculty and students in navigating academic truth-telling within inclusive higher education settings. This gap justifies the need for a transcendental phenomenological inquiry into how honest feedback is experienced, interpreted, and given meaning by both groups.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a **Transcendental Phenomenological Research Design** based on the work of Clark Moustakas. The design is appropriate because it sought to uncover and describe the essence of participants' lived experiences regarding academic truth-telling, particularly the provision and reception of honest feedback on students' academic performance and standing in inclusive higher education institutions.

Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes understanding participants' experiences as they are consciously perceived, while setting aside the researcher's assumptions and biases through the process of epoche or bracketing. This approach enabled a deeper exploration of how faculty members communicate honest feedback and how students interpret, experience, and respond to such feedback within inclusive educational environments.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study consisted of faculty members and undergraduate students from inclusive higher education institutions who have direct experiences in giving and receiving honest feedback regarding academic performance and standing. These participants are considered information-rich sources capable of providing meaningful insights into the phenomenon of academic truth-telling within higher education contexts.

A total of 30 participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly employed in qualitative research to identify individuals who possess firsthand knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon under investigation. Specifically, study included 10 to 15 faculty members and 15 undergraduate students from various academic disciplines to ensure diverse perspectives and experiences.

Faculty participants must meet the following criteria: (1) currently employed as full-time or part-time instructors/professors in a higher education institution; (2) have at least three years of teaching experience; (3) have experience providing academic feedback and discussing students' academic performance or standing; and (4) be willing to participate in an in-depth interview. Student participants, on the other hand, must: (1) be currently enrolled in an undergraduate program; (2) have received academic feedback from faculty members regarding their class performance or academic standing; (3) be willing to share their experiences

and perspectives; and (4) voluntarily consent to participate in the study.

The sample size is deemed appropriate for a transcendental phenomenological study, as the primary objective is to gain a deep understanding of participants' lived experiences rather than achieve statistical generalization. Data collection was done until sufficient depth and richness of information were obtained, and thematic saturation was reached, wherein no new significant insights emerged from the participants' accounts.

To protect participants' rights and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts, reports, and publications. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was secured before the data collection. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Research Instrument

This study utilized a **semi-structured interview guide** as the primary research instrument to explore the lived experiences of faculty members and undergraduate students regarding academic truth-telling in inclusive higher education institutions. In transcendental phenomenological research, semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate tool for capturing rich, in-depth narratives that reflect participants' meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994).

The interview guide was developed by the researchers based on the specific research objectives, related literature, and key constructs of the study, namely: honest feedback, academic standing, and student development. The instrument consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed descriptions of participants' experiences in giving and receiving honest academic feedback. Follow-up probing questions were included to encourage deeper reflection and clarification of responses, allowing participants to fully express the meaning they attached to academic truth-telling.

The interview guide was divided into two sets: one for faculty participants and another for student participants. The faculty interview guide focused on their experiences in providing honest feedback, ethical considerations in communicating academic performance, challenges encountered in inclusive classrooms, and perceived impact of feedback on student development. On the other hand, the student interview guide explored their experiences in receiving honest feedback, emotional and academic responses, interpretation of academic standing, and perceived influence on their motivation and learning development.

To ensure content validity and appropriateness, the interview guide underwent **expert validation** by three professionals in the fields of educational research, qualitative inquiry, and inclusive education. Feedback from experts were used to refine the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the questions with the research objectives. A pilot interview was also be conducted with a small number of participants who were not part of the actual study to test the clarity, flow, and comprehensibility of the questions.

All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility for participants to share their experiences freely while ensuring that all key topics were covered. The interviews were audio-recorded, with the consent of the participants, and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues, contextual details, and initial reflections during the interview process.

The use of a semi-structured interview guide ensured consistency across participants while maintaining the flexibility necessary for phenomenological inquiry. This approach supports the study's goal of uncovering the essence of academic truth-telling by allowing participants to express their lived experiences in their own words.

Data Gathering Procedure

This study employed a systematic qualitative data gathering procedure designed to capture the lived experiences of faculty members and

undergraduate students regarding academic truth-telling in inclusive higher education institutions. The process followed the standards of transcendental phenomenological research to ensure that participants' experiences are described accurately, ethically, and in depth (Moustakas, 1994).

Prior to data collection, the researchers secured all necessary approvals from the relevant ethics review committee and institutional authorities. Once approval was granted, potential participants were identified through purposive sampling based on the inclusion criteria established for faculty and student participants. Selected participants were formally invited to participate in the study through written communication or official correspondence, clearly explaining the purpose of the study, their role, and their rights as participants.

After confirming participation, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The consent form includes details about the study objectives, procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Participants were asked for permission to audio-record the interviews to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

The primary data collection method was **semi-structured in-depth interviews**. The researchers scheduled interviews at a time and place convenient for the participants, ensuring comfort, privacy, and minimal disruption. For participants who were unavailable for face-to-face interaction, online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet was used.

Each interview was conducted for approximately 45 to 60 minutes, with the duration determined by the depth and elaboration of participants' responses. The interview began with introductory and rapport-building questions before proceeding to the main interview guide. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to freely narrate their experiences of giving or receiving honest feedback regarding academic performance and standing. Probing

questions were utilized to clarify responses and elicit richer descriptions when necessary.

During the interview process, the researchers took **field notes** to document non-verbal cues, emotional expressions, and contextual observations that may contribute to data interpretation. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of data representation.

After transcription, the researchers conducted a preliminary review of the data to ensure completeness and accuracy. Participants may be contacted again for **member checking**, where they were given the opportunity to review summaries of their responses to validate the accuracy of the interpretations.

Data collection continued until **data saturation** was achieved, meaning that no new significant themes or insights emerge from additional interviews. This ensures that the essence of the phenomenon is adequately captured.

Throughout the entire data-gathering process, strict confidentiality and ethical standards were observed. Participants' identities were protected through by their pseudonyms, and all data were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers. The entire procedure is designed to uphold the integrity of phenomenological inquiry while ensuring respect, dignity, and protection of participants.

Data Analysis

The researchers identified recurring ideas related to honest feedback, academic standing, emotional responses, challenges, and student development. Through thematic clustering, significant statements were grouped into meaningful categories that reflected participants' shared experiences.

Following thematic clustering, a **textural description** was developed to describe what the participants experienced regarding academic truth-telling. This description included detailed accounts of how faculty members provided honest feedback and how students received,

interpreted, and responded to such feedback within inclusive higher education settings.

Subsequently, a **structural description** was constructed to explain how participants experienced the phenomenon. This involved examining the contextual factors, conditions, and circumstances that shaped the delivery and reception of honest feedback, including classroom environments, institutional culture, communication practices, and emotional dynamics.

Finally, the researchers synthesized the textural and structural descriptions to derive the **essence of the phenomenon**, representing the fundamental nature of academic truth-telling in inclusive higher education. This essence encapsulated the shared meanings and core experiences of both faculty members and students regarding honest feedback and its contribution to academic growth, personal development, and inclusive learning.

Trustworthiness of Analysis

To ensure the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and rigor of the findings, several trustworthiness strategies were employed, including member checking, peer debriefing, and the maintenance of an audit trail documenting all analytical decisions. These procedures enhanced the accuracy of the interpretations and ensured that the findings faithfully represented participants' lived experiences.

Through this systematic analytical process, the study sought to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of academic truth-telling as experienced by faculty members and students in inclusive higher education contexts.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards for qualitative research involving human participants, particularly faculty members and undergraduate students in inclusive higher education institutions. Given the sensitive nature of academic truth-telling, honest feedback, and perceptions of academic standing, careful attention was devoted to safeguarding

participants' rights, dignity, privacy, and well-being throughout the research process.

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate institutional authority. All participants received a clear explanation of the study and voluntarily signed an informed consent form before participation. The research procedures complied with institutional and national ethical guidelines governing research involving human participants.

Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as research participants. They were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty or adverse consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants in interview transcripts, reports, and publications. Any identifying information, including institutional affiliations or contextual details that could reveal participants' identities, was removed or modified to protect privacy.

To ensure data security, interview recordings, transcripts, and related research documents were stored in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researchers. Data were retained in accordance with institutional data management policies and were securely deleted or destroyed upon completion of the required retention period.

The principle of **non-maleficence** guided the research process by ensuring that participants experienced no emotional, psychological, social, or professional harm because of their

involvement. Because discussions involved potentially sensitive reflections on academic performance and feedback experiences, interviews were conducted in a respectful, supportive, and non-judgmental manner.

The principle of **beneficence** was likewise upheld, as the study aimed to contribute to the enhancement of feedback practices, teaching approaches, and student development within inclusive higher education institutions. While direct benefits to participants could not be guaranteed, their contributions may inform improvements in educational policy and pedagogical practice.

The principle of **justice** was observed through the fair and equitable selection of participants based on clearly defined inclusion criteria. No participant was excluded based on gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, or other irrelevant characteristics, ensuring equal opportunity for participation.

Throughout the research process, the researchers practiced **reflexivity and bracketing (epoché)** to minimize personal biases and maintain fidelity to participants' lived experiences. Reflexive journals were maintained to document assumptions, monitor researcher subjectivity, and enhance transparency during data collection and analysis.

To further strengthen ethical integrity and credibility, participants were invited to engage in **member checking**, allowing them to review summaries and interpretations of their responses. This process ensured the accuracy of the findings and affirmed that participants' voices were authentically represented in the final research report.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Themes on Faculty Experiences in Providing Honest Feedback, Student Experiences, Meanings, Challenges, and Developmental Impact of Academic Truth-Telling

Research Objective	Emergent Theme	Analysis and Interpretation	Explanation and Observation	Supporting and Contrasting Literature
To describe the lived experiences of faculty members in providing honest feedback on empathy in students' academic performance and standing	Balancing honesty and academic feedback delivery	Faculty members experience tension between maintaining academic standards and protecting student emotions when giving feedback	Faculty often modify tone and language to avoid discouraging students while still communicating academic realities. This reflects emotional labor in teaching	Hattie & Timperley (2007) support clarity; Brookhart (2017) notes emotional difficulty in delivering critical feedback
	Responsibility-driven truth-telling	Faculty perceive honest feedback as a professional and ethical obligation	Teachers feel accountable preparing students for real academic professional expectations	Sadler (2010) emphasizes for standards-based feedback; Falchikov and (2005) highlights ethical responsibility in assessment
To describe the lived experiences of students receiving honest feedback	Emotional impact of academic truth-telling	Students experience mixed emotions such as motivation, anxiety, disappointment, or appreciation	Feedback is not only cognitive but deeply emotional and personal	Sutton (2012) supports emotional dimension; Weaver (2006) notes varied student perceptions of feedback
	Feedback as a guide for improvement	Students interpret honest feedback as a roadmap for academic growth when clearly explained	Constructive feedback enhances self-regulation and academic engagement	Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) support self-regulated learning; Lipnevich & Smith (2009) emphasize actionable feedback
To explore meanings attached to academic truth-telling	Feedback as care and honesty	Both faculty and students interpret honest feedback as an act of care when delivered respectfully	Truth-telling is perceived not as criticism but as developmental support	Carless & Boud (2018) highlight trust in feedback; Boud & Molloy (2013) emphasize developmental feedback

	Feedback judgment learning opportunity	as vs.	Some students interpret feedback as Misinterpretation evaluation of worth affects acceptance and rather than learning use of feedback support	Price et al. (2010) note feedback as judgment; Ajjawi & Boud (2018) emphasize meaning-making
To identify challenges, opportunities, and emotional responses	Communication barriers in feedback delivery		Faculty struggle with These barriers reduce clarity, time depth and workload issues; constraints, and large personalization of Weaver (2006) notes inconsistency concerns	Poulos & Mahony (2008) identify issues; Weaver (2006) notes inconsistency concerns
	Cultural inclusivity challenges		Diverse student backgrounds influence how feedback is received and interpreted	Inclusive contexts require adaptive feedback; Ryan & Henderson (2018) emphasize cultural responsiveness
To uncover the essence of honest feedback in student development	Feedback catalyst in student academic personal growth		Honest feedback as contributes to improved performance, awareness, resilience	Hattie (2012) supports learning impact; Tai et al. (2016) highlight evaluative judgment development
	Trust foundation developmental feedback		Development occurs when trust exists between faculty and students	Trust enhances acceptance and transformation of feedback into learning
				Carless & Winstone (2019) emphasize literacy; Henderson et al. (2019) stress trust importance

The findings suggest that academic truth-telling in inclusive higher education is a multidimensional phenomenon involving ethical responsibility, emotional negotiation, communication challenges, and developmental impact. Faculty members consistently navigate the tension between honesty and empathy, while students experience feedback both as an emotional event and a developmental tool. The essence of the phenomenon indicates that honest feedback becomes transformative when it is grounded in trust, clarity, and inclusivity.

The results align with existing literature emphasizing that feedback is not merely informational but relational and developmental in nature. While previous studies highlight the importance of clarity and actionability in feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), this study extends understanding by emphasizing the lived emotional and ethical experiences of both faculty and students in inclusive higher education settings. The findings also confirm that misinterpretation of feedback remains a persistent challenge, particularly when students

perceive feedback as evaluative judgment rather than developmental guidance (Price et al., 2010; Ajjawi & Boud, 2018).

Moreover, the study highlights that inclusive education contexts intensify the complexity of feedback delivery, requiring faculty to engage in culturally responsive and emotionally sensitive communication practices (Gravett, 2020; Ryan & Henderson, 2018). Ultimately, the essence of academic truth-telling emerges as a balance between honesty, care, trust, and developmental intent.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of faculty members and undergraduate students regarding academic truth-telling in inclusive higher education institutions, particularly focusing on the provision and reception of honest feedback on students' academic performance and standing, and its influence on student development. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, the study revealed that academic truth-telling is a multidimensional and relational phenomenon shaped by ethical responsibility, emotional sensitivity, communication practices, and institutional contexts. The findings indicate that faculty members consistently navigate the tension between honesty and empathy when delivering feedback. While they regard honesty as an essential professional and ethical obligation, they also remain attentive to students' emotional well-

being and motivation, resulting in carefully framed messages and reflective teaching practices that attempt to balance rigor with care. On the student side, honest feedback is experienced as emotionally charged, often eliciting feelings such as anxiety, disappointment, or motivation depending on how it is delivered and understood. However, when feedback is clear, respectful, and grounded in trust, students tend to interpret it as a meaningful guide for improvement and personal growth rather than as a negative judgment. The study further shows that academic truth-telling is not limited to assessment outcomes but is deeply connected to relational trust, communication clarity, and shared understanding between faculty and students. Misinterpretations often arise when feedback lacks explanation or is perceived as purely evaluative, highlighting the importance of feedback literacy and dialogic interaction in higher education. Additionally, challenges such as large class sizes, time constraints, and diverse learner needs affect the consistency and depth of honest feedback practices, yet these challenges also create opportunities for more adaptive and inclusive approaches. Overall, the essence of academic truth-telling lies in the integration of honesty, empathy, trust, and developmental intent, where feedback becomes a transformative educational process that supports students' academic achievement, self-awareness, and personal development within inclusive higher education environments. (301 words)

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