Study on Teacher-Student Relationships and Students Motivation

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Abstract

Academic achievements are always of interest to many parties including teachers, parents, school administrators and governments alike. Malaysia is no exception, having spared no effort in attempting to enhance student learning and academic performances in its public schools. These efforts are mostly centred on curriculum development, teaching approach and most recently, assessment. Student-teacher relationship, however, has received scant notice from its policymakers. Similarly, when it comes to investigating the link between student-teacher relationship and student's academic motivation, especially in boarding schools, local researchers pay little notice to it. This is despite the fact that in such schools, students stay in hostels for a number of years—interacting with their teachers more than their family, and meeting the schools' demands that they maintain high academic achievements. This study was an attempt to fill in some of this gap in knowledge.

Keywords: Motivation to learn, teacher – student relationship, academic achievement, school adjustment

INTRODUCTION

It is a generally accepted truth that the future lies in the hands of the next generation and that the success of the next generation is based largely on education. Increasing numbers of reports and articles in the media have been published in recent years showing that education of the next generation in the United States is lacking. The long-standing superpower stands to lose its status on the global playing field, threatening the way America has come to see itself and its role in the world. These trends have caused panic, and politicians have claimed a rededication of their efforts in this arena. However, while the belief that U.S. students are falling behind the world academically is widespread, no single concrete solution has emerged. The leading approach to improve the U.S. education system currently centers on raising standards that can be measured through standardized tests. The idea is that without a quantifiable measure of progress, schools cannot know whether they are improving; similarly, by comparing their results with those of other schools, it is reasoned, schools will be motivated to make even greater strides. It has been suggested (Thompson, 2010) that an emphasis on student motivation may be far more valuable than an emphasis on which specific facts students have memorized from U.S. history or which functions they can calculate in mathematics.

While it may be somewhat counterintuitive to argue that education is best improved by focusing on something other than the material the students are expected to learn, many studies have shown that this very well might be the case. The idea states, in brief, that motivated students learn more, learn better, and learn by themselves. That is to say, a tradeoff is more than worth it: To dedicate some percentage of a teacher's time and efforts to motivating students will translate at the end of the day to those students having learned a lot more than if that same time and effort had been invested in conventional transfer-of-knowledge methods, or far worse, test preparation.

Accordingly, many researchers have conducted studies on student academic motivation and student goal orientation. In particular, those researchers who concentrate on the dynamics of motivation within classroom settings have started to emphasize the potential role of relational variables (e.g., Davis, 2003; Pianta, 1999) and teacher behaviors (e.g., Skinner & Belmont, 1993) in student academic engagement. In the last 40 years, researchers examined student motivation, focusing on several questions (e.g., Pintrich, 2003 Skinner, 1995; Stipek, 1988): What moves students to learn? What influences the quantity and quality of the effort they invest? What choices do students make? What makes them persist in the face of hardship? How is student motivation affected by children's relationships with significant adults? How does motivation develop? How does the school environment affect it? Thus, educators, parents, and students have paid substantial attention to the importance of motivation in school because of significant contributions it has been shown to have on student academic learning,

self-esteem, selfefficacy, and school readiness. Motivation to learn is a competence acquired through general experience that is predominantly stimulated through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by significant others (Brophy, 1987). Infants and young children appear to be mobilized by curiosity and driven by an intense need to explore, interact with, and discover their environment. In the classroom setting, the content covered and the social context can vary continuously. Therefore, children are frequently involved in unfamiliar learning environments. This can create ambiguity for some students but can challenge others. Accordingly, students try to make sense of novel learning situations by referring to their motivational beliefs (Brophy, 1987). Motivational belief refers to the opinions, judgments, and values that students hold about objects, events, and learning processes (Brophy, 1987). Motivational belief also refers to students' opinions of the efficacy or effectiveness of learning and the teaching process. For example, children's beliefs about their academic experiences have important implications for their school adjustment and academic achievement (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Accordingly, expectancies and values are directly determined by other achievement-related beliefs such as achievement goals, self-schemata, and beliefs about science (Wigfield, 1994). Similarly, motivational beliefs act as a frame of reference that guides students' thinking, feelings, and actions in any subject area. For example, motivational beliefs about mathematics determine which strategies and motivational goals students develop. Significantly, a student's beliefs about a domain are predominantly optimistic or pessimistic, thus providing a positive or negative context for learning (Skinner, 1995; Stipek, 1988; Vermeer, Boekaerts, & Seegers, 2000).

Teacher–child relations play a prominent role in the development of competencies in early school-age years (Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995; Pianta & Walsh, 1996) and during the transition to middle school (Davis, 2003; Pianta, 1999). Teachers may operate as social agents, and they can affect students' intellectual and socioemotional experiences by creating a classroom setting that stimulates both student motivation and learning. Moreover, teacher–student relationships serve a regulatory function for the development of social, emotional, and academic skills (Davis, 2006). Studies have shown that positive teacher–student relationships can lead to a warm classroom environment that facilitates successful adaptation in school and thereby increases student motivation to learn. In contrast, conflictual teacher–student relationships are associated with lower achievement and selfesteem as well as ongoing relational conflict with both teachers and peers (Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Van Damme, & Maes, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Research has further indicated that children with whom teachers report positive relationships are outgoing and socially competent (Birch & Ladd, 1997 Pianta et al., 1995). Moreover, in these studies the teachers believed that high-quality relationships between teachers and their students enhance classroom learning and motivation by building a safe and supportive classroom context for students to open up and listen to the teachers and take intellectual risks (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta et al., 1995). Similarly, the beliefs teachers hold about teaching and learning, and the nature of expectations they have about their students also exert a powerful influence (Stipek, 1988). These findings support the key role of teacher–student relationships on children's motivation to learn and school adjustment

What Is A Student-Teacher Relationship?

A student-teacher relationship in the classroom is a positive relationship between the teacher and the student in efforts to gain trust and respect from each other. This relationship may consist of getting to know your students better, providing choice and encouraging the students to become stronger learners everyday. By doing this teachers are showing respect to their students, valuing their individuality and being polite. Having a positive relationship with your students helps them become more successful in the classroom as well as makes your classroom a safe and welcoming environment for all.

Ways To Build A Student-Teacher Relationship

There are many tips and tricks that can be used to build a strong student teacher relationship. One way that a strong student teacher relationship can be created is by making it apparent

that the teacher cares about the students ("6 Ways to Build Strong Teacher-Student Relationships with SEL", 2016). This can be done by talking with your students, such as asking about their day. Another way could be by listening to your students, this can be done by hearing their opinions, taking into account their interests, and by learning each student's unique learning styles ("6 Ways to Build Strong Teacher-Student Relationships with SEL", 2018). As well you can develop mutual trust with your students, such as providing them with choices and always having their best interest in mind ("6 Ways to Build Strong Teacher-Student Relationships with SEL", 2017). In addition, you always have to be respectful and fair with each and everyone of your students ("6 Ways to Build Strong Teacher-Student Relationships with SEL", 2015). You can ensure this by not picking favorites and having the same corrected behavior for each student. Furthermore, you can get to know your students and their families. This can be done by paying attention to your students during class and offering them opportunities to talk or share what they want about their families. Lastly, by giving your students positive words of encouragement and constructive criticism ("6 Ways to Build Strong Teacher-Student Relationships with SEL", 2018). This is important due to the fact that it creates trust with your students, as they know they can rely on you to be honest. Of course, there are many other alternative ways to build a positive student teacher relationship, but these are some great examples of how to start.

Advantages of a Student-Teacher Relationship

Student- teacher relationships have displayed many advantages in the classroom. To start, students who share a positive relationship with their teacher develop stronger social-emotional skills. In addition, these students are more likely to absorb an increased amount of academic knowledge (Positive teacher-student relationships have cascading benefits, 2017). The result of a strong student-teacher relationship is that it allows students to feel confident through exploration and taking risks in their academic tasks. In short, students who have a positive student-teacher relationship demonstrate a stronger performance in the classroom (Positive teacher-student relationships have cascading benefits, 2018). However, one of the most important impacts of a positive student-teacher relationship is the production of an environment that incorporates mutual respect. One way an educator can produce a strong relationship with a student is to explicitly define learning goals and expectations in a positive manner. This could look different for groups of students or individual students. The strong relationship will allow for educators to be aware of their students' learning and adjust their learning goals and expectations as needed (Admin, 2017). In the same manner, the educator should allow opportunities for students of all learning styles to participate in class discussions through oral and written communication. In addition to academic advantages, positive student-teacher relationships improve mental health and assists students in developing self-worth (Admin, 2017). Oftentimes, students look up to their educators as mentors. With this in mind, students are likely to feel pride when the educator encourages them in their learning and social interactions. Social competence, problem-solving abilities, autonomy, and a feeling of a bright future or purpose are protective elements that boost resilience, these all can be developed in a supportive teaching atmosphere (Bondy et al., 2007). As noted, students benefit from positive student-teacher relationships. Likewise, educators benefit as well. While creating strong relationships with their students, educators are strengthening their own interpersonal and professional skills (Admin, 2017). By strengthening their interpersonal communication skills, educators are more likely to respond effectively to stressful situations. In addition, educators are able to form relationships with parents and coworkers. In summary, it can be noted that students and educators equally benefit from the creation of positive student-teacher relationships.

The Importance Of Student-Teacher Relationships: Short and Long Term

As stated, student-teacher relationships are highly essential in an effective classroom. Specifically, student-teacher relationships are important for students in their short term and long term education. Student-teacher relationships are important in the short term because it creates a thriving classroom environment, helps students develop self worth and improves student mental health (Buffet, 2019). In the same manner, these positive relationships may

decrease behavioral problems and promote academic success. Student- teacher relationships help foster the academic success of students. With this being said, student-teacher relationships assist students in the short term. These relationships support students for the specific year they spend in that educational setting with the educator (Buffet, 2019). Likewise, a positive student-teacher relationship is very important in the long term because it gives students confidence as well as ensuring that they know that their ideas are valuable. In turn, this allows students to carry this confidence throughout their future years pursuing academics. Also, this confidence and recognition of self-worth can be seen in social and emotional aspects of the students life. Another long term effect is that positive teacher relationships teach students that mistakes are an indication that they are learning. Learning is ongoing and students are able to identify this through the production of positive student-teacher relationships. This type of relationship will foster confidence in the long-term for the student.

Causes of Poor Student Teacher Relationships

Poor teacher-student relationships result from the instructor's lack of awareness. Some students require tailored educational approaches since they do not respond to learning in the same way as others. When a teacher fails to regard an individual student's educational needs, relationship problems between teachers and students arise. Each student's ability to learn and interact with educators is influenced by their personality, family backgrounds, mental processes, learning styles, priorities, maturity levels, and academic ambitions (Tucker, 2018). When possible, teachers should treat each student as an individual who deserves one-on-one attention and specialized, concentrated education. In addition, a poor student-teacher relationship will develop if the educator's main or only priority in the classroom is academics (Tucker, 2018). In correspondence with academics, students need to feel cared for and have the chance to feel strong emotions. Educators are responsible for building relationships with students that are not surface level or academically focused. Students should feel that their educator is someone they can trust and communicate freely with. The lack of empathy displayed by an educator can result in a poor student-teacher relationship.

Why Teacher-Student Relationships Matter

a. Impact on Academic Achievement

The present study consistently highlights the positive correlation between strong teacher-student relationships and academic success. When students feel a personal connection with their teachers, they are more likely to engage actively in the learning process. This engagement translates into higher levels of motivation and ultimately improved academic performance.

Studies have shown that students who perceive their teachers as supportive and caring are more likely to attend classes regularly, complete assignments on time, and participate actively in classroom discussions. This heightened engagement contributes to a positive feedback loop, where students develop a genuine interest in learning, fostering continuous academic improvement.

b. Social and Emotional Development

Beyond the realm of grades and test scores, teacher-student relationships play a pivotal role in shaping the social and emotional development of students. Building trust and rapport in the classroom creates an atmosphere where students feel safe to express themselves, take risks, and ask questions.

In a positive classroom culture, students are more likely to collaborate with their peers, share their thoughts openly, and develop critical social skills. Teachers who understand and address the diverse needs of their students contribute significantly to the emotional well-being of their students, creating an environment conducive to both learning and personal growth.

What influences Teacher Student Relationship?

a. Class Size and Teacher Workload

One of the challenges educators face in fostering meaningful relationships with students is the increasing class sizes and heavy workloads. Balancing individual attention in larger classes requires strategic planning and innovative teaching methods. School leaders must

explore ways to support teachers in managing their workload, ensuring that they have the time and resources to cultivate strong connections with each student.

b. Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness

In today's diverse educational landscape, cultural sensitivity is a crucial factor in building effective teacher-student relationships. School leaders must promote an environment where educators understand and appreciate the diverse backgrounds of their students. Creating an inclusive environment involves not only acknowledging cultural differences but also celebrating and integrating them into the fabric of the school community.

c. Teacher Mindset and Attitude

The mindset and attitude of teachers play a pivotal role in the quality of relationships they form with students. Empathy, a cornerstone of effective teaching, fosters connections by allowing teachers to understand and respond to the unique needs of each student. Building resilience in both teachers and students is equally important, as it enables them to navigate challenges together, strengthening their bond.

Strategies for Cultivating Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

a. Establishing Clear Communication Channels

Communication is the bedrock of any relationship, and teacher-student relationships are no exception. School leaders should encourage and facilitate regular communication between teachers, students, and parents. Establishing clear channels for feedback, updates, and concerns creates a supportive network that enhances the educational experience.

Utilizing technology for communication can bridge gaps and ensure that information flows seamlessly between all stakeholders. Online platforms, emails, and instant messaging can be powerful tools in keeping everyone connected and informed.

b. Encouraging Mentorship Programs

Mentorship programs, both among students and between teachers, are effective in fostering positive relationships. Peer mentorship initiatives provide students with a sense of belonging and support, while teacher mentorship programs contribute to professional development. School leaders can champion these programs, providing the structure and resources needed for successful implementation.

c. Implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs are gaining recognition for their role in enhancing teacher-student relationships. Integrating SEL into the curriculum equips students with valuable emotional intelligence skills and provides a framework for teachers to address the social and emotional aspects of learning. School leaders should invest in training teachers in SEL practices, ensuring they are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of student emotions.

Also Read: Emotional Benefits of Strong Teacher-Student Relationships

d. Professional Development for Teachers

Continuous professional development is key to ensuring that teachers have the skills and knowledge necessary to cultivate positive relationships with students. Workshops focused on relationship-building skills, cultural competence, and understanding diverse learning needs can empower teachers to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. Incorporating relationship-building into teacher evaluations reinforces its importance in the overall assessment of a teacher's effectiveness.

Real-World Examples

To illustrate the tangible impact of effective teacher-student relationships, let's explore a few real-world examples. In a school where a mentorship program was implemented, students reported feeling more connected to their peers and teachers. This sense of connection translated into improved attendance rates, higher grades, and a decrease in disciplinary incidents.

In another case, a school that prioritized communication channels saw increased parental involvement. The collaborative effort between teachers and parents resulted in a holistic approach to student support, addressing academic, social, and emotional needs. This

comprehensive approach contributed to a positive learning environment and improved overall student well-being.

Overcoming Challenges

a. Addressing Resistance and Skepticism

Implementing strategies to enhance teacher-student relationships may face resistance or skepticism from educators who prioritize traditional teaching methods. School leaders play a crucial role in communicating the value of strong relationships and providing evidence of positive outcomes. Sharing success stories and emphasizing the long-term benefits can help overcome initial resistance.

b. Navigating Cultural and Diversity Challenges

Creating an inclusive environment requires a deep understanding of cultural and diversity challenges. School leaders must implement strategies to promote inclusivity, such as offering cultural competency training for staff. Building a culture of respect and understanding ensures that teacher-student relationships are built on a foundation of mutual appreciation and acceptance.

The Role of School Leaders

a. Setting a Positive Tone from the Top-Down

School leaders set the tone for the entire educational community. By leading by example and prioritizing positive relationships, they create a culture that values connections between teachers and students. This commitment must be evident in the leadership's actions, policies, and communication.

b. Allocating Resources for Relationship-Building Initiatives

Investing in relationship-building initiatives requires a strategic allocation of resources. School leaders should consider budgetary considerations, time allocation, and staff support when implementing programs focused on enhancing teacher-student relationships. By providing the necessary resources, leaders demonstrate their commitment to the holistic development of both students and educators.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of teacher-student relationships on academic performance is profound and far-reaching. School leaders play a pivotal role in fostering an environment where these relationships can thrive. By understanding the factors influencing these connections, implementing effective strategies, and overcoming challenges, leaders can create a blueprint for success. The journey towards academic excellence is intricately tied to the strength of teacher-student relationships. As we navigate the complexities of education, let us recognize the transformative power of these connections and commit to building a future where every student has the opportunity to flourish academically, socially, and emotionally.

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