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What are the perceptions of teachers in India regarding positive Teacher-Student Relationships as a protective factor for the mental health of students?

by

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We accept this Thesis as conforming to the required standard.

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Abstract

Positive Teacher-Student Relationship (TSR) is one of the major protective factors for the mental health of the students and is the most significant factor in the social, emotional and academic development of the young ones. This factor has been researched and by many researchers in different parts of the world, but I found no studies done in India regarding this subject. In the current study, I took the opportunity to examine the perceptions of teachers in India regarding positive outcomes of positive TSRs and the different barriers they are facing in building good relationships with their students. I chose qualitative approach and questionnaire survey with open-ended questions as a tool to collect the perceptions of total 30 teacher participants from one school in Chandigarh and one school in Jalandhar city of state Punjab in India. Findings indicated that teachers do perceive positive Teacher-Student Relationships as a major factor for the social, emotional and academic development which leads to the good mental health in students, but they have mentioned potential barriers they are facing in building good relationships with students in classroom.

*Keywords: safe environment, disengagement, communication-gap*
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Author

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

I was in Jawahar navodaya Vidyalaya, a residential school for seven years, from grade 6 to grade 12. This school was first opened with the intention of providing education to those children who lived in remote places and did not have access to education due to different barriers, such as poverty. Later that school emerged as a top educational institution for brilliant children from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds, where children secured their position after passing competitive exam.

Life was different there, and the school worked to keep distractions at a minimum. There was no access to Internet or the phone, and television could only be used for watching the news. All students were supposed to study and engage in serious support programs and co-curricular activities. Such an environment might seem harsh, but that period was the golden time of my life. I came out of the school as an independent, resilient, smarter individual who had engaged in many life-changing experiences.

In this school, I had experienced the impact of teacher’s support on my life and on the lives of other students. I came to believe that, when teachers support students and trust them, students will try to give their 100 percent because they feel responsible towards the expectations of their teachers. Further, deep inside students come to know that, if they sometimes failed, they would still have their teachers to help lead them to the right path.

On the contrary, I have seen teachers who believe that distance from students could benefit both students and teachers. But, in my experience, students never benefit from gaps or disconnections from teachers. I still remember when I entered that school, I was not even aware
of a single capability of mine. As I was standing in the assembly preparing to read news for the first time, I was shaking with the fear. I was facing so many faces, and I was unable to speak even a single word. Suddenly, my teacher came near me and started reading news on my behalf. All the pressure was suddenly relieved. By the next news reading, I was caught up. And I have never stopped. My relationship with my teachers has given me an ability to trust myself and others. These relationships have filled me with the courage to face my failures and the self-confidence to convert these failures into victories.

One time, when I was in 12th grade, I stood up for my friend who was depressed because of bad grades. After our teacher scolded her so badly, I was unable to stop myself from telling my teacher that, as a teacher, she should understand the struggles of students instead of just yelling; and, I remember her words: “Become a teacher first, and then you will get to know what a teacher is supposed to do or not.” I replied, “I will become a teacher, and I will definitely be able to do what I am telling you to do.” Obviously, I was not supposed to argue with my teacher, and I got punished later. However, I never have regretted that moment because it revealed to me the purpose of my life at the age of just 16 years.

With the same focus, I have completed a master’s in chemistry, then a Bachelor of Education, and started my career as an assistant professor in a college. I have started practicing what I wanted to do for a long time. I was happy and have successfully created positive space for students in my classroom. My students were doing so well in their academics and, at the same time, they always volunteered to help in other important events.

One day, the head of my department called me into her office and told me that I should maintain a distance from students because I am a teacher. In fact, I should not let them talk to me about their problems. Although I was able to understand that this is the way it works in our
culture, I did not understand why she was saying this to me as a educationist. This event aroused my interest to better understand the perceptions of teachers about student-teacher relationships so that I might make change possible. For me, students’ problems outside their academics are equally important and impact students’ performance and growth in life. Sadly, however, I failed to have the support of my senior colleagues and the head of the department.

I have decided to work in high school where I can engage students in positive things instead of just wasting their time and energy on unproductive activities or by just being depressed. Here, I started from scratch and was successful building positive connections with my students. Again, the outcomes were positive, but I was not supported by my seniors. My life was on a cycle, and I was frustrated because I believed my work as a teacher was being limited by higher authorities. I was unable to do what I believed in and wanted to do since I was 16 years old.

I have been depressed in my life many times, but I was resilient enough to fight back every time because of the strong protective shield given by my teachers. So many incidents from my own life have compelled me to tell others, most importantly teachers, that their positive and productive relationships with students can do wonders in their lives – especially during the transition period of adolescence. Research shows that, due to internal and external stressors, many children become depressed or have mental health issues that, in extreme cases, might lead them to have ideas about suicide or to attempt suicide.

Now that I am in Canada doing a Master of Education in special education, I am again experiencing the power of teachers’ supports and connections. My graduate research offers me a chance to work to initiate a change in my country India. Once again, I am completely ready to
study the importance and impact of teacher-student relationships by becoming more knowable about the perceptions of teachers by doing this research

**Context**

During the five years of my teaching career, I have taught very diverse children in one classroom; however, I never have had any experience with children with any kind of disability or special ability. One possible reason for this could be that inclusion has only been recently introduced in India, so it is not fully implemented yet. However, I do realize there are children struggling academically because they have not been diagnosed with a learning or other disability and they are in the same classrooms trying to reach the same expectation levels as other students.

In my work, I am defining struggling students to be children with any kind of exceptionality, whether this is mild, moderate or severe, physical, social, emotional or psychological. It also includes any known or unknown problem a child is dealing with. One of the most vulnerable struggles of students is to deal with mental health issues, which require attention from parents as well as teachers. Research shows that student-teacher relationships can help eliminate distress, depression, anxiety, and can foster resilience (Sulkowski & Simmons, 2017).

Suicide is a complex issue. Intentionally causing self-harm and causing one’s own death emerges from the mental health issues I have already described. It includes thinking of killing oneself, planning it, attempting suicide, and suicide itself. If we look at the statistics worldwide, 6% of deaths were accounted to suicide, and 90% of suicide case are reported from low-income countries. Further, suicide is most prevalent in adolescents and young adults, particularly among females, which have makes it the second leading cause of mortality among females and the third leading cause among males aged 10-24 years (Mckinnon, Gariepy, Sentenac, & Elgar, 2016).
According to research done by World Health Organization (WHO), in 2002 16 of 100,000 deaths were reported due to suicide every year worldwide. In 2009, studies showed that adolescents were often more at risk and suicide was the second leading cause of mortality in this group (Bazrafshan, Sharif, Molazem, & Mani, 2016). Suicide cases were mostly reported from under-developed and developing nations due to many reasons like unemployment, population burst, domestic violence, bullying, etc. Being an Indian, I am concerned about increasing suicide rates among youth which are related to the mental health of youth. It was estimated that 20 per 100,000 individuals died as a result of suicide, which was twice the world average. And, of the 187,000 suicides in 2010, most suicides were committed by youth at their most reproductive phases of life (Singh, Singh, Biswas, & Rao, 2013).

There are many other issues and risk factors that might lead to poor mental health of individuals at young ages. I suggest that a protective factor for students struggling with these issues is the positive impact of good teacher-student relations. “Positive teacher-student relationships are characterized as having high level of warmth, open communication, and social support provided by teachers to students” (Sulkowski et al., 2017).

Lindo, Taylor, Meany-Walen, Purswell, Jayne, Gonzales and Jones (2014) note that a “teacher can serve as therapeutic agent” and suggest that teacher-child, relationship-building (TCRB) programs as a professional development program for teachers, where teacher-student relationships are used by teachers to promote positive social, emotional, and academic function outcomes. Sulkowski et al. (2017) explained that a nurturing, emotionally supportive, and trust-building teacher-student relationships are important for fostering students’ success across multiple domains of functioning. These include motivation, behavioral engagement, prosocial behavior, and healthy psychosocial adjustment, and might also protect students from relational
victimization like peer bullying. Such research suggests that positive teacher-student relationships build resilience in adolescents.

**Research question**

All my previous experiences of being a student and a teacher in India and the opportunity to do my MEd research at Vancouver Island University are the driving forces behind my choosing of teacher-student relationships in India as my focus. My specific research question is: “What are teacher’s perceptions in India regarding positive teacher-student relationships (TSRs), specifically as a protective factor for the mental health of students?”

**My research sub-questions include:**

- What do Indian teachers understand by the concept of a good teacher-student relationship?
- Do Indian teachers perceive teacher-student relationships as a protective factor for struggling students?
- What are the reasons behind the perceptions that Indian teachers hold?
- What struggles might Indian teachers have faced or are facing in practicing it if they believe good teacher-student relationships are a potential means of improving mental health?

**My research method**

To research these questions, I first looked at the literature and research that already was done on this topic. Second, I surveyed a number of Indian teachers using a questionnaire so that I might come to know their perceptions and the reasons behind their perceptions. I am specifically
looking at the perceptions of teachers, so there will be no right or wrong answers. This study will be a qualitative study.
CHAPTER 2

Literature review

Introduction

In my thesis, I am looking for perceptions of teachers in India regarding positive teacher-student relationships as one of the protective factors for the mental health of students. In this chapter I dig into the present literature to gain clarity about what are positive TSRs and their impact on different domains of students like academic, social, emotional, and mental health. These domains help me in stating the advantages of positive TSRs and disadvantages of negative TSRs. Literature will help me comparing the perception of teachers in India and the prevailing literature on this area.

Positive teacher-students relationship

Mason, Hajovsky, McCune and Turek (2017) and Lei, Cui and Chiu (2018) have clearly defined and contrast the positive teacher student relationship from negative teacher student relationship (TSR). Positive TSR is a connection between a student and a teacher characterized by a high level of warmth, open communication, and social support provided by teachers to students. However, on the other hand, negative teacher–student relationships often involve conflict, negative emotional expression, and involve a scarcity of social support. Therefore, positive teacher–student relationships encourage the development of trust, emotional support, and ambition among students; whereas, negative teacher–student relationships tend to isolate students and make them feel uncomfortable and detached from the overall school social climate. Essentially, emotional stability and student’s faith in teachers are two determinants of positive teacher student relationship.
Lei, Cui and Chiu (2018) have further defined the term teacher support from two different points-of-view: these are, namely, self-determination and social support. From a self-determination point of view, teacher support occurs when students receive cognitive, emotional, or autonomy-oriented support from a teacher during the learning process. Self-determination includes the dimensions of support for autonomy, structure, and involvement. Support for autonomy is teacher provision of choice, relevance, or respect to students. Structure includes clarity of expectation and contingencies. Involvement is warmth, affection, dedication of resources, understanding the student, or dependability. Involvement can influence anxiety, depression, hope, and other emotions among students.

In the social support model, teacher support can be viewed in two ways: broad or narrow. The broad perspective, based on social support framework, defines teacher support as a teacher giving informational, instrumental, emotional, or appraisal support to a student in any environment. Informational support includes giving advice or information in a particular content area. Instrumental support is giving resources such as money or time. Emotional support includes love, trust, or empathy. Appraisal support is giving evaluative feedback to each student. The narrow perspective views teacher support in the form of help, trust, friendship, and interest only in a classroom environment.

Why positive teacher student relationship is important

Mason, Hajovsky, McCune and Turek (2017) have explained the why behind the phrase teacher student relationship (TSR). They addressed this question by referencing work in attachment theory, which focused on mother-child relationship. According to attachment theory, supportive teacher-student relationships are critical in creating and maintaining a sense of school
belonging that encourages positive academic and behavioral outcomes. A caring and supportive teacher can make similar, meaningful impacts in shaping youth outcomes. Teacher-student relationships are typically viewed as consisting of two primary dimensions: closeness and conflict. These two dimensions were referred to as positive TSRs and negative TSRs in most studies. Closeness represents the warmth and positive affect between the teacher and the child and the child’s comfort in approaching the teacher, whereas conflict refers to the negativity or lack of dyadic rapport.

**Benefits of positive TSRs and disadvantages of negative TSRs**

Teacher-student relationships are major protective factors for the well-being of students, and there is an immense number of advantages of positive TSRs. At the same time, the devastating effects of negative TSRs further strengthen the importance of having teacher support in the life of student.

**Academic benefits.** Talking about the academic benefits, academically at-risk students who have positive and productive relationships with their teachers or perceive their relationships as supportive are shown to make efforts to participate in effective learning and try to perform academically at their levels best because they feel confident in their academic abilities, trusted by their teachers, and safe within the school surroundings. This increased engagement, in turn, contributes to higher achievements (Lindo at el., 2014; Luo, Xiang, Zhang & Wang, 2017).

Lei, Cui and Chiu’s (2018) major finding is that a positive correlation exists between teacher support and positive academic emotions such as relief, hope, enjoyment, calmness, contentment, excitement, happiness, and pride. At the same time, significant negative correlations between teacher’s support and negative academic emotions were shown to include shame, anxiety, boredom, anger, depression, fatigue, and hopelessness. In simple words, this
finding means that positive teacher support tends to elevate positive academic emotions; and, at the same time, positive teacher support reduces negative academic emotions among students.

Another study (Sulkowski and Simmons, 2017) indicated that positive teacher student relationships affect the multiple domains of academic functioning by improving achievement, motivation, behavioral engagement, prosocial behavior, and healthy psychosocial adjustment. Positive teacher student relationships also were a stronger influencer for student academic outcomes than the influence of their peer relationships; hence, positive relationships with teachers might be a major protective factor that have more key benefits than the benefits associated with the peer relationships.

Furthermore, according to Hosan and Hoglund (2017) and Decker, Dona and Christenson (2007), school engagement plays an important role by decreasing the number of behavioral referrals because it increases students’ emotional engagement in student-teacher relationships, fosters resilience in children, and improves students’ academic skills. Children who have close relationships with their teachers and peers feel motivated and connected with their classrooms; and, because of these relationships, students are more willing to engage in lessons and participate fully in the classroom activities. These results elevate children’s abilities to learn the necessary skills for the academic success. However, it has been found that school engagement is generally found higher in younger children as compared to older children, which suggests that good teacher student relationships might be helpful in increasing the school engagement among older children and further help them enhance their academic skills.
Impact on social-emotional well-being. Lei, Cui and Chiu (2016) and Hosan and Hoglund (2017) have suggested that the negative correlation between affective teacher-student relationships and externalizing behavior problems means that positive teacher student relationships have the potential to reduce the externalizing behavioral problems (EBPs) among students. Furthermore, TSR is like a support system for the development of behavior in students. For this reason, students who are closer to their teachers were involved in fewer anti-social behaviors. However, negative TSRs were more influential than positive TSRs on student’s EBPs and might increase the negative experiences and aspects of school in the mind of students. These TSRs interfere with students’ school enjoyment and both make them feel emotionally disconnected from school and elevate the risk of emotional disengagement from the school environment.

Elaborating the same view, Luo, Xiang, Zhang and Wang (2017) suggested that positive teacher student relationships were a protective factor for behaviorally at-risk students because teachers’ emotional support successfully eliminated the aggressive behaviors of children and also reduced the risk of developing undesired social relationships.

Helkere, Schottelkorb and Ray (2007) explained three aspects of student-teacher relationships: these were emotional security, dependency, and socialization. These three aspects predicted the social relationships of children and also made them feel emotionally secure. These aspects helped children build positive relationships and appropriate behaviors with other students. On the other hand, conflict-based TSR lowered children’s abilities to show pro-social behavior with peers.
Impact on mental health well-being. Teacher-student relationships helped protect students from depression, suicidal behavior, and involvement in bullying as a victim. Gloppen, McMorris, Gower and Eisenberg (2017) explained that students who have encountered bullying and who do not feel safe in their school environment had an increased risk of mental health problems because bullying and victimization is associated with internalizing problems and suicidality. One major finding of the study was that teacher student relationships were only helpful in reducing the harmful effects of internalizing symptoms but were not significant protective factors. This finding is contrary to findings that have asserted that having positive teacher student relationships lessens the chances of encountering depression and other mental health problems. Within the school, young people who have positive relationships with teachers and other adults are less likely to be a bully or a victim of bullying because they feel safe in school (Glew, Fan, Katon, & Rivara, 2008; Hong & Espelage, 2012).
CHAPTER 3

Methodology and methods

Introduction

The topic of my research study is Positive Teacher-Student Relationships. The research question, the study asked was: “What are teacher’s perceptions in India, regarding teacher-student relationship as a protective factor for mental health of students?”

The main purpose of this chapter was to give a brief outline of how this study will be conducted. In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature in this area. I also presented the study’s definitions, the importance of the TSRs, and the influence of both positive as well as negative TSRs in the life of students.

In this study, teachers from the government and private schools of city Chandigarh and Jalandhar in Punjab state were the participants. Chandigarh city is a union territory and capitol of two states, namely Punjab and Haryana, which together have a mix of population from different states. Jalandhar city is one of the biggest districts, and there are 21 towns and 941 villages in that district.

I recruited 30 teachers from the government and private schools of city Chandigarh and Jalandhar in Punjab state to be the participants. All participants were presented with a printed copy of the questionnaire that included three open-ended questions as a way to better understand these teachers’ perceptions about teacher-student relationships and their perceived barriers of establishing such relationships. This study was solely based on the perceptions of the teachers;
therefore, it was a mixed-methods study where I analyzed the questionnaires in both qualitative and quantitative ways to synthesize the different perceptions of the teachers.

The project description: purpose, goals and knowledge transfer

A. Purpose of the research

The intent behind this study was to better understand how teachers in India perceived their own supportive relationships as teachers with their students. I believed this was an important area to research because, in Indian culture, teachers are perceived as a higher authority and are called GURUs. In India, the higher status of teachers typically creates a gap between a teacher and a student. Being an Indian citizen and a teacher, I am concerned about student’s disconnect with their teachers and the negative consequences these disconnects have for both students and teachers.

Student disengagement is harmful because it increases the level of stress in students who have no one to talk to regarding their difficulties and who feel unsafe within their school environments. For teachers, disconnections between themselves and students also make their teaching tasks difficult. Specifically, teachers have a more difficult time understanding how individual students learn best or what individual students need to grow.

As I studied the literature, I did not discover any specific studies regarding my topic in India, hence I decided to look at studies that had been completed in the different parts of the world as a way to gather the meaning of the positive TSRs. I particularly looked at why this area is so important for students and the various positive and negative impacts TSRs on both students and teachers.
This study will help open the doors for future research in the same field because I believed first that it was important to know teachers’ perceptions. Only then can we understand teachers’ perceptions and potential reasons and problems teachers are facing in India when they try to initiate and build positive teacher-student relationships. Finally, hopefully this study can help us learn more about how teachers in India might better implement TSRs and learn more about why TSRs are important in all of education.

B. Research goals and questions

All my previous experiences of being a student and a teacher in India suggested a need for research in this area. Personally, my experiences were the driving forces behind me choosing Indian teacher’s perceptions about teacher-student relationships (TSRs).

My research study’s sub-questions included:

- What do teachers in India believe is a good teacher-student relationship?
- Do teachers perceive teacher-student relationships as a protective factor for students in all areas?
- Do teachers perceive teacher-student relationship as a protective factor for students in the area of mental health?
- What do teachers in India see as important mental health issues?
- What reasons do teachers in India offer as rationales behind their perceptions?
- How might building better teacher – student relationships benefit teachers?
Study design and methods

My study was mainly qualitative, although answers to the survey questions did produce quantitative data. The basic reason behind the study was to better understand Indian teachers’ perceptions. I wanted to better understand how teachers represent the “voice of their minds.” In this case, no answer was wrong or right. The analysis of the data reflected the thought process and the potential reasons behind it.

Hopefully, this study will open doors for the research in the same field and further research about the reasons behind what I see currently as disconnected relationships between teachers and students in India. This study will be helpful in providing the positive impact of TSRs on different domain of students.

In total, 30 teachers from the government and private schools of city Chandigarh and Jalandhar in Punjab state were the participants. I chose these two cities because these are demographically diverse. Participants from these cities have represented the perceptions of teachers from both rural and urban area and have provided a broader analysis that can become more generalizable later. Steps in my research method included:

First, I built my questionnaire. This questionnaire contained two sections. The first section contained a few simple questions seeking participant’s non identifiable personal information like gender, qualification, years of teaching experience, classes they teach, etc. The second section contained questions seeking teacher perceptions regarding positive TSRs and the reasons for their perceptions.
Because I am pursuing my master’s in education here in Canada, which is 11,488 kilometers away from India or equal to the air travel of 7,138 miles, I was not able to go back to India to collect the data there. As a result, I attempted to find participants from the school where I taught before and I also selected my aunt as a member of my team who helped me in recruiting participants from the school where she is currently teaching. She is a government teacher in Chandigarh, India. Regardless of where my participants come from, I wanted these participants to be fully willing to participate in it to ensure the authenticity of the answers to eliminate any kind of harm to the relationships and to the job, I decided not to ask any identifiable information to make questionnaires fully anonymous.

Third, I asked and was granted permission from the school principal and management by writing them an official letter before I seek participants and before I surveyed them. I submitted my proposal to Vancouver Island University’s ethics board to get the approval to proceed the study further.

Fourth, after I obtained the approval from REB to contact teachers, I recruited more than 30 teachers who were fully willing to participate in the study from the school where I taught in the past and who were colleagues of my aunt in her current school. I provided flyers to the schools in order to provide information to the teachers regarding study and how they could participate in it. Consent letters were also provided to teachers for their reference only as I was providing them printed copies of questionnaire and returned questionnaires were the proof of consent in itself.

Fifth, I sent the questionnaire through password protected email to my aunt, who assisted me in providing printed copies of questionnaire to the reception of her own school in Chandigarh from where the willing participants were instructed to receive and return it after they complete
the questionnaire. She travelled to Jalandhar city afterwards, which is my home city, to provide questionnaires to the reception of the school where I used work in the past for which I took permission through email and also fixed an appointment for my aunt to visit the school.

I received permission to survey teachers through an application from the principal and management of the school and sent out a flyer to inform teachers of this survey. The travel time was approximately 2.5 hours, so it was easy for her to drive there. She went again to collect the questionnaires from the reception area of the school. After that, I received all the questionnaire envelops through mail. She used one of the fastest and safest mailing services for the security of the papers. In about four days I received the questionnaires here in Canada.

Sixth, for analyses of the data, I studied the answers of the questionnaires to see what teachers said and then I grouped similar responses under categories of perception. In this way, in the end, I was able to collect different perceptions, the teachers’ rationales, and a list of barriers suggested by teachers that they were facing while building positive TSRs.

**Rationale and support for design and methods**

In my study, I focused on gathering the perceptions of teachers regarding the positive TSRs, so I was seeking teachers’ own opinions, beliefs, and points of view regarding positive relationships. These are the main characteristics of a qualitative research that I came to better understand while doing literature review. Pathak, Jena, and Kalra (2013) explained that a qualitative study is mainly used to understand the different beliefs, attitudes, and interactions, which gives non-numerical data at the end and only qualitative study has the ability to add a new dimension to already known knowledge.
I chose a questionnaire survey as the instrument to collect data for my qualitative study because qualitative study generates words rather than numbers and asking questions directly to the participants was the easiest, quickest, and most practical way of gathering the perceptions I was looking for. My research methodology was practical because questionnaires could be targeted to a group of one’s choice and could be managed in different ways. For example, I picked and chose the questions asked as well as decided the format of open-ended, closed-ended, or mixed of both as per the requirement of the study.

Interviews and focus groups are effective methods, but I have decided to ask questions to the participants of my study through questionnaire. My aim was to better understand the perceptions of the teachers, so they knew the answers and have participated in it without putting themselves in a spotlight and have answered in their free time. This meant there was no pressure on teachers to reply on the spot, as well they were also given time to think before answering the questions. These steps were undertaken to help make the data authentic.

**Potential challenges**

One potential challenge I faced during the data collection was to help teachers realize the seriousness of the area and importance of their truthful answers of the questionnaire. Because I was using a questionnaire study, I was researching them “at a distance.” This distance did not allow me to see them face-to-face to present why I believed my topic and questionnaire were so important.

To mitigate this problem, I contacted teachers from the schools where I had worked in the past and utilized the help of my aunt, who is a government teacher in India in the recruitment of teachers from her school. I provided printed copies of the questionnaire to the receptions of both
the schools with the help of my aunt. As well, she also went to schools to collect completed questionnaires, which were fully anonymous, from the reception desk of the schools. This process was done to avoid any harm to relationships and career. After that, all the questionnaires were sent to me through physical mail special used for document safety. I did send a flyer and brief paper overview of the study and its importance prior to the questionnaires.

Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to provide a brief layout of the plan I followed to gain permissions from all mandatory authorities, recruit the participants, collect the data, and to analyze this data in the end. I have also noted any potential challenges that I faced while doing this research from distance and, at the same time, to have provided possible solutions to mitigate those challenges. While thinking and creating the whole plan, I tried to ensure that the authenticity of the data would not be compromised at any cost.

To summarize the whole proposal of the study, I would say that I wanted to find out the perceptions of teachers regarding positive teacher-student relationships as a protective factor for the mental health of struggling students. Specifically, I wanted to study teachers in India: because I am a citizen of India, I am concerned about the increasing rate of mental health issues among students and, as per literature, the impact of negative TSRs is larger than the impact of positive TSRs. To investigate their perceptions, asked them:

- Do they think positive TSRs are helpful for students who are struggling in their classroom?
- Do they perceive TSRs as protective factors for the mental health of students?
- What is the reason behind their perception?
• What do they understand by positive teacher-student relationship?
• Do they believe that maintaining a certain gap from the students is helpful for both students and teachers?
• What challenges do they face in maintaining positive TSR?

I was looking for teachers’ points of view, so only teachers were able to give me the answers. Furthermore, to obtain their perceptions I surveyed them through a questionnaire because this was both easy and the most effective way of asking perceptions because I deemed that not everyone would feel comfortable discussing their perceptions. Furthermore, I believed that participants might fear judgement. Questionnaires gave them the freedom to answer without the fear of judgement and also the flexibility to complete the questionnaire as per their schedule.

Their answers were like:

Positive TSR for me is ____________________________

I do/ don’t think positive TSR as a protective factor because____________________

I do/ don’t think maintaining a certain gap from students is helpful because____________

I have tried to maintain positive TSR but_________ challenges____________
CHAPTER 4

Analysis and findings

Introduction

Chapter 4 will review my analyses of the data. My data consists of the opinions, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers. Thus, I was not looking for right or wrong answers. I analyzed the perceptions and the rationales behind their perception to categorize them, which means that similar perceptions were placed under similar categories. While examining the data, experience in teaching, gender, age, and other information provided in questionnaire Part 1 was also considered. I listed the barriers mentioned by the teachers who perceive TSRs as a protective factor and have failed to develop a good rapport with their students.

During one of my courses at Vancouver Island University, I was working on one of my assignments for exceptionalities in children and my topic was depression. While searching the literature, I learned that most of the studies give suggestions about fighting depression or dealing and helping people in depression. Few studies talked about the protective factors that could stop people from being overwhelmed by stress and depression. One major protective factor I came across was positive Teacher-Student Relationships, and I decided to ask teachers in India about their perception regarding positive Teacher-Student Relationships as a protective factor for mental health of students.

For this qualitative study, I chose a questionnaire survey as a method to ask teachers their perceptions. My questionnaire was in two parts: Part I sought general information about their teaching experience, specialization, classroom strength, etc. Part II consisted of ten statements to which teachers were asked to give their opinions by choosing one of the four options. These included: slightly agree, agree, slightly disagree, or disagree. Finally, the questionnaire included
three open-ended questions, which asked teachers to share their rationales for choosing options
and the major barriers they perceived were hindering their building positive Teacher-Student
Relationships.

To collect data to answer my research question, I asked teacher participants from India to
share their insights on these questionnaires. Teachers from the government and private schools of
city Chandigarh and Jalandhar in Punjab state were the participants. I selected these two cities
because Chandigarh city is a union territory and capitol of two states namely, Punjab and
Haryana, which together have a mix of population from different states. Jalandhar city is one of
the biggest districts, and there are 21 towns and 941 villages in the area.

Physical copies of questionnaire were provided to the schools, one in Chandigarh and one in
Jalandhar. These questionnaires were distributed with the help of my team member, who also
collected completed questionnaires from the reception area of the school. A total 42 teachers
volunteered. Of these teachers, two were male teachers and remaining 40 were female teachers
from different subject specializations and years of experience in teaching.

As mentioned in the consent form participants signed, if participants were uncomfortable
giving answers to any question, they were told they could leave that question blank. Upon
checking all the questionnaires, I discovered that 12 questionnaires were only partly, but not
fully, completed. Important information like subject specialization, years of experience, and
other important information were not answered. As well, most of these questionnaires did not
answer the open-ended questions. Obviously, not answering these questions was the right of
these teachers; however, this rendered 12 out of 42 questionnaires unfit for analysis. As a result,
I have selected the 30 fully-completed questionnaires for further analysis and have given them code numbers from 1 to 30 to make it easy for analysis.

**Question by question analysis**

To review, participants were asked a question. Then participants were given a series of choices to answer, from slightly agree (mostly disagree), agree, slightly disagree (mostly agree) and disagree. The following section outlines these teacher-participant responses. Below, I have analyzed each question on the questionnaire. First, each question is written: second, I review the answers that teacher participants offered and try to make initial sense of what their answers might tell me as a researcher. Further analysis will be engaged as a summary of this chapter.

**Question 1.** “I perceive positive Teacher-Student Relationship (TSR) as a protective factor for mental health of students.”

In this first statement of the questionnaire, participants were asked to select one option out of slightly agree, agree, slightly disagree, and disagree and then offer a rationale for their answer. Because the purpose of the study was to better understand the perceptions of teachers regarding positive teacher-student relationship as a protective factor for the mental health of their students, I decided to ask this question directly as the first question in the questionnaire. All 30 participants, irrespective of their gender, years of teaching experience, teaching load, or other major responsibilities in school, reported their agreement for the statement. Clearly, they perceived positive TSR as a protective factor. With their agreement, they also gave their opinions about positive TSR.
Three teachers mentioned that positive TSR improved the learning experiences of students and resulted in better academic performance as well as the mental health of students. In addition, three participants stated that TSR decreases classroom anxiety, stress, and also helped build confidence in students, which further helped build resilience in students. One teacher agreed to the statement by stating that TSR helped students feel included and cared for, which means they are more emotionally connected. Two participants shared similar opinions that TSRs were helpful in positive mental, emotional, and social development. Specifically, teachers mentioned following as key benefits of positive TSRs:

1. Helped students feel safe in classrooms
2. Were helpful in emotional and social development
3. Enhanced the quality of teaching-learning experience
4. Helped build confidence
5. Decreased stress and anxiety of classroom
6. Helped students feel included and heard.

One teacher offered “wings” as a metaphor for positive TSRs, which was a beautiful expression for the feelings, students have when somebody stands by their side in the school or in case of any trouble.
Question II. “I believe in building good rapport with students in order to earn their respect.”

Of the 30 teacher participants who participated in my research study, 23 teachers completely agreed with the statement that building good rapport with students was “very important” to earn their trust. Whereas, five teachers marked slightly agree, one marked slightly disagree, and one noted that they completely disagree with it.

Question III. “I was stopped by my superiors from being too engaging in my classroom.”

For this question, 20 participants completely disagreed that they were stopped by their superiors from being engaging in their classrooms. This collective response suggests that their senior colleagues did not limit their classroom work. On the other hand, five teachers completely agreed with the statement, two slightly agreed, and three slightly disagreed. Their responses, taken in total, suggest that most teachers believe they have autonomy in their classrooms to engage students however they decide is the best way to do so.

Question IV. “I believe environmental factors (family, society, peers etc.) have huge impact on academic outcomes of a student.”

Of the 30 teachers who participated, 27 teacher participants believed environmental factors had huge impacts on academic outcomes. Two teachers felt that other important factors were as important as environmental factors by reporting slight disagreement with the statement, and only one teacher believed that the environment had an impact but not a huge impact by giving slight agreement to it.

Question V. “I listen to my student’s problems even from their personal life outside the school and try to help.”
Of the 30 teacher participants, 24 teachers reported their complete agreement to the statement that they tried to listen to the personal problems of students and tried to help. Six participants showed slight agreement, which meant they believed certain barriers existed that prevented them from helping always when it came to problems from the personal lives of students. Thus, all these six participants agreed that environmental factors had a huge impact in the above statement, but still they reported a slight agreement for this statement.

**Question VI.** “I feel building good rapport with students in classroom is just a waste of time, as we got so much to cover in a short time frame.”

Of the 30 teacher participants, 26 teachers reported their complete disagreement for the statement. This means, in their opinion, that building good rapport is not a waste of time even if they must complete so much work in short time frame. Three participants slightly disagreed by stating that good rapport does not result in learning, but it helps to create conditions conducive for learning. Furthermore, their work is difficult because there is much content to cover in their syllabus. Only one teacher completely agreed by saying that they only have 40 minutes with students in their classroom, which is not even enough to cover the syllabus. This participant’s suggestion is that teachers should be given with extra time for rapport building. On the other hand, one teacher reported their opinion that rapport building is not limited to the walls of classroom.

Teachers also reported the following benefits of building good rapport with students. They reported that TSRs:

1. Were important for ensuring holistic development of students.
2. Helped students resolve their academic and non-academic issues.
3. Decreased the communication gap between a teacher and a student.
4. Helped teachers better understand individual differences and problems of students.
5. Enhanced the overall teaching-learning experience.
6. Gives satisfaction to teachers to increase their confidence.
7. Helps students feel safe in the classroom.

**Question VII.** “I was never stopped from getting involved into the personal problems of students by my superiors.”

Of the 30 teachers who participated, 27 teachers agreed to the statement. Their response suggests that they have never been stopped by their superiors from getting involved in the personal problems of students. Three teachers completely agreed, one slightly agreed, and five slightly disagreed to the statement. The teacher who slightly agreed to the statement also slightly agreed to the previous statement that they listened to the personal problems of students from outside the school life and tried to help. These responses suggest that the participant was stopped a few times from becoming involved in the personal problems of students, which might be one reason the participant reported not being able to help students all the time.

Five teachers agreed to statements VI and V that they believed environmental factors had huge impacts on academic outcomes and reported that they tried to listen to the personal problems of the students from outside school life. However, some teachers slightly disagreed (mostly agreed) to the statement “I was never stopped from getting involved into the personal problems of students by my superiors.” These answers suggest they probably were often stopped by superiors or senior colleagues from becoming involved into the personal problems of students and they considered this as one of the barriers for initiating positive TSRs.
Three participants reported their agreement to this statement: they also believed that environment factors have huge impacts students. As well, they reported that they always tried to help students with personal problems.

One pattern I discovered by analyzing the data was that all the teachers who were stopped by the superiors at some point in time from becoming involved in the personal problems of students were from one or another field of science. However, these opinions were independent of the years of experience because the answers varied from 1 to 25 years of teaching experience among the teachers being interrupted by the senior colleagues. I am unsure what this correlation suggests, but it might be worth further research.

**Question VIII.** “I believe in creating a safe classroom environment for my students where they can share anything without any fear.”

Almost every teacher participant (29 of 30 participants) agreed they should create a safe classroom environment so that students could share without fear. Only one participant slightly agreed, which suggests she believed in creating a save environment where students could share. However, this same participant also showed slight agreement for statement V, which suggests she does not always listen to the personal problems of students and try to help.

**Question IX.** “I perceive that teachers can protect students from stress and depression by becoming positive influence in their life.”

Teachers could be positive influences in students’ lives and can protect them from stress and depression, 29 participants out of 30 teacher participants reported. Only one teacher slightly
agreed to this statement. These answers likely mean that participants believe that other influences also have major roles.

**Question X.** “List major barriers in the way of building good relationship with students as per your perception.”

In this open-ended question, teachers were asked to list major barriers they faced while trying to build positive relationships and good rapport with their students. As part of the analysis of these barriers, I wrote all the teacher-participants’ responses on a sheet of paper, then I studied them to build themes that would allow me to better organize and understand the responses. Using this analysis process, I came up with seven types of barriers. These were: (1) Academic barriers, (2) Social barriers, (3) Knowledge/training barriers, (4) Environmental barriers, (5) Attitudinal barriers, (6) Communication barriers, and (7) Student barriers.

Following are the common barriers I perceived, with the teacher-participants comments under each barrier.

1. Academic barriers:
   a. Focus on syllabus completion
   b. Ignorance of co-curricular activities, which are actually helpful in building good rapport and team spirit.
   c. Shortage of time, or time stolen from teaching.
   d. More focus on academic grades and not on overall development of child, due to which teachers remain syllabus focused.
   e. Workload and other responsibilities on teachers.
   f. Large classroom size.

2. Social barriers:
a. Prevailing higher status of teachers creates a gap between teachers and students.

b. Social expectations and pressure of senior colleagues.

3. Knowledge/training barriers:

a. Less awareness or lack of knowledge among teachers regarding positive outcomes of positive teacher student relationship.

b. Teachers mental health, knowledge, training, or previous experiences of building relationships.

4. Environmental barriers:

a. Impact of home environment on student’s behaviour and social skills.

b. Rural background and its impact on student’s thought process.

c. Fearful atmosphere of school and classroom due to rigid norms of school and high expectations.

5. Attitudinal barriers:

a. Lack of discipline and moral values in students.

b. Favouritism in the classroom impact negatively on student’s relationship with teachers.

c. Lack of mutual respect.

d. Anti-social behaviour of students

e. Dictatorial attitude of teachers in classroom and not-so-welcomed attitude towards student’s opinions.

6. Communication barriers:

a. Communication gap between teacher and a student.

b. Introvert nature of students
7. Student barriers:
   
a. Lack of student interest and involvement in classroom discussions.

Summary

In this chapter, I have shared my analysis of the data I collected. In Chapter 5 I will discuss the meanings I have ascribed to this data and share a discussion of limitations, implications, and suggest a scope for future research studies into this important area.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Introduction

In this research study, I looked at the perceptions of teachers in India regarding Positive Teacher-Student Relationships as a protective factor for mental health of students. I chose to do my thesis in this particular area because I believe that one positive TSR can change the life of student. In my own first-hand experience with my teachers when I was a student and in my teaching experience, I was stopped by my superiors from feeling able to engage in the class due to short time span and felt as if I was also stopped from helping students with their personal problems outside of the school concern. Thus, my own experiences have encouraged me to learn about the opinions of other teachers regarding positive TSRs.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the area of my study, what led me to choose this topic, why this topic is so important for me, and how the findings of this study might benefit others. I defined and explained the terminology used along with my research question, sub-questions, and general methodology.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature in the area of positive Teacher-Student relationships, shared my findings about the advantages of positive relationships with teachers and also discussed the impact of negative TSRs which are more harmful than not having positive relationship with teachers or any adults. I also looked into the impact of positive TSRs on academic outcomes of students, socio-emotional well-being, and mental health.

In Chapter 3, I outlined my research methodology and noted the steps I followed in process of taking REB approval, recruitment of participants, and data collection. For the purpose of gathering opinions of teachers in India regarding Positive Teacher- Student Relationship, I
asked teacher participants from India to answer a two-part questionnaire with the help of my team member. These completed questionnaires served as the data for this study.

In Chapter 4, I shared the findings of my research study by analyzing the questionnaires and working to make sense out of the findings by making links between responses. Specifically, I found that 30 of 30 teacher participants believe positive TSRS are a protective factor for all the aspects of students which lead to good mental health. These findings suggest that 100 % of teachers respond positively to the idea of building good rapport with students and helping students with any kinds of issues they have. Participants mentioned the barriers they faced while building positive TSRs, and lack of skills and appropriate training was second most common barriers mentioned after social pressure.

**Summary of findings**

In this chapter I present a summary of all my findings in this study along with a discussion of limitations, implications, and scope of future studies. During the analysis of collected data, I found no relationships between teachers’ perceptions with their gender and years of experience in the teaching. Most teachers who reported being stopped by their superiors from getting involved into the personal problems of the students or from being too engaging in the classroom were from one or another field of science. In considering why that might be the case, I have theorized that science is a subject that requires a large amount of involvement from both teachers and students to help students better understand the facts and the science behind those facts.

This whole process of building connections between science and students is time-consuming and a lack of time is the most commonly-reported barrier in this study. This study leads me to think about some of the strategies, science teachers might engage that could help
them build good rapport with students without leaving their main focus, which is content teaching in the required time frame. That important question, however, would take further research and consideration.

Another interesting connection I found was that six teachers reported that they were never stopped from being too engaging in the classroom or they were only stopped few times. These teacher participants showed slight disagreement (mostly agreed) with the statement “I was stopped from getting involved in to the personal problems of the students by my superiors.” I have interpreted that this finding means they were not stopped from being engaging in the classroom when it came to subject or content teaching; however, they were stopped from becoming involved into the personal problems of students that were not related to the course. If I am correct, this finding suggests that a lack of knowledge among teachers regarding the impact of environmental factors (family, peer pressure, negative experiences, etc.) on the academic outcomes of students.

One of the 30 participants was the self-admitted administrator of the school, who believed that positive TSRs were important. He also believed that environmental factors had a huge impact on academic outcomes. As a result, he reported that he always tried to listen to the students’ problems, both inside the school and from their personal lives outside the school. He reported never being stopped by anyone from being too engaging in the classroom or in the personal problems of the students.

However, one teacher from same school, who had 22 years of teaching experience in teaching genetics (field of biology) and was a self-admitted career counsellor in the school, reported that she was stopped from becoming involved in the personal problems of the students and was also stopped by the superiors from being too engaging in the classroom most of the
time. This finding suggests that there might be differences in perspectives between teachers and administrators about how behaviors are interpreted.

Another teacher participant from that same school, who was also a self-reported counsellor and had 25 years of experience, reported only slight agreement to the statement “I listen to my student’s problem even from their personal life outside the school and try to help.” This teacher participant reported social pressure as the most important barrier for not succeeding in maintaining positive TSRs. These findings suggest that, despite having a clear vision and positive opinion about positive TSRs, even an administrator of a school might be failing to help educators overcome various barriers in the way of creating good rapport with the students.

**Limitations**

For this study, I recruited participants from one government school of Chandigarh, which is a union territory, and one private school of Jalandhar city of Punjab. I chose these two cities because both are big cities and have mixed population from different parts of India.

One limitation of the study was the small sample size, which I believe is insufficient to fully generalize from. There was no difference in the opinions of teachers from different parts of state or from different school setup because all 30 participants reported that Teacher-Student Relationships (TSRs) were of utmost importance for the overall growth of students. However, the barriers they have listed included the school set up, available resources, knowledge, and social environment, which differs in different parts of country and in different type of schools. Where I to replicate this research in smaller villages or towns in India, there is a probability of participants reporting different barriers for building TSRs.
Implications and recommendations

This study was specifically done in India because I found little research conducted in this area in India. I believe that, in order to give implications and recommendations for the improvement of anything in education, first we must understand the present situation or educational entry behaviors. With this vision, I moved forward and collected perceptions of teachers in India regarding Teacher-Student Relationships as protective factors for the mental health of students and to help them mediate the different barriers they were facing in a real-time teaching experience.

One major concern that appeared during analysis was that 20 of 30 teachers reported that building positive Teacher-Student Relationships required special skills and knowledge that could be developed through training. This finding suggests a lack of training, workable strategies, and understandings in the area as one of the biggest barriers for teachers in India. Given my own experience, I am not surprised by this finding. Thus, I believe that in-service teacher training sessions, discussion groups, and exposure to the latest research and the most proven strategies for teachers could help teachers from India improve this practice.

Social barriers are also something that cannot be changed overnight or in a few days by suggesting some implications. These barriers have grown from old thought processes deeply embedded in Indian society. These social barriers can be changed only by providing an awareness about the changing needs of individuals with changing times and increasing pressures of a highly-paced lifestyle on parents, students, and teachers.

Another study finding suggests that a lack of knowledge exists among teachers about mental health and how mental health is interlinked with other aspects of individuals’ well-being. In their opinions on TSRs as a protective factor for mental health in students, only two teachers
reported positive TSRs a way of releasing stress and anxiety among children in classrooms. The remainder of my study participants all deemed that TSRs were helpful in effective teaching-learning process. Thus, I believe stakeholders, including those in the education ministry and school boards, should educate everyone regarding mental health, which is at least a subject talked about in India. However, these discussions must be generated by teachers by means of trainings, workshops, professional discussions.

Suggestions for further research

Teacher-student relationships are important protective factors that have not been studied much in India. My present study focused on teachers’ perceptions; however, due to time constraint and a small sample size, I was unable to collect a large amount of data. As a result, to further this research, more participants from more states would help to generalize the potential barriers for positive TSRs.

After learning more about the perceptions of teachers and potential barriers, in the future researchers might also research more about the perceptions of students and the barriers they are facing while they work to build good relationships with their teachers. Furthermore, by keeping the perceptions of both teachers and students in mind, we could come up with better implications and strategies for educators. Another possible research, which could be done in future, might focus on the perceptions of teachers regarding the most interesting and effective methods of receiving in-service trainings related to building good rapport with students.

Conclusion

A positive teacher-student relationship was important for me because it played an important role in carving my personality and behind making me resilient. I was fortunate to have supportive teachers and parents, which I realize every day when I fight back easily from tough
and depressing moments. I was so inspired by my teachers that I chose teaching as a career with a vision of replicating this same role for my students. However, because I was stopped over and again from being involved in the problems of students and I was able to see students’ disengagement in their classrooms and the negative impact such disengagements had on students’ academic, socio-emotional and mental health, I was encouraged to engage in this specific research study.

Because I was a teacher in India, and because Teacher-Student Relationships were so important for me, I decided to ask teachers about their perceptions regarding positive Teacher-Student Relations and the barriers they faced as teachers who worked to build such relationships. I was not surprised by my research findings: in fact, much of what I found in my research was what I expected. All the participants perceived positive TSRs as a protective factor for overall positive development of students, but they had faced some opposition building good rapport with students.

After learning more about some of the different barriers, I now feel that opposition exists and that it is more widespread than only teachers. Even people in higher positions of administration, people in management, or education departments also face different barriers. On one hand, teachers feel a lack of training as one big barrier; on the other hand, proving continuous training to teachers is difficult for stakeholders because of a lack of funds and a need for experts. Teachers felt that they were asked to remain syllabus-focused only because of big curriculum and short time spans, and even the administrators and superiors lacked workable strategies for making and sharing decisions.

As I end my research study, I can say that the teachers in India who participated in my research perceived positive TSRs as a factor for helping different aspects of student’s well-being.
This finding has given me a sense of relief that they are thinking in a right direction, even though they are facing barriers. That said, I don’t believe these barriers are insurmountable. I also believe that these barriers could be eliminated by providing appropriate training for building necessary skills, awareness for mental health and its sensitivity, appropriate knowledge for understanding basic psychology of individuals, and a better understanding of the changing needs of individuals as called for by the changing times.

Finally, I hope this research will lead someone to research administrators of the schools for understanding what barriers they are facing for providing required trainings to the teachers, various effective and inexpensive ways to provide up to date knowledge to the teachers and how teachers want to receive trainings.
References


