
Teacher –Students Relationship as a Tool for Positive Academic Performance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The paper examined the concept of teacher-students relationship as a tool for positive academic performance. It examined the essential components of student –teacher relationship such as the learners, teachers, cooperative learning, and reciprocal learning and so on. The paper also talks about the importance of teacher-students relationship which stated that good teachers’ students’ relationship creates many advantages between both the teachers and students. For instance, a good relationship produces a good environment within the classroom. It also highlights the causes of poor teachers’ students’ relationship, such as insensitivity to student needs, teachers’ bullying, troublesome behaviour and so on. Lastly, the paper proffers solution to poor teachers’ students’ relationship that, teachers should avoid the use of complete authority in handling students. Since the students are under the care of the teacher, the teacher is expected to show good example to them, his authority and discipline over the students should be personal rather than official and also parents’ show of concern for their children’s welfare is crucial.*

KEYWORDS: teacher, students, relationship, positive, academic, performance

INTRODUCTION

The educational planners, educational managers, and teachers participating in the educational system are directly responsible for the success or failure of any educational system, whether in developed or developing countries around the world. Teachers play a critical role in our educational system, and it's no exaggeration to say that "no educational system can rise beyond the calibre of its teachers" (FRN 2000). Teachers' services are so essential and crucial in shaping the nation's future by enhancing the calibre of men and women who are desirable to society (Ekechukwu and Ifeanyichukwu, 2021).

The academic achievement of pupils at school is influenced by schools and teachers. Students, teachers, or schools could all be to blame for a student's low academic achievement. This is supported by a study, Egbokhan (2016) that found a positive interaction between professors and students, which has the potential to affect students' academic performance. As a result, effective school planning can assist pupils in overcoming these issues (Amaefule, 2018). This is in keeping with the advice that the teacher-student relationship be improved in order to improve the learning process and develop mutual assistance and interaction in diverse activities (Aduwa, 2014). Teachers and fellow students both have a part in affecting the teacher-student interaction. The importance of developing teacher-student relationships includes increased student interest in learning, improved student academic achievement, and more motivated students (Adeoye, 2013). Furthermore, teachers must work with children to lessen negative emotions such as anger, despair, dissatisfaction, boredom, and fear, while always boosting positive feelings such as confidence, enjoyment, appreciation, and safety, if teachers are dissatisfied, frustrated, uninspired, and unmotivated, the nation's educational system is doomed, because educational goals cannot be met without them (Bajah, 2014).

According to Lee (2007), the trust that develops in teacher-student relationships might influence students' academic achievement. Student – teacher relationship can influence students' future paths towards academic excellence (Lee, 2007). As a result, as Lee (2007) points out, a positive and professional relationship between teachers and students is critical in providing a safe environment in which students may work without feeling rushed and become motivated to learn. To create secure environments and offer students confidence in their abilities to work without pressure and become motivated to learn, a decent and professional connection is essential (O'Connor, Dearing, and Collins, 2011). Students are better able to recall freshly taught knowledge when they are directed by favourable emotional inputs (Nelson and Lorber, 2009). It should be stressed that when the teaching and learning atmosphere is safe and supportive, children are motivated, impacted, and stimulated to actively participate with their professors. That is the relationship between the teacher and the pupil. According to Fraser, Adridge and Soerjaningsih (2010), teachers should establish a professional relationship with their students, because the creation and maintenance of a positive classroom climate plays an important role in rendering the teaching and learning process more effective and efficient.

An over view of Teacher –Student Relationship

The student-teacher relationship is one of the most important features in the context of learning. It is also one of the factors affecting student-teacher development, school engagement and academic motivation. Student-teacher relationships form the basis of the social context in which learning takes place (Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011). Student-teacher interactions are not only influenced by a number of aspects including gender, but in turn also influence a student's academic performance and behaviour. Supportive and positive relationships between teacher and students ultimately promote a sense of school belonging and encourage students to participate cooperatively in classroom activities (Hughes and Chen, 2011). One positive aspect about the above perceptions from literature is evidence that good relationships between students and their teachers are essential to the development of all students in school (Hamre and Pianta, 2001).

In the report of Hamre and Pianta (2001), they posited that positive student-teacher relationships are a valuable resource for students. A constructive relationship with a teacher enables students to be able to work on their own because they know their teachers are there for them in case problems arise. They also know that such teachers will recognise and respond to the problem promptly. As children enter the formal school setting, relationships with teachers provide the foundation for successful adjustment to the social and academic environment. Roorda *et al.* (2011) demonstrated that the quality of student-teacher relationships is strongly related to students' motivation to learn.

In the same vein, Nurmin (2012) found that teachers ensure more close relationships with highly engaged students. The association of teacher student relationships is stronger with student engagement than with learning achievement. Self-determination theory also exemplifies on the importance of good student-teacher relationships. The theory argues that individuals have three basic psychological needs: the need for relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The need for relatedness, or belonging, refers to a human being's tendency towards wanting "to feel connected to others; to love and care" (Fosen, 2016). The need for belonging is so strong that individuals seek to develop relationships even in adverse situations. The need to belong is a powerful motivation in itself, and that is why students who feel connected with and supported by their teachers are more likely to feel motivated to learn. Student-teacher relationships are correlated with students' intrinsic motivation (OECD 2013). Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) highlight three types of student-teacher engagement, namely emotional, behavioural, and cognitive engagement. They further said that it is useful for understanding why good relations promote intrinsic motivation. According to Fredricks *et al.* (2004), emotional engagement refers to students' emotional reactions such as interest. Teacher warmth and attention to students can motivate students to participate in classroom activities. Such positive emotions drive student motivation and can therefore lead to behavioural engagement, when students cooperate by following rules and participating in learning activities (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand and Kindermann, 2008).

In line with the above, Furrer and Skinner (2003) believe that students' participation can be externally motivated by wanting to please teachers, which means that students might seek teacher approval and attention as a reward. When there is no student-teacher relationships, it is overtly characterised by conflict which may be damaging to students, more damaging than simply a lack of close teacher-student relationships (Murray & Murray, 2004).

That is why Spilt, Hughes, Wu and Kwok (2012), argue that conflicting relationships with teachers cause feelings of distress and in security in students, there by restricting their ability to concentrate on learning. Students with more conflictual teacher student relationships had insufficient down-regulation of cortisol levels, meaning they were constantly more stressed than students with good teacher-student relationships (Murray and Murray, 2004). Educators' relationships with students are equally beneficial to teachers, with research showing that good teacher-student relationships are positively correlated to teachers' job satisfaction and effectiveness (Day and Gu, 2009; Fosen, 2016). Negative teacher-student relationships are a

common source of teacher stress and burnout. This is understandable when one considers the emotional labour that is part of teachers' work, especially in relation to dealing with disruptive student behaviour, this could eventually lead to brain drain in the system.

The above literature shows that student-teacher relationships have a great impact on students' attitudes towards achievement. It is also obvious that if students are comfortable with their teachers and the school environment, positive relationships will be easily developed, which might benefit their social behaviours and skills. This is in consonance with Koen (2018), statement, that the development of interpersonal relationships, either between student and teacher or between students and students, is simply the keystone in building what individual learners want to achieve in both the classroom and life itself. From the above it can be deduced that student -teacher relationships are the emotional bond that exists between teachers and students in school. Both students and teachers have the power to shape and change the quality of these relationships (Sabol and Pianta, 2012). In the same vein Nugent (2009) suggests that by creating healthy relationships, teachers can motivate students during the learning process, which is one of the main objectives in a teacher's practice. To make relationships between teachers and students easier, teachers must be aware of the students' emotional and academic needs and must be able to work with it.

Essential Components of the Teacher–Student Relationship

The learner: who is a negotiator in the learning development and the objective of learning. Richard and Rogers (2011) argue that learners have the responsibility to partake in classroom activities that are based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning. Students have to be comfortable with listening in the group. This stand point signifies that relationship is a need that students ought to strive for in order to achieve their goals. They need to be in relationship with their teachers to enable them experience school in a positive way that can result in academic achievement.

The teacher: Richard and Rodgers (2011) note that teacher can also be assumed to be a counsellor, group process manager and effective communicator in the classroom. In such ways, teachers need to reflect on how they can assist their students toward success. This is an important component that maintains higher expectations for each student. They also have a big role in facilitating the communication process between students to act as an independent contributor within the learning environment and they inspire students to re-imagine their future.

Cooperative learning: Macpherson (2007) notes that cooperative learning is part of a group of teaching and learning techniques where students interact with each other to acquire and practice the elements of a subject matter to meet common learning goals'. Cooperative learning is a very formal structuring of activities in a learning context that includes specific elements intending to increase the potential for rich and deep learning (Macpherson, 2007). It provides a chance to encourage and support each other in the learning environment. This point really shows the truth of interdependence in the group that members are responsible for each other's success.

The teacher may observe and intervene if necessary to ensure that the task is done accordingly. Tickett and Moos (1973) as cited in Myers and Claus, (2012) state that the classroom environment consists of dimensions; the ability for students to develop relationships with their instructors and peers and the extent to which students can engage in learning activities, and the general structure of the classroom provided by the instructor.

Many learners still seem to depend completely on the teacher to impart knowledge teachers carry the whole duty for education; while learners or students are supposed to listen and often do not even have any idea at first of what occurs in the classroom. However, this practice is changing owing to educational and social reforms that need to be developed. Nugent (2009) suggests that to create a strong relationship, teachers need to motivate during the learning process. Relationships are formed in the social groups of both teachers and students, and especially in educational contexts. As a result, teachers and students need to play more of an active role towards achieving academic success; they have to establish a more positive and professional relationship. Motivation plays a very crucial role in the process of building good relationships in school, as it encourages students to work very hard so that they could be given again.

Reciprocal teaching: Downey (2008), on his work ‘Recommendations for fostering educational resilience in the classroom’ suggests the use of reciprocal teaching as an effective instructional tool; one that requires the building of a strong interaction between teachers and students as they develop an inquiry – oriented approach to learning’. Based on my experience as a teacher, I learned that the teaching process that is set through structural dialogue technique between teachers and students is the key for providing the opportunity to create a good and professional relationship in the learning contexts. Having a socializing environment between teachers and students helps in instilling values and experiences such as motivation to learn actively in the classroom or learning environment.

Support and openness: Warshof and Rappaport (2013) have clearly explained the value of support and openness in order to create and cultivate a professional relationship between learners and teachers in the school. They impress on educational leaders the importance of providing support to teachers so that they may have a key help to maintain the formed relationship with the students. It is clear that strong and quality relationships need support to provide teachers with guidance on relationship building and maintaining strategies in the learning environment. O’Connor, Dearing and Collins (2011) confirm ‘the importance of fostering school teachers’ awareness of the role of their relationships with students, and provide teachers with information on how to develop relationships in the classroom and school in general.

Cognitive and socio-psychological process: Hallinan (2008) recommends learning to be a cognitive and socio-psychological process, it has shown that students who like school have higher academic achievements. This means that creating supportive and professional relationships with students give teachers additional strengths that

promote learning with joy and pleasure as of a wide range of students' interests. Larson (2011) says that attitude and achievements that students develop inside the school have an important impact on teacher-student relationships in schools. If students feel comfortable with the teacher and the school environment, they can make more positive and professional relationship such as friendship, develop a better way to behave and improve in their social thinking.

Fulfilment of students' expectations: Fosnot (2005), stated that fulfilment of students 'expectations may be directly linked to motivation and performance in learning.' For example, providing motivation to the way students and teachers behave in the classroom can create a strong relationship because to a certain extent, they are influencing each other. Dillon (2010) confirms that 'it is during the first lesson when both students and teacher establish the basis for their relationship. The greetings, the role and what it is has expected of each other is discussed.' The basis of the relationship between teachers is made during the first time people meet. For example, human beings have set up relationships based on what they shared from the first time of meeting. Hence teachers and students do the same in formulating their relationships in the learning contexts. Reeve (2006) has mentioned educator's characteristics that may help in creating healthy and productive relationships such as gentleness, discipline, relatedness and supportiveness. Hence, it is important to note that these characteristics seem to be the codes of caring.

Importance of teachers' students' relationship

According to Joshua and Joshua (2006), a good teachers' students' relationship creates many advantages between both the teachers and students. For instance, a good relationship produces a good environment within the classroom, which can be a vital point to the success of both teacher and student. On the other hand, there is a flip side to the coin and that is a bad relationship. A bad relationship is where most of the problems come about in the classroom for both teacher and student.

Maduka (2014) discovers that many students are no longer able to express and expand their minds because of the barriers placed upon them by their teachers and peers. Blankstein wrote that one must conform to the teachers' way of thinking because if you do not, you are taking a chance in receiving a bad grade. Even though one must compromise one's own opinion to satisfy a teacher, it is worth it because you only need to take that course once if you follow the style and beliefs of your teacher. Then again, if you do not follow the pattern of your teacher, you may end up taking that same course many times until you finally surrender to the beliefs of your instructors.

The teacher's opinion in the classroom can be overpowering in many cases and it can make you forfeit your own opinion even if you feel that you are right. Such intimidating methods of the teacher can repress the creativity of the student. Therefore, making the student into a uniform thinker, which is not the best way in acquiring knowledge. As Socrates would say, one must ask questions and challenge them to find the truth (the truth being knowledge) and that is the best way to acquire knowledge (Ajao, 2011).

Simply the notion that a teacher and a student are having a bad relationship can cause many problems. The problems that do derived can be very dramatic in both the teacher and the students. In case of the teacher, it could possibly make the teacher more inclined to punish students without even having a true valid excuse in doing so. Furthermore, communication which is one of the most essential tools in a place of education would be broken and perhaps never again be obtained (Oredein, 2010).

When the teacher creates an environment that the student feels comfortable and welcome it could only open the door for knowledge and even more. The reason being that the student feels confident to express himself without any fear of being isolated and ridicule from his peers and teachers. The teacher can also benefit from a good environment because the teacher will probably be more inclined to teach with inspiration and creativity. When someone feels comfortable in their environment, one is able to challenge many things that are not reasonable (Ofoegbu, 2009). Overall a good relationship can be beneficial to the teacher and the student, if not both the teacher and the student run the risk of losing something very valuable. Unnecessary obstacles are placed on the teacher and student when there is a bad relationship between them. So if there is any way to avoid a bad relationship, it should be done

Teacher-Student-Relationship and Academic Performance

A good and professional relationship is required to create safe contexts and give students confidence in their capability to work without pressure and become motivated to learn (O'Connor, Dearing and Collins, 2011). This especially happens when students are guided by positive emotional stimuli, they are better able to recall newly learned information (Nelson and Lorber, 2009). Here, it should be emphasized that students feel motivated, influenced and stimulated to actively participate with their teachers when the teaching and learning environment is safe and supportive. That is the teacher–student's relationship is vital to academic performance.

According to Fraser, Adridge and Soerjaningsih (2010), teachers should establish a professional relationship with their students, because the creation and maintenance of a positive classroom climate plays an important role in rendering the teaching and learning process more effective and efficient. Hence, students in quality relationships with their teachers are helped in improving and fostering knowledge, attitude, skills and social development. Also, students with higher quality relationships take part more often and are more engaged in the learning perspectives than the students with a lower quality relationship. O'Connor (2008) states that personal relationships with students gives teachers internal rewards and gives meaning to their work. Based on this viewpoint, teacher - student relationship helps teachers create a sense of trust and increase the number of opportunities to sustain a meaningful role in the learning context.

Teacher – Student's relationships play a very important role in developing a mental picture of an individual. Ewnetu and Fisseha (2008) postulate that teachers have the basic needs for relatedness among the students in their class which can play an important role in students' self-concepts, the expectation towards scholastic

achievements as well as how to make a meaningful life after school. Hence, a student's self-esteem development is the overall sense of support a student feels from the important people around them. Myers and Pianta (2008) confirm that teacher – students relationship is fundamental to healthy development of students in school especially with regard to the student's self-esteem. Lee (2007) notes that the trust developed in teacher - student relationships can contribute to students' academic performance.

Causes of poor teachers' students' relationship

The following are some of the causes of poor teachers' students' relationships according to Nuhfer (2014).

- **Insensitivity to student needs:** A lack of awareness on the part of the instructor leads to poor teacher-student relationships. Not all students respond the same way to lessons, and some require personalized educational practices. For example, a teacher might assume that a student who never volunteers in class is apathetic or disengaged. In reality, the student might be a visual learner who does not respond well to lecture-style teaching. Relationship troubles between teachers and students surface when a teacher doesn't consider an individual student's educational needs. Personality, family backgrounds, thought processes, learning styles, priorities, maturity levels and academic goals influence each student's ability to learn and connect with educators. Teachers are wise to view each student as an individual who deserves one-on-one attention and specialized, focused instruction whenever possible.
- **Teachers' bullying:** Bullying by a teacher leads to poor relationships with students. Stuart Twemlow, MD, a psychiatrist who directs the Peaceful Schools and Communities Project at the Menninger Clinic in Houston, conducted an anonymous survey of 116 teachers at seven elementary schools. Surprisingly, 45 percent of the teachers admitted to bullying a student. Twemlow defines teacher bullying as "using power to punish, manipulate, or disparage a student beyond what would be a reasonable disciplinary procedure." When elementary, junior high, high school and even college instructors bully students, their behaviour results in dysfunctional teacher-student relationships. Students don't trust teachers who bully them, and they don't feel that those instructors have their best interests in mind. Some students lash out at teachers who bully them or withdraw completely — neither of which is a healthy or productive option.
- **Crossed lines and mixed signals:** Teachers often send students mixed messages. Social networking, texting and online teacher-student interactions complicate classroom relationships. In some cases, teachers get too friendly with their students and cross lines of professionalism, even when sexual misconduct doesn't occur. For example, some students lose respect for teachers who accept their Facebook friend requests and post images of themselves taking part in inappropriate behaviours. When a teacher's private, personal life becomes a part of the classroom environment, some students lose sight of appropriate boundaries.
- **Troublesome behaviour:** A leading cause of dissension between teachers and students is rude, disrespectful or condescending behaviour. Teachers are often to blame for these types

of infractions, but students are guilty as well. Teachers who interrupt students, blame them for classroom problems, ignore students' personal needs, criticize them in front of classmates and demonstrate apathy do their students a great disservice. Instructors should always try to show appreciation, respect, kindness and patience. Displaying flaring tempers, yelling at students and expressing frequent irritation results in stressful and unhealthy teacher-student relationships. Similarly, students who show disrespect, badmouth teachers or ignore well-meaning guidance contribute to strained relationships.

Proffer solution to poor teachers' students' relationship

Onyeachu (2006) stated that the following should be done;

1. Teachers should avoid the use of complete authority in handling students
2. Enough facilities should be provided in the school that will give room for teachers and students to make use of outside academic activities to create a strong bond between them
3. Schools should endeavour to formulate few rules and regulations. Efforts should be made to get students represented in the school's disciplinary committee;
4. Since the students are under the care of the teacher, the teacher is expected to show good example to them. His authority and discipline over the students should be personal rather than official;
5. There should be co-operation between the home and the school so that the teacher will know the student's home background. This will enable the teacher to solve problems of poor relationship due to personality.
6. Parents' show of concern for their children's welfare is crucial;

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, it can be stated that student-teacher relationships are as important as the teaching and learning component itself. Based on the above it is evidenced that when there is a decent connection between learners and their instructors, this will empower learners to communicate with their teachers at any time without dread. Effective classroom engagement therefore provides students with opportunities to socialise while learning, because it keeps students motivated towards their works, provides appropriate instruction with friendly feedback, and keep disruptive behaviour to a minimum level. Learners with a positive engagement with their teachers will experience positive motivational convictions about school and classroom commitment, and this would positively correlate with their performance and achievement in school. Positive teacher-student relationships are therefore dimensions and determinants of student academic performance in secondary schools in Nigeria.

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