



Teachers´ characteristics and development of students´ attitudes towards school

Las características de los profesores y el desarrollo de las actitudes de los estudiantes hacia la escuela

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Abstract

This paper addresses two issues: secondary school teachers' characteristics and the impact of these characteristics on pupils' perceptions of school. Study explored the characteristics of high school teachers in Niš (Serbia) as perceived by high school students. A comparison was made between views on their teachers characteristics expressed by two groups of students: vocational schools students and students attending grammar schools. When it comes to the impact of teachers' characteristics on student's perceptions of school, personal characteristics, professional characteristics and teacher's behavior were taken into consideration. A total of 448 students completed three Likert scales that were developed for the purpose of the study (a scale for measuring student's perception of the presence of certain qualities among teachers, a scale for measuring teachers' effort to encourage prosocial behavior and a scale for measuring student's attitude toward school). The study showed significant difference between vocational school teachers' characteristics and characteristics of teachers who work in grammar schools. The positive correlation between students' perceptions of teachers' characteristics and students' attitudes toward school was also confirmed. The positive impact of teachers who possess professional and personal qualities reflects on students by encouraging student's motivation to go to school, reducing the feeling of pressure in school, improving student's perception of school atmosphere and reducing the absence from classes.

Resumen

El objeto de estudio de este artículo son los distintos perfiles pedagógicos de los profesores de secundaria y la influencia de éstos sobre la percepción de la escuela por parte de los alumnos. Realizado en Niš (Serbia), el estudio que presentamos consiste en el análisis del perfil pedagógico y personal de profesores de secundaria según la percepción de sus alumnos, y la comparación de los resultados entre dos grupos de estudiantes: los de las 'escuelas vocacionales' (equivalentes a los ciclos formativos en España), y los institutos. Para evaluar el impacto de la percepción de los alumnos del profesorado sobre su percepción de la escuela, se consideraron las características profesionales, personales y la actitud como docentes del profesorado. Un total de 448 estudiantes completaron tres escalas de Likert elaboradas para el estudio (percepción por parte del alumno de ciertas características entre el profesorado; esfuerzo para promover la conducta prosocial; actitud del alumno respecto a la escuela). Los resultados muestran una diferencia significativa entre el perfil percibido de los profesores en los dos tipos de centro educativo. Se confirmó la correlación positiva entre la percepción de los estudiantes de los perfiles del profesorado y su valoración de la escuela. El impacto positivo del profesorado con cualidades profesionales y personales se refleja en los estudiantes en forma de una mayor motivación para atender, reducción de la presión, y mejora de la percepción del ambiente escolar por parte del alumnado.

Palabras clave

Perfil pedagógico; Cualidades; Percepción del alumnado; Escuela secundaria

Keywords

Teachers´ characteristics; Qualities; Students' perceptions; Secondary school

1. Introduction

Improvements in secondary education, as one of the central issues of the education system, are largely determined by the quality of teachers. Teachers' characteristics, behaviour and the efforts they make affect important aspects of the school context, such as the quality and effectiveness of school (Wilson and Corbett 2014), achievement of better academic outcomes (Jimerson and Haddock 2015), creation of stimulating learning environment (Soebari and Aldridge 2015) and integration of modern educational technology into work (Yoon et al. 2015; Wastiau et al. 2013; Wu and Zhan 2012). Due to great importance of the teaching role, the interest in this issue is constantly evolving and growing, as indicated by the increasing number of research studies (Shoulders and Krei 2015; McHugh et al. 2013; Malm 2009; Hamachek 1969).

In reference literature one encounters an approach in which authors emphasise the importance of some of the teachers' characteristics, depending on the topic of the research. For instance, some studies pinpoint teachers' characteristics important for working with gifted students, such as hard work, high energy level, emotional maturity, self-efficiency, knowledge, intelligence, flexibility, sense of humour and creativity (Siegle, Rubenstein and Mitchell 2014; Whitlack and DuCette 1989). With respect to working with children with special needs, the underlined teachers' characteristics are the ability to establish positive teacher-child relationships, tolerance, kindness, lower tendency towards punishment and criticism (Breeman et al. 2015; Syrnyk 2012). By researching into teachers' characteristics and school innovations, many authors confirmed that a school context improved by ICT is correlated with teachers' characteristics (Çakir and Bichelmeyer 2016; Hao and Lee 2015; Buabeng-Andoh 2012).

In order to adequately examine teachers' characteristics and the scope of their influence, it is necessary to consider students' views. Consequently, the research studies that indicate students' perceptions of teachers' qualities are of great importance (Wentzel and Miele 2016; Mainhard 2015). Considering that teaching practice also includes specific interpersonal relationships in which students and teachers influence each other in various ways, a wider approach to this problem is needed. The main aim of the present study is to examine the relation between teachers' characteristics and behaviour and students' attitudes towards school. Bearing in mind that a small number of studies explore teachers' characteristics from the students' standpoint (Misbah et al. 2015; Khaled et al. 2014), this approach could bring forward the issue and enrich theoretical approaches regarding teachers' quality and their impact on students' attitudes towards school. The results of this research could be relevant for school practice and contribute to raising the quality of schools and improving education.

2. Theoretical background

It is a well-known fact that teachers' characteristics and behaviour have great influence on shaping students' personalities, their knowledge, values, and attitudes towards school. Previous studies confirmed the influence of teachers' characteristics on forming students' attitudes towards science (Gibson and Chase 2002; Morrell and Lederman 1989), or towards particular school subjects (Subramaniam and Silverman 2007; Midgley, Feldlaufer and Eccles 1989). Students perceive teachers as central figures, which in addition to school climate, academic environment and discipline, represents an essential element of the school context (Wilkins 2008; Waxman, Garcia and Read 2008). A step further in this direction is provided by multilevel analysis results, which confirm the correlation between teachers' behaviour and students' attitude towards school, stating that students' evaluation of teachers' behaviour often includes the assessment of general classroom situations, as well as of school climate (Peter and Dalbert, 2010). It is believed that students' satisfaction with school is related to their sense of belonging, integration, academic achievements and teachers' characteristics and behaviour (Shaunessy and McHatton 2009). Studies have shown that the manner in which teachers treat students is extremely important, comprising one of the most influential variables that affect the development of students' experience of school as a safe and supportive environment (Lai et al. 2015:40). Furthermore, studies show that teachers who provide safe and supportive environment,

recognise different aspirations and motivations among their students, and listen to their students are more likely to be successful than teachers whose practice is based on traditional pedagogical approaches and whose primary focus is on control and discipline (Woodson-Smith, Dorvart and Linder 2015:464). Teachers' actions shape the learning environment, thus constituting an essential part of the school context, taking into account motivation and cognitive and affective aspects of the learning process (Titsworth, Quinlan and Mazer 2010).

In order to explore more thoroughly the influence of teachers' characteristics on students' attitudes towards school, these characteristics were divided into personal features relating to teachers' personalities, and professional characteristics, relating to subject knowledge and methodological knowledge of teachers.

Studies which observe teachers' personal characteristics usually refer to the results of research studies which consider variables such as educational level, socioeconomic status, age, gender, educational experience, etc. (Dunkake and Schuchart 2015). Studies have also confirmed the importance of students' attitudes regarding personal characteristics such as self-efficiency, determination, eloquence, consideration, sense of humour and resourcefulness. The authors Klassen et al. (2011) have defined self-efficacy in teachers as "*the confidence teachers hold about their individual and collective capability to influence student learning*" (p 21). A large number of studies point out the influence of teachers' self-efficiency on students' achievements (Locke and Johnston 2016; Klassen and Tze 2014). Researching into characteristics of quality teachers, it is emphasised that, from students' standpoint, the most-mentioned character trait of good teachers was friendliness, followed by being understanding or caring, being calm or balanced, and being joyful or positive. Furthermore, a characteristic that is highly valued is teachers' sense of humour (Läänemets, Kalamees-Ruubel and Sepp 2012:30). Attempts to develop an understanding of personal characteristics that make a good teacher also reveal the importance of eloquence, and teachers' verbal abilities, posited as important predictors of quality teaching (Aloe and Becker 2009).

Although personal characteristics have unquestionable importance for the assessment of teachers' quality, one should avoid the trap of perceiving these characteristics as primary and attaching to them much greater importance than they actually have. Thus, Kennedy (2010) stresses the importance of other characteristics related to the environment which arise from the school context and which are more related to the teaching profession. In addition, it is considered that the professional qualities of teachers are determined by their professional and pedagogical knowledge, with an emphasis on teaching methods (Çatma and Corlu 2016).

Researching into teachers' professional characteristics is of great importance because it incorporates content knowledge and skills necessary for planning and presenting lessons. In accordance with the previous statement, the authors provide a classification of essential professional characteristics and emphasise both teachers' subject-specific content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, as the most important (Kunter et al. 2013:806). Content knowledge can be interpreted as a deep knowledge, but also as an understanding of the subject which the teacher presents (Baumert et al. 2010; Krauss et al. 2008), whereas pedagogical content knowledge can be explained as a set of skills that are required to successfully organise lectures and enable successful system design of students' knowledge (Hill, Rowan and Ball 2005; Krauss et al. 2008). The author Max Van Manen accentuates a pedagogical tact, as an essentially important characteristic of the teaching profession, noting that it represents the unity of the ability to "*hear*", "*feel*" and "*respect*" the essence of uniqueness of a person (Van Manen, 1991:133). Studying excellence among teachers, MacDonald (2010:266) emphasises the importance of the following characteristics: teacher's positive attitude towards students' learning, an ability to develop a system of values among students, a wide range of teaching methods and linking knowledge. In the field of development of teachers' professional roles, more attention is paid to various activities that aim to emphasise problem-based thinking and learning, to permit student choice and initiative and to encourage depth rather than breadth (Danielson 2011:58).

Personal and professional characteristics determine teachers' behaviour and attitudes towards students, which is of great importance in the development of students' attitudes towards school. In fact, the relationship between teachers and students is different from any other relationship that adults can have with children or with each other, and should be characterised by humanity, love, care and understanding (Van Manen 1991). Teachers devoted to developing a relationship of understanding with their students are able to recognise the mood in the classroom and discover a problem, which makes them confident persons with whom students can share their problems. Such a trusting relationship between teachers and students facilitates the acceptance of advice, encouragement, help, suggestions and instructions for learning. The relationship between teachers and students can shape students' social abilities, their attitudes towards peers and adults, adjustment to school, academic achievements and learning abilities (Roorda et al. 2011; Yablon 2010). A positive student-teacher relationship can be identified by a low number of conflicts, a high degree of closeness and support, as well as by low dependency (Rudasill et al. 2010; Battistich, Schaps and Wilson 2004), and it is not easily developed. McHugh et al. (2013) showed that the common problem in this relationship occurs when teachers do not pay enough attention to students' problems and their needs, goals and interests. So, in order to achieve a good relationship with students, teachers must show interest in students' well-being.

This study is unique because the sample comprises students from two different types of secondary schools - vocational and grammar schools. These schools are different in many respects: academic achievements, teachers' qualities, and attitude towards school. The following research tends to determine how these differences influence the creation of students' attitudes towards school.

3. The present study

The aim of this study was to explore the standpoints of secondary school students concerning the characteristics that they perceive in their teachers and to discover whether teachers' qualities affect students' attitudes towards school. The study also explores if there is a difference between students' perceptions of teachers' characteristics in two types of secondary schools – the first one offers four years of general education and prepares students to enrol for almost any faculty (grammar school); the second one focuses on preparing students for work, it is more practice-oriented and most students after the completion of this type of secondary school do not continue with their education, but seek employment (secondary vocational school). Thus, this study poses the following research questions:

1. Which characteristics do students perceive in their secondary school teachers?
2. Do teachers' characteristics differ due to the type of school in which teachers work?
3. Are there significant relations between students' perceptions of their teachers' characteristics and students' perceptions of school?

The study focuses on a sample of 226 students attending secondary vocational schools and 222 students attending grammar schools, since it was considered that this would help ensure response rate that would be applicable for comparison.

4. Method

Given that the purpose of the study was to explore students' opinions about secondary school teachers, the sample of the study consists of secondary school students. The sample structure is shown in Table 1. The study comprises 448 secondary school students in their second, third and fourth grade. Among them, 226 participants (50.4%) were attending secondary vocational schools while 222 participants (49.6%) were attending grammar schools. In terms of academic achievement, in grammar schools most students are excellent (183) and in secondary vocational schools most students are very good (91), or have lower academic achievement

(72). For instruments to be delivered a random sample of classrooms in each secondary school was chosen. Out of 460 distributed questionnaires 448 have been returned completed and available for analysis.

Table 1.

Structure of the sample according to the type of school students attend and their academic achievement

Type of school	Frequency	Percent (%)	Academic achievement		
			Excellent	Very good	Good, satisfactory or failed
Grammar schools	222	49.6	183	37	2
Secondary vocational schools	226	50.4	63	91	72
Total	448	100	246	128	74

The analysis in this study was based on the data gathered by using three instruments designed especially for the purposes of this study.

The first used instrument was a scale for measuring students' perception of the presence of certain characteristics in teachers. The instrument was a five-point Likert scale. Numbers in the scale represent the number of teachers who have specific characteristics (1-None of my teachers has this characteristic, 2-A small number of teachers has this characteristic, 3-About half of my teachers has this characteristic, 4-Most of my teachers have this characteristic, 5-All of my teachers have this characteristic). The scale consists of two subscales (two types of teachers' characteristics). The first section (subscale) of the instrument listed personal characteristics of teachers, the second section listed professional characteristics. The reliability of each subscale was confirmed by conducting the Cronbach's Alpha test (for the first subscale, personal qualities Alpha=0.77; for the second subscale, professional qualities Alpha=0.85)

The second developed instrument was also a five-point Likert scale for measuring teachers' behaviour concerning their attitudes towards students and their actions to encourage pro-social behaviour among students. Numbers in this scale represent the number of teachers who exhibit certain behaviour (1-None of my teachers does this, 2-A small number of teachers does this, 3-About half of my teachers does this, 4-Most of my teachers do this, 5-All of my teachers do this). The scale consists of two subscales (teachers' attitude towards students and actions to encourage pro-social behaviour among students). The scale reliability was confirmed by conducting the Cronbach's Alpha test: for the first subscale, teacher's attitude towards students Alpha=0.93, and for the second subscale, Alpha=0.84.

The third instrument used in the study was a five-point Likert scale for measuring students' attitude towards school. Numbers in the scale represent the level of agreement with the statement (1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neither agree nor disagree, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly agree). Items in the scale refer to: students' attitude towards attending school and cutting classes, students' opinions about school environment, students' feelings of security and the amount of pressure at school. The reliability of the scale was confirmed by conducting the Cronbach's Alpha test that showed good reliability of the instrument (Alpha= 0.79).

The data analysis was conducted by using the SPSS Statistics 20. Statistical parameters that were used are frequency, percent (%), mean value (M), standard deviation (SD), sample size (N), the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for determining reliability of the instruments, Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r), and Independent-Samples t-test.

5. Results

Teachers' characteristics and behaviour that secondary school students recognise are presented in Table 2. At the top of each list are the characteristics that most teachers have and behaviours that most teachers exhibit.

Table 2.

Mean value of students' ratings of the number of teachers who possess a certain quality

Teachers' characteristics	Mean (SD)	
Personal		
Self-confidence*	3.72	(0.96)
Determined*	3.44	(0.93)
Eloquent*	3.36	(0.87)
Considerate, thoughtful	2.91	(0.91)
Sence of humor, cheerful	2.86	(0.85)
Resourceful	2.58	(0.94)
Professional		
Open to students' questions*	3.99	(0.99)
Professional knowledge*	3.92	(0.87)
Teaches clearly, with direct instructions and stresses the important*	3.51	(0.95)
Open to students' ideas	3.28	(1.02)
Patient	3.26	(0.97)
Works hard, punctual, disciplined	3.25	(1.00)
Objective in student's work assessment	3.15	(1.07)
Multiple interests	2.89	(0.96)
Innovative	2.64	(1.03)
Teachers' behaviour		
Attitude towards students		
Collaborates with students*	3.47	(0.96)
Respects students*	3.32	(1.03)
Provides assistance	3.18	(1.05)
Believes that children are good by nature	3.17	(1.16)
Puts an effort into getting to know the students	3.14	(1.04)
Acts in the interest of students	3.12	(1.02)
Behaves friendly towards students	3.12	(1.01)
Fair and democratic	3.11	(0.95)
Helps students to successfully deal with their problems	3.02	(1.06)
Has understanding for students' problems	2.99	(1.06)
Shows trust in students	2.92	(0.95)
Treats a student as a significant person	2.82	(1.10)
Shows compassion	2.74	(1.07)
Actions to encourage pro-social behaviour among students		
Encourages students to co-operate with each other and get to know each other better*	3.02	(1.12)
Talks with students about proper reactions in certain situations	2.83	(1.20)
Talks with students about the importance of maintaining good relations	2.73	(1.03)
Encourages students to work together to solve their own conflicts	2.72	(1.15)

* Characteristics that most teachers possess

When it comes to teachers' personal characteristics, the results (Table 2) showed that many teachers have positive characteristics relating to intellect and self-confidence. Secondary school students described most of their teachers as self-confident (M=3.72), determined (M=3.44) and

eloquent (M=3.36). On the other hand, according to students' perception, few teachers can be described as 'good', 'considerate', 'cheerful and 'full of ideas'.

Among professional characteristics, only three have been singled out as characteristics that most teachers possess: 'allowing students to ask questions' (M=3.99); 'has good professional knowledge' (M=3.92); 'teaches clearly, with direct instructions and stresses the important' (M=3.51). Other qualities, such as: 'allowing students to express their ideas', 'assesses objectively', 'works hard', etc. are possessed by half of teachers. Also, a larger number of students responded that only small number of teachers can be described with attributes: 'has multiple interests' and 'innovative'.

Regarding teachers' attitudes towards students, the results showed mostly positive attitudes. They collaborate with students (M=3.47) and show them respect (M=3.32). On the other hand, regarding closeness in a teacher-student relationship, the results show that only half of teachers put effort into getting to know the students, act in their interest and help them deal with problems. What lacks the most in teachers' behaviour towards students, according to the results, is showing compassion and treating students as significant persons.

Teachers' efforts to encourage pro-social behaviour among students are shown in the fourth section, in Table 2. Mean values of students' ratings of M=3.02 and lower indicate that only half of teachers, or less, put effort into developing pro-social behaviour among students.

Table 3.
Differences between grammar school teachers and vocational school teachers

Teachers' characteristics	Mean		t	p
	Grammar school	Vocational school		
Personal	3.15	3.23	-1,505	0.133
Professional	3.21	3.43	-3.622	0.000*
Attitude towards students	2.92	3.24	-4.418	0.000*
Encouraging pro-social behaviour	2.48	3.16	-8.249	0.000*

*Significant difference between values at 0.01 level

To determine whether there were differences between grammar schools and secondary vocational schools regarding students' perceptions of their teachers' qualities, the independent t-test was performed. Table 3 displays the results which show significant difference ($p < 0,01$) between students' responses about three types of teachers' qualities: professional qualities, positive attitude towards students and teachers' actions towards developing pro-social behaviour among students. Students of secondary vocational schools rated their teachers more positively in terms of these qualities than students in grammar schools. Results indicate that there are more teachers in secondary vocational schools who put efforts into developing good relationships with students than there are in grammar schools. Therefore, they are described by students as better people and better professionals.

5.1 Teachers' qualities and students' attitudes towards school

To discover whether students' perceptions of school are related to their perceptions of their teachers' characteristics, Pearson correlation test was performed. The results presented in Table 4 indicate that there is a significant positive correlation ($p < 0.01$) between how students perceive their teachers (as persons and as professionals) and their attitude towards school. Students who find that most of their teachers have positive personal characteristics, positive professional characteristics and treat students fairly also have positive attitude towards

attending school. They perceive school environment as safe and stimulating for learning and development. Also, they don't feel the need to skip school and don't feel pressured at school by their teachers and peers.

Table 4.

Correlation matrix - teachers' qualities and students' attitude towards school

Students' attitude towards school	Teachers' characteristics and behaviour			
	Personal qualities r (p)	Professional qualities r (p)	Positive attitude towards students r (p)	Encouraging pro-social climate r (p)
I like going to school	0.328 (0.000*)	0.346 (0.000*)	0.400 (0.000*)	0.357 (0.000*)
I find school atmosphere stimulating for learning and development	0.448 (0.000*)	0.454 (0.000*)	0.468 (0.000*)	0.341 (0.000*)
I don't feel the need to skip school	0.366 (0.000*)	0.326 (0.000*)	0.399 (0.000*)	0.263 (0.000*)
I feel safe in my school	0.356 (0.000*)	0.353 (0.000*)	0.409 (0.000*)	0.242 (0.000*)
I do not feel any pressure at school by teachers or peers	0.395 (0.000*)	0.386 (0.000*)	0.490 (0.000*)	0.381 (0.000*)

*Significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) – Pearson Correlation Test

It was also found that students' attitudes towards school (their willingness to attend school, lower tendency to skip classes) are positively correlated with teachers' actions to encourage pro-social behaviour among students. Students who reported that most of their teachers encourage students to co-operate, talk with students about proper reactions in certain situations (such as conflicts) and about the importance of maintaining good relations with peers, also showed more positive attitude towards school and its environment.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore which characteristics secondary school teachers possess and to determine whether these characteristics have influence on students' attitudes towards school. By exploring students' perceptions (N=448) of their secondary school teachers' characteristics, it was found that most teachers have qualities such as: able to formulate and express thoughts, eloquent (intellectual qualities), self-confident, good professional knowledge, teaches clearly, offers direct instructions and stresses the important, collaborates and respects students. All these qualities are important for teachers as professionals, but this creates an impression of a formal, cold emotional relationship and distance in teacher-student relationships. Among qualities that most teachers possess, not a single quality suggesting positive emotional relationship with students was distinguished. Furthermore, the results have shown that students perceive only a small number of teachers as: good, thoughtful, content, compassionate. The lack of compassion can lead to developing serious problems in the teaching process, especially if among students there are those with emotional and behavioural disorders. These students need care, closeness, empathy, and a healthy relationship with an adult person who could offer guidance (Breeman et al. 2015, Syrnyk 2012). Good teacher-student relationships are also a strong preventive factor (Noam and Hermann 2002), and if there is no support and respect, there is a greater risk of developing various forms of students'

risk behaviour, social maladjustment or emotional problems. In order to be able to respond to all of these challenges, a lifelong professional development of teachers is a necessity (Fullan 2014).

The presented study also indicates that a number of teachers lack creativity. The characteristics such as: 'full of ideas', 'has many interests' and 'innovative' were not characteristics that students primarily noticed among teachers. Moreover, these qualities were at the bottom of the lists of characteristics that teachers possess. The process of developing creativity at school could represent a major challenge for teachers who do not express creativity. A model of school where students must listen to teachers, take notes and memorise relevant materials for the tests is no longer sufficient. Technical means allow students to gain additional knowledge outside the classroom (Falloon 2013; Buckingham 2013). Therefore, there is a necessity for designing creative methods (Skinner 2016; Starko 2013; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Teachers face an important task of creating joy and vitality in the classroom with the help of knowledge, new information and innovative methods. Based on the obtained results of this study, it can be concluded that teachers' creativity and innovativeness are not satisfactory and it should be done more in this field in order to encourage teachers to accept and apply innovations to work and design new creative methods. First of all, initial teacher education should be emphasising the significance of creative methods and techniques, and teachers should be introduced to creative teaching and learning techniques and encouraged to create their own new techniques.

Another observed issue was the lack of teachers' commitment to encourage pro-social climate in the class. The results showed that secondary school teachers do not pay enough attention to this problem. Hence, teachers' awareness of their social role in the lives of students should be raised. Developing social skills at school reinforces the social skills of students at school, but also in their immediate environment. Accordingly, it is desirable that teachers strengthen co-operative forms of learning within the school to make it a stimulating environment (Caprara et al. 2014).

In this study, we also investigated whether students perceive differently their teachers' characteristics depending on the type of school they attend (grammar school or secondary vocational school). The results showed a statistically significant difference in favour of the teachers who work in vocational schools. In terms of professional qualities, teachers' behaviour towards students and commitment to the achievement of pro-social climate in classes, these teachers were assessed more positively than teachers in grammar schools. It is our assumption that, since vocational schools have more students who have lower grades or fail classes (Table 1) than grammar schools do, teachers in vocational schools devote more attention and time to helping these students, which resulted in a more positive student experience. Further research into this issue is needed.

Finally, it was examined how teachers' characteristics may affect students' attitude towards school. Students who described most of their teachers with positive personality traits and positive professional qualities and who assessed student-teacher relationships as positive also expressed a positive attitude towards attending school. They perceived school environment as safe and stimulating for learning and development. Also, these students have a reduced need for skipping classes and do not feel pressured at school by their teachers and peers. Furthermore, it has been shown that student's attitude toward school is highly correlated with teachers' efforts to encourage pro-social climate in the class. Students, whose teachers encourage them to co-operate and talk with them about maintaining good neighbourly relations, expressed more positive attitudes toward school and its environment.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, this study indicates that secondary school teachers cultivate a more professional attitude towards students, while there is little room left for closer contact which would imply the expression of compassion, understanding and mutual trust. Students do not feel that teachers

treat them as important persons, and this study has shown that this trait, as well as other teachers' characteristics which are related to providing social and emotional support, are highly correlated with students' perception of school environment and their need to skip classes.

The findings regarding students' attitudes and needs concerning their teachers' characteristics and behaviour can be significant in many ways. First of all, these studies provide a better insight into researchers and teachers, into general opinion about teachers. They also point out the deficiencies of the existing teaching practice. As such, these studies can provide implications for improving teachers' education and professional development programmes. This paper (its theoretical, methodological part, as well as the analysis of the research results) may serve as a basis for further research, as well as for comparison with other similar studies.

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