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Editorial: Student-teacher relationship quality research: Past, present and future

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Student-teacher relationship quality research: Past, present and future

More than 20 years have passed since the publication of Pianta (2001) on the quality of the teacher-student relationship. Since then, several attempts have been made to elaborate theoretically the concept of teacher-student relationship quality and to provide empirical evidence of the impact that good teacher-student relationship quality might have on academic achievement, student psychological adjustment, and classroom climate. The teacher has been recognized as a “psychological parent” and defined as a secure base and safe haven, following attachment theory (Verschueren and Koomen, 2012, 2021; Prino et al., 2022; Spilt et al., 2022). Several studies have shown that a relationship with the teacher characterized by affection, closeness, and respect predicts more favorable developmental outcomes and better adjustment to the classroom context in any school setting (Roorda et al., 2011, 2017; Longobardi et al., 2019, 2021; Lin et al., 2022). However, after 20 years, we saw the need to synthesize the current literature on the topic of teacher-learner relationship quality and to promote a collection of studies that provide new insights, ideas, and reflections to advance the research field and overcome current limitations.

In this Research Topic, 16 publications were collected from different parts of the world. The Research Topic includes two literature reviews, several empirical works, some of which aim to develop and validate instruments to measure the quality of the teacher-student relationship, and others to promote new knowledge about the effects and mechanisms of action of the quality of the teacher-learner relationship on the psychological development and adjustment processes of children and adolescents. In addition, the Research Topic includes a contribution on possible intervention strategies on the quality of teacher-student relationship.

Literature review

Spilt and Koomen present a chronological review of the literature that shows how the research field of teacher-student relationship quality has evolved over the past three decades. The authors highlight five major themes that have emerged in the literature and identify current research limitations, offering important suggestions for the development of new research. In addition, Shayo et al. proposed a review of the conceptualization and measurement of trust in the home-school context.

Measurement instrument development and validation

Borremans and Spilt addressed a topic that seems important to us. The authors devoted themselves to the validation of a questionnaire for measuring attitudes, knowledge, and self-efficacy in building dyadic relationships with students: Competence Measure of Individual Teacher-Student relationships (COMMIT). In this work, the authors developed the questionnaire and examined each dimension in a sample of pre-service teachers. Whitehead et al. developed and validated a new self-report instrument to measure adolescents' perceived teacher quality: Caring Student Teacher Relinquishment Scale. The instrument was validated on a sample of Canadian youth and has two dimensions: Teacher Support and Attitude and Caring Teacher Qualities. Yadav et al. propose the development and validation of a measurement scale for the Indian context, while Bai et al. present the development and validation of a version of the Student Teacher Relationships Scale for the private college context. Indeed, the latter point out that the current measurement scales are not applicable to the private school context due to characteristics different from those of public schools. Thus, in their article, propose the validation of the Private-College Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (PCSTRS). The authors also found a positive correlation between the PCSTRS and measures of wellbeing, involvement in extracurricular activities, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and academic achievement. In addition, the authors compared students from public and private schools and found differences in PCSTRS dimensions and correlation between the constructs studied. This paper paves the way for further research.

New horizons

The paper by Vagos and Carvalhais sought to find answers to the unknowns that the COVID-19 pandemic has raised with regard to teacher relations and the quality of the teacher-student relationship. In their longitudinal study, 47 teachers and 56 students assessed the quality of the teacher-student relationship at two different time points: after 3 months of online instruction

and after 3 months of face-to-face instruction. According to the authors, online instruction is perceived by students as an impersonal experience, and online instruction is associated with less conflict in the teacher-student relationship due to the absence of social cues. Despite the importance of distance learning in the dramatic moments of the pandemic, it is considered useful to encourage teachers to connect with their students and prioritize social presence. This can help in the psychological adjustment of the students.

Conflict management in the classroom is addressed in the paper by Alvarez et al. The authors point out the importance of considering teachers' emotional regulation when managing conflict in the classroom. In addition, the authors suggest that virtual reality may be a good tool for training teachers in developing appropriate strategies for managing classroom climate.

One of the issues that requires greater investigation, particularly in collectivist cultures, is the degree of agreement between students and teachers regarding their mutual relationship. In this direction is the contribution of Gregoriadis et al., who used a dyadic analysis approach to determine the degree of agreement between teachers' and students' perceptions of their relationship with each other. The study was conducted in Greece and found that students and teachers perceive their dyadic relationship from different perspectives.

A number of papers have been presented on the effects of the quality of the teacher-student relationship on students' and teachers' psychological adjustment and the possible mechanisms involved. Among them are two studies from Italy. Longobardi et al. provided new evidence on the possible mediating role of a positive teacher-student relationship in the relationship between daytime sleepiness and prosocial behavior in kindergarten children. Relatively less is known about how TSR influence teachers' functioning. In this direction, Pedditz et al. found that satisfaction in the teacher-student relationship may be a protective factor for burnout in elementary and secondary school teachers.

Some studies have come from cultural contexts in which the quality of the teacher-student relationship has been little studied. DUBY et al. proposed qualitative work conducted in South Africa. Based on teacher connectedness theory, the authors provided evidence of the potential impact of a good teacher-student relationship on promoting wellbeing, particularly sexual and reproductive wellbeing, among a group of female adolescents and young adults. In China, Luo et al. shed light on the possible moderating role of the teacher-student relationship in the relationship between parental punishment and adolescent loneliness. Among other findings, the authors report that Chinese adolescents' loneliness is less influenced by parental punishment when they have a more positive relationship with their teachers.

Finally, another contribution from the Chinese cultural context by [Bo and Chinemerem Onwubuya](#). The authors offer a contribution from the Chinese cultural context. They illustrate the complexity of implementing the School Discipline Law as a universal national policy. Their contribution seems innovative, and the authors' reflections can serve as a guide for future research in other cultural contexts.

Interventions

The Research Topic also addressed intervention strategies designed to promote better quality teacher-student relationships in educational contexts. [Koenen et al.](#) tested Student Teacher Interaction Coaching (STIC) with six teachers working with children with special needs. Working with children with special needs can be very complex, especially for teachers who are early in their careers. The pilot study proposed by the authors seems to suggest that STIC could be a useful intervention to improve the quality of the teacher-student relationship and increase positive emotions in the relationship.

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Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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