

STUDENT PERCEPTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A TEACHER AND A STUDENT IN THE TEACHING PROCESS

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Abstract

Contemporary didactic thoughts see the teacher and student as cooperators, as partners co-responsible for the success of the teaching process and promote their relationship as the key element of quality teaching. The educational relationship between a teacher and a student in pedagogical science and practice is an extremely important question from the perspective of creating school culture. Every school possesses a portion of the rules and procedures which are conscious and predictable, weaved into the school curriculums, but the school culture is often represented by the unwritten, unconscious, the thing that really affects the way students and teachers communicate in school. This paper questions the educational relationship between the teacher and student from the perspective of a student.

The aim of the research was to establish a student's perception of the educational relationship and communication with the teachers in the school and the teaching process. The research problem is focused on the analysis of the relationship between a student and a teacher, the way the teacher and his traits and qualities are perceived from the perspective of the students, as well as student suggestions on the required personality traits of a teacher in order to improve communication, all with the aim of improving the quality of their relationship and the teaching process. 437 examinees, who were all high school students, took part in this research.

Research results showed the elements of the teacher's behavior they consider to be important to create a positive relationship, as well as those they consider to be obstacles in creating such a relationship and the estimation of the student's perception of the teacher and the sensations that the teachers invoke in them. The results received were compared with teacher's answers, which are part of the result of a parallel research.

The positive school culture and quality interpersonal relations in it are a prerequisite of a quality teaching process and the research contributing to the understanding of this phenomenon is scientifically justified and practically applicable.

Keywords: teaching process, educational relationship, school culture, communication, interpersonal relation.

1 INTRODUCTION

If we think about a quality school and quality teaching, we do not only look at educational aims and tasks, but also other educational elements. In the spirit of humanist pedagogy, following the tradition of Vittorino da Feltre, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Francois Rabelais..., the aim of education is the development of a wholesome personality, the unity of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspect and the intellectual, emotional, and social development.

For the development of every young person, a comfortable and supporting environment is necessary and it is precisely the teachers who can, using their behavior and character traits, create and nurture an environment which contributes to the complete development of a student. According to *Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development* [1], the teacher is a person whose professional activity includes the transfer of knowledge, attitudes and skills which are determined for students included in the educational program. From that definition alone it is visible that the teacher's role in the teaching process is much wider and more demanding than the educational one we usually tie to a school. The interpersonal relation is a complex and dynamic process which determines the behavior of people involved and whose basic characteristics are interaction, mutuality, circular stimulation, and the acting of the unconscious [2].

The relationship between a teacher and a student represents a strong predictor of the quality of teaching, a protective element in the psychosocial development of the student and, as such, must be systematically thought out, nurtured and developed. A positive development of an individual goes on when there are certain conditions for growth which, according to Rogers [3] are: “unconditional positive respect, openness and empathy” (p. 289).

We could summarize the teacher’s competences into three groups: professional competences, pedagogical-psychological-didactic-methodic competences and personal, social competences.

Different elements can define a positive relationship between a student and a teacher, for instance quality communication, creating a secure, positive social and emotional environment, mutual respect, trust, a positive attitude and patience, equality, readiness to help.

A student’s perception on the teacher-student relation is very important, which is confirmed by numerous pieces of research pointing to a great influence of the school environment on the satisfaction with the school, the feeling of acceptance and confidence, the reduction of risk behavior of students and, lastly, academic success.

Contemporary didactic thoughts see the teacher and student as cooperators, partners co-responsible for the success of the teaching process and their relationship is brought forth as the key element of quality teaching. The educational relationship between a teacher and a student in pedagogical science and practice is an extremely important question from the perspective of creating school culture. It is interpreted by patterns of behavior which include historically set norms, values, beliefs, traditions and myths [4]. Every school possesses a portion of rules and procedures which are conscious and predictable, weaved into school curriculums, but the school culture is often represented by the unwritten, unconscious, the thing which really affects how students and teachers communicate in the organization. These are unwritten rules on interaction, problem solving and decision making [5]. Many authors offer different definitions of the school culture [6], [7], [8], but they all agree that it is a multidimensional phenomenon which needs to be studied from multiple aspects and is under the influence of a series of elements.

The relationship between the teacher and student is definitely one of the important elements in creating school culture. The positive educational relationship teacher-student is mentioned as a protective element in the psychosocial development and education of the student in school [9].

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The aim and research problem

The aim of this research was to determine student perception of the educational relationship and communication with the teachers in school and the teaching process. The research problem is focused on analyzing the relationship between the student and teacher, the perception of the teacher and his traits and qualities from the perception of the student and their ideas and suggestions on the necessary teacher traits for the improvement of communication, all with the aim of improving the quality of interpersonal relations and teaching process.

2.2 Research hypotheses

- H1 - There is a statistically relevant difference in the causes of non-discipline in the teaching process considering gender and the type of school
- H2- A quality relationship with the teacher is what contributes the most to student satisfaction in class
- H3 – There is a statistically significant difference in the student estimation of teacher traits considering the type of school students go to
- H4 – There is a statistically significant difference in the student’s estimation of traits they most appreciate in their teachers considering the type of school
- H5 – There is no statistically significant difference in opinion on creating a positive attitude of teachers and students considering gender

2.3 Examinees and the procedure

437 examinees took part in the survey (170 were male and 267 were female) from vocational schools (N=201) and grammar schools (N=236) in 4 counties: Požeško-slavonska, Splitsko-dalmatinska, Osječko-baranjska and Dubrovačko-neretvanska, in 10 schools (Vocational school Požega, Vocational school Split, Vocational school Osijek, First high school Beli Manastir, High school Metković, First grammar school Split, Grammar school Metković, Grammar school Beli Manastir, Grammar school Požega, First grammar school Osijek). All the examinees were familiarized with the survey aims and tasks prior to implementation, whereby they were guaranteed anonymity with a plea to answer their questions truthfully. The survey consisted of three parts. The first part contained questions of the sociodemographic character, while the second one questions student perception of the relationship with the teacher and how they see the teachers in their school and the teaching process. The final part of the survey attempted to gather qualitative data on the suggestions to improve the relationship between teacher and student. The research results were gathered and analyzed using the SPSS program package, and descriptive and inferential methods of data analysis were used.

3 RESULTS

Research showed that students believe that for a positive relationship between a teacher and a student the most important thing is an affectionate, warm and friendly relationship of a teacher towards students (25,6%). This is followed by the understanding and respect for student personalities (23,6%), the readiness of a teacher to help a student (19,2%), equal relationship towards all students (18,5%), objective grading (7,1%), interesting presentation by the teacher (4,1%), and 1,8% of examinees feel that there is another reason contributing to a positive interpersonal relationship.

This is in accordance with the research by Drobot and Roşu [10] who state that the most important element of a good relationship between a teacher and a student is the way in which a teacher attempts to build relationships with students and that the attributes of an ideal teacher are open communication, a friendly attitude, honesty, and patience. West [11], in his research, recognizes three categories characterizing positive relations: the readiness of a teacher to help a student, recognition and the feeling that a teacher loves what they do, as well as five categories characterizing negative relations: embarrassment, unjustifiable discipline, unwanted aggression, inappropriate affection and unrealistic expectation.

It is interesting that student perception of the causes of misunderstanding between a teacher and a student is mostly an existing defiant attitude of a student towards a teacher (40,0%), but also the inability of a teacher to understand a student (19,9%) with the attitude of a teacher that he/she must always be right (18,1%). Individual examinees believe that one of the reasons is also a depreciating attitude of a teacher towards a student (17,6%), age difference (1,6%) and something else (1,8%).

Survey results showed the causes of non-discipline of students in the teaching process. Students, therefore, believe that a lack of discipline of students in class depends on the way the teacher presents (24,9%), whether the material is interesting (21,7%), the ability of a teacher to get students interested (21,5%), how strict they are (14,6%), students' house manners (16,2%) and something else (0,9%). It is important to mention that there are no differences in the statements involving the causes of a lack of discipline in the teaching process considering the student's gender ($p > 0,05$) and the type of school (vocational or grammar school) and, thus, the first hypothesis is rejected (H1).

This research attempted to find more about the positive aspects of class. In that sense, the most satisfaction in students in class is made up by how interesting the material is (24,9%), the quality of relationship from a teacher towards students (19,9%), followed by how funny the teacher is (18,1%), praise and encouragements by the teacher (13,0%), clear, descriptive, and interesting presentation by the teacher (12,1%), valuing students' opinions (9,6%) and something else (2,3%). It is visible that the way in which a teacher makes class interesting, as well as a quality and motivating relationship between the teacher and student represents a highly valuable component of the teaching process, but the results, however, highlight that the examinees put focus primarily on how interesting the material is (24%) as a valuable component contributing to student satisfaction in class, rejecting the second hypothesis (H2). Namely, student satisfaction in class created by the ability of a teacher to make materials interesting, we believe represents a noteworthy teacher competence which can be seen through the prism of a relationship with the student.

This research attempted to gather data on how the teachers are perceived by students. The largest number of examinees feel respect towards teachers (67,7%), followed by affection (7,6%) in a

significantly smaller percentage, and then indifference (7,3%), admiration (5,5%), hatred (3,9%), awe (2,7%), fear (1,6%), contempt (0,7%) and something else (3,0%).

Furthermore, the results also point towards the existence of a difference in the perception of teacher traits in students, which was shown by the t-test for independent samples (Table 1). The T-test for independent samples on student estimations of the traits they most appreciate in their teachers, therefore, showed that there is a statistically significant difference $t(433)=2,23$, $p<0,05$ considering the type of school the students go to, which confirms the third hypothesis (H3). Further descriptive analysis determined that students differ in their priorities towards certain attitudes of a teacher towards a student considering the type of school. The students of vocational schools estimate that the most important thing is an affectionate and warm relationship towards students (13,1%), understanding students (10,6%), followed by a happy demeanor (8,3%), just and objective grading (6,0%), clear, descriptive, and interesting presentation (5,1%) and, ultimately, external appearance and dress code (2,8%). Grammar school students estimate the first two claims to be equally significant as did the students of vocational schools, but they give priority to a clear, descriptive and interesting presentation (6,9%), just and objective grading (6,9%), happy demeanor (6,4%) and, ultimately, external appearance is given the least importance (1,6%).

This research gathered data on problems the teacher has to deal with, from the student's perspective, as well. The T-test for independent samples of student estimation of the student problems which particularly occupy a teacher determined a statistically significant difference $t(433)=2,32$, $p<0,05$ considering the type of school students go to (Table 2). Further descriptive analysis determined that grammar school students estimate success in learning (26,6%) as a problem which occupies a teacher, while vocational school students primarily highlight absences and discipline (23,4%). It is visible, from what was previously mentioned, that there is a difference in the spectrum and volume of work the teachers have to deal with in schools from a student's perception. In other variables examined in the research (cause of misunderstanding students, reasons for a lack of discipline in class, satisfaction with teaching) there is no statistically significant difference considering the type of school ($p>0,05$)

Table 1. T-test on student problems which occupy the teacher considering the type of school

Variables	Type of school	N	M	SD	t
Which of the suggested traits do you most appreciate in your teacher (especially class teacher)	Vocational	201	2,86	1,66	2,23*
	Grammar school	234	2,52	1,51	
Which problems especially occupy the teacher (especially your class teacher)	Vocational	201	2,16	1,25	2,32*
	Grammar school	235	1,89	1,21	

Note: $p<0,05^*$; $p<0,01^{**}$; $p<0,001^{***}$

The T-test for independent samples on the student estimation of traits they most appreciate in their teachers showed a statistically significant difference $t(433)=2,23$, $p<0,05$ considering the type of school students go to, which confirmed the fourth hypothesis (H4). In that sense, further descriptive analysis determined that students differ in their priority towards certain behavior attitudes towards the student considering the type of school, where the vocational school students estimate that the most important thing is an affectionate and warm relationship with students (13,1%), understanding students (10,6%), followed by a happy demeanor (8,3%), just and objective grading (6,0%), clear, descriptive, and interesting presentation (5,1%) and, ultimately, external appearance and dress code (2,8%). Students of grammar schools estimate the first two claims to be equally important as do the students of vocational schools, but they give priority to a clear, descriptive, and interesting presentation (6,9%), just and objective grading (6,9%), happy demeanor (6,4%) and, ultimately, external appearance is given the least importance (1,6%).

In other variables examined in this research, there is no statistically significant difference considering the type of school ($p>0,05$)

Table 2. Differences in student perception of problems occupying the teacher considering the type of school

Variables			Which student problems particularly occupy the teacher (especially your class teacher)					Σ	
			Success in learning	Discipline and absences	Personal problems of students	Student future	Nothing in particular		Something else
School you go to	Vocational	f	61	102	6	11	18	3	201
		%	14,0%	23,4%	1,4%	2,5%	4,1%	0,7%	46,1%
	Grammar school	f	116	79	8	16	14	2	235
		%	26,6%	18,1%	1,8%	3,7%	3,2%	0,5%	53,9%
Σ		f	177	181	14	27	32	5	436
		%	40,6%	41,5%	3,2%	6,2%	7,3%	1,1%	100,0%

Furthermore, the t-test for independent samples determined that there is a difference in the variable examining the opinion of the creation of a positive attitude between a teacher and student considering gender $t(435)=2,42$, $p<0,05$, which rejected the fifth hypothesis (H5). In that sense, further descriptive analysis (Table 3) determined that male examinees consider that the most important thing is understanding and respecting personalities (8,5%), as well as the readiness of a teacher to help (8,5%) and then the affectionate and warm relationship of a teacher towards students (8,2%), while female examinees emphasize the affectionate and warm relationship (17,4%), understanding and respecting personalities (15,1%), and then an equal relationship towards all students (11%).

Table 3. Differences in perception of a positive attitude in the teacher-student relationship considering gender

Variables			What, in your opinion, affects the creation of a positive attitude in the teacher-student relationship						Σ	
			Affectionate and warm relationship of a teacher towards students	Understanding and respect for student personalities	Readiness of a teacher to help a student	Objective grading	Equal relationship towards all students	Interesting presentation		Something else
Gender	Male	f	36	37	37	11	33	10	6	170
		%	8,2%	8,5%	8,5%	2,5%	7,6%	2,3%	1,4%	38,9%
	Female	f	76	66	47	20	48	8	2	267
		%	17,4%	15,1%	10,8%	4,6%	11,0%	1,8%	0,5%	61,1%
Σ		f	112	103	84	31	81	18	8	437
		%	25,6%	23,6%	19,2%	7,1%	18,5%	4,1%	1,8%	100,0%

Research offered student suggestions to advance the teacher-students relationship. Using qualitative analysis, the following results were created, which say that students believe that, in order to improve the educational relationship and communication with teachers, mutual respect, conversation and understanding students is important. Students suggest that the interesting nature of the content and the presentation of it by the teacher would benefit the betterment of the very teaching process, which relates to the improvement of expert competences of teachers, followed by constructive criticism and critical thinking, as well as validating the opinions of students, tolerance, and the flexibility of the very teaching process.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Changes going on at all levels of society present many demands to the school as an educational institution, and especially the teacher as the carrier of the educational process. Therefore, the teacher assumes the role of coordinator, advisor, motivator, facilitator, a person of trust, friend, and is also demanded to have a series of competences which do not exclusively relate to the educational portion

of working in a school. Teachers contribute to the growth and development of a young person, and the research which contributes to the understanding of the relationship between the subjects of the educational process, the teacher and the student, are scientifically justified and their results are practically applicable. The results of this research showed that students believe that, for a positive relationship between a teacher and the student, an affectionate and warm friendly relationship of a teacher towards the students is important, as well as understanding and respecting student personalities, readiness of a teacher to help a student, equal relationship towards all students, objective grading and interesting presentation of a teacher. Also, some guidelines were given which were shown to be a predictor of quality teaching and guidelines to improve the educational relationship and communication with teachers (mutual respect, conversation and understanding students).

Even though there is no agreement among authors on defining the notion of teacher-student interaction i.e. even though different authors are focused on different aspects of interaction, research clarifying different aspect of this interaction is needed, from the perspective of the student but also the teacher. In any case, results of research into the relationship between the teacher and student clearly showed that the quality of their interaction in the classroom is directly positively correlated with learning outcomes [12].

Interpersonal interaction between the teacher and the student, as an interactive, constructive relationship, requires constant thinking, examining and advancement. Student attitudes on the components of this relationship and the characteristics of the teacher in it are a pathway towards building a more quality interaction which, ultimately, contributes to a teaching process of a higher quality. Some future research and interactions between teachers and students should encompass more variables of this process (from a teaching style, leading a class, social and emotional relations, ways of communicating) in order to get a clearer image on the interaction between a teacher and a student.

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