

# Students Speak Out: Unpacking the Dynamics of Student-Teacher Relationships

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## ABSTRACT

*This study was carried out to find the perception of students towards the teachers and students' relationship, and to explore the teacher and student relationship in science education. This study employs the quantitative and qualitative methods and a survey-interpretative research design. Sixty students aged fourteen and eighteen were surveyed and interviewed in Kathmandu district. It shows that the teachers play an important role in decisive students' perceptions of personal success. The perception of students showed that their success is related to the effect of a positive connection with a teacher. Participants also provided examples of negative relationships. The position of construction caring relationships with students is demonstrated in this article. The positive influence is developed in the discussions of the qualities or actions of teachers and the significance of their role, which impacts student success both inside and outside of school.*

**Keywords:** *Student's perception, Negative relationship, Personal success, Positive relationship*

## Background

Our teaching journey began in a classroom filled with students who had a range of learning needs. Some exhibited behaviors that were new to me as an inexperienced teacher, while others faced academic challenges that pushed me to reconsider everything we had learned at Tribhuvan University. We were working in a Chemistry Education Classroom, full of enthusiasm and determination, yet we struggled to address the diverse requirements of our students. It wasn't until much later in our careers that we recognized the significance of forming connections with students. We came to understand that a teacher's primary responsibility is to establish relationships with students; the real impact lies not in the content delivered but in conveying genuine care. Our continued work in chemistry education has shaped our teaching philosophy to emphasize the necessity of developing personal connections with each student.

Throughout our experience, we realized that students are more open to academic engagement when they feel respected, cared for, and valued. We believe it's essential to share my identity not just as a teacher but also as a person, someone who might relate to their experiences. Reflecting on our time as students, we recognize that having a teacher show personal investment in our success would have greatly enhanced our achievement. Ultimately, individuals tend to perform better when they sense that their educators are personally invested in their educational journey.

In this study, we examine the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and how these perceptions influence students' academic progress. Specifically, we explore how these relationships can serve as a resource or social capital for students, as posited by theorists like Coleman and Ngware et al. (1997). Understanding both teachers' and students' viewpoints is crucial since both parties need to engage in the relationship for social capital to manifest. A key aspect of this relationship may be linked to teachers' beliefs regarding students' effort at school. From our observations, there's a strong, positive correlation between students' effort and their performance in chemistry. Students are more likely to invest effort if they feel their teachers care and foster good relationships. Conversely, those at risk of dropping out may not engage as much, especially if they perceive negative attitudes from educators. For these vulnerable students, the perception of a caring teacher can be critical; it assures that their commitment to learning will be met with teacher support.

The relationships formed within the school environment significantly influence personal development. Our societal participation is closely tied to the quality of relationships we cultivate with peers and educators. Developing the skills necessary for building relationships demands extensive practice over the years. This belief reinforces my conviction that student-teacher relationships are pivotal for individual success, both academically and socially. Research supports this notion, indicating that students who foster positive, supportive relationships with their teachers tend to excel in their studies. Consequently, these meaningful connections prepare students to thrive in society. This study centers on the impact of student-teacher relationships on academic success. While many students might forget specific lessons, the influence of their teachers, whether positive or negative, leaves a lasting impression that cannot be overlooked.

Teachers leave a permanent impression on their students, and this impression may have a lifelong effect. The term relationship also needs further clarification. For this study, I am defining a relationship as statement (verbal and non-verbal) between the teacher and the student that is supposed as caring. This study used surveys and personal interview data to measure student-teacher relationships and

their impact on student success. Additional data analyzed includes student academic attainment and attendance records.

## **Review of the Literature**

While distinct processes are intricately linked, teaching and learning are mental processes that create meaning and comprehension. The concept must relate to something familiar for connections between meaning and understanding. Therefore, learning becomes meaningful when the student actively engages with it. Conversely, teaching requires educators to convey knowledge in a way that allows students to derive meaning from it, necessitating a connection between teacher and learner. This relationship is essential for effective teaching and learning. The interaction between teachers and students forms the core of the educational experience, engaging active and evolving minds (Gallardo, Barrasa, & Guevara-Viejo, 2016). Furthermore, both parties must perceive this connection as caring. Emotional security plays a crucial role in learning; recognizing an individual's emotional state, providing personal attention, and addressing academic needs are vital responsibilities of teachers to foster this security. When learners are emotionally equipped to process their experiences, they can more effectively link new material to previous knowledge (Subedi, 2021). The relationship between student and teacher is emotional, significantly influencing the teaching and learning experience. To progress academically, many students require emotional connection and affirmation (Hughes, 2011), which stems from an authentic emotional synchronization with their teacher (Fouts, 2001). Caring is essential for fostering this emotional commitment, as educators must invest time and effort in establishing a meaningful connection with all students within a dynamic and interactive learning atmosphere (Motta & Bennett, 2018). According to Kohn (1999), schools function as small communities where teachers uphold students' dignity by providing opportunities that foster a sense of belonging and open dialogue, ultimately enhancing the learning experience.

Niebuhr and Niebuhr (1999) surveyed 241 ninth-grade students to explore the relationship between student-teacher interactions and academic performance. Their findings underscore the significance of these relationships, suggesting that when teachers foster a connection with their students, it encourages the students to put in greater effort, thereby enhancing their chances of success. Teachers need to generate an environment where students can get to know them, embodying warmth, care, and nurturing (Mercer & Dornyei, 2020).

Similarly, Green (1998) examined 600 students and 600 teachers to identify what attributes contribute to a nurturing school environment. The study revealed that positive relationships between students and teachers are fundamental to a

nurturing atmosphere. This creates a cyclical dynamic where such relationships are essential for nurturing environments, and these environments, in turn, foster healthier student-teacher connections. Tiberius (1999) emphasized the necessity of relationships in teaching, comparing them to the essential ingredient in baking – flour in a cake. He asserts that effective teachers cultivate trustful, open, and secure relationships with their students, characterized by cooperation and interaction. This engagement encourages students to take risks in their learning, leading to increased participation and more effective learning outcomes.

Wells (1989) noted that as students' progress through school, their learning environments become more diverse, which can lead to disengagement from building student-teacher relationships. He pointed out that students who remain in school often identify a good teacher as a key positive factor in their educational experience, further supporting the notion that strong student-teacher relationships correlate with academic success. "Students are less likely to leave school when they engage with adaptable, positive, creative, and student-centred teachers instead of those who strictly enforce rules" (p. 3). Tauber (1997) discussed the influence of first impressions on relationships, noting that teachers might form biases based on physical appearance, past experiences, or other teachers' comments about students. These impressions can vary among educators, leading to distinct expectations and relationships. Therefore, he suggests that teachers should not rely solely on first impressions but rather invest time in understanding their students as individuals. Research by McCroskey and Teven (1997) focused on how students perceive their teachers as caring. Their study indicates that when students feel their teachers care, it positively impacts both their emotional and cognitive learning outcomes. However, they also acknowledged the need for further investigation into the specific behaviors that convey caring. This suggests that nurturing student-teacher relationships not only positively influence learning but also promote socially acceptable behavior and enhance communication skills for developing interpersonal relationships.

In his 1999 work, Pianta poses the question, "Why do teachers teach?" He observes that many educators tend to illustrate how their experiences with students have shaped them personally. Teachers often share anecdotes about specific students, which frequently highlight the impact those students have had on their lives. The relationships that develop between teachers and students, both positive and negative, significantly influence teachers' self-reflection and actions. Utilizing social development theories, Pianta examines how social interactions can be fostered. He highlights the importance of child-teacher interactions, asserting that "child competence often resides within the context of relationships with adults, and adult-child relationships play a crucial role in development, shaping it in essential ways" (p. 17).

Similarly, in a 1999 qualitative study, Medina and Luna investigated the dynamics of student-teacher relationships in classrooms comprised of emotionally and behaviorally challenged adolescents. The findings revealed a consistent preference among students for the connections they had with their teachers or teaching assistants. Remarks like, "My teacher understands me, listens to me, and befriends me without judgment; they care, empathize with my needs, and value me," underline the necessity of fostering strong student-teacher relationships. This research illustrates the significance of such connections, particularly in special education, while also suggesting that high-quality relationships are crucial in all educational settings. The existing literature supports the notion that student-teacher relations play a vital role in the learning process, influencing academic performance, dropout rates, school climate, and students' overall desire to attend school (Acharya & Subedi, 2023). The overall atmosphere of a school, viewed as a social institution, benefits from teachers who exhibit care, understanding, and sensitivity to the needs of their students.

Aligned with the literature discussed, I observed that Fouts and Kohn's concepts are comparable, as they emphasize how emotional engagement significantly influences teaching and learning. This perspective fosters emotional investment and a connection necessary to cultivate a conducive learning environment. Kohn, Green, and Wells examine the environment's role, highlighting that its attributes promote more adaptable, imaginative, and student-centered learners instead of those strictly adhering to rules. Medina and Luna emphasize the importance of a positive school atmosphere and enhanced communication skills for interpersonal relationships, also noting that unique educational environments evoke positive responses from students. Thus, the literature speaks to emotional engagement, the learning environment, and distinctive educational contexts as factors enhancing the relationship between students and teachers. However, Tauber presents a contrasting viewpoint, suggesting that first impressions of teachers are influenced by a teacher's physical presence, past experiences, and communication styles, resulting in varied relationships among individuals. Similarly, McCroskey and Teven center their ideas on the instructional framework, student viewpoints, teacher impact, and specific teacher behaviors that shape the dynamics of student-teacher relationships. Pinta emphasizes the significance of teacher behaviour in the learning process. The personal reflections and actions of the teacher largely influence students' perceptions and their relationship with the teacher. Thus, this literature predominantly emphasizes teacher behaviours, their influences, and the context of instruction in building relationships.

Our perspective also underscores the pivotal role of teachers in fostering student-teacher relationships. Academic learning is intertwined with students' understanding that they are respected and cared for and that their efforts are

valued in determining their outcomes. our viewpoint slightly diverges from the existing literature. Student-teacher relationships serve as a vital resource or social capital for students. Based on my experience, we anticipate that students' efforts will directly and positively impact their achievements. When students observe that their teachers genuinely care for them, it contributes to their success, highlighting the importance of student-teacher relationships. Neiabur shares a similar viewpoint, as both of us emphasize creating avenues for student success. We expect students to exert more effort when they sense that their teachers are invested in them. The care and reliability shown by teachers may encourage students to dedicate themselves to the relationship with the teacher and their school. Our perspective also considers the school environment as a key factor. The relationships between students and teachers develop alongside their interactions with peers and educators. Therefore, the existing literature chiefly concentrates on emotional engagement, the learning environment, and teacher behaviors. In contrast, our perspective emphasizes experience, the role and actions of the teacher, student effort, teacher care and reliability, the school environment, and the facilitation of opportunities for students. Consequently, our viewpoint stands apart from the prevailing ideas in the literature.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study is based on the Quan-qual research design. Sixty students of grade 11 and 12 were selected from Kathmandu district through a random sampling procedure. The survey and interview guidelines were used as the research tools. We administered a survey to sixty students, 30 of each in grades eleven and 30 twelve with a science background. The college has a population of five hundred fifty students. The participants were selected randomly, much like flipping a coin, and included students enrolled in academic courses. Once the students were chosen, a consent letter was sent to their parents, explaining the purpose of the survey and stating that attendance and academic performance would be considered during data collection and analysis. The selection process was random and encompassed academic and nonacademic students based solely on our experience. We approached teachers from specific grade levels and courses and requested that they randomly select the necessary number of male and female students to participate in the survey.

The surveys were conducted by one of the core chemistry teachers, comprising a group of participants that included fifteen male and fifteen female students from both grade eleven and grade twelve academic courses. To eliminate potential biases, another teacher was asked to administer surveys to randomly selected students in their classrooms. The students received straightforward instructions for completing the survey and were given the option to participate in a personal

interview. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. The survey featured eighteen questions that required a simple Yes or No answer, along with sections for personal reflection.

As noted by Neuman (1997), using an approval/disapproval response format in surveys can encourage higher participation rates. Therefore, we expected students to feel more comfortable responding with a straightforward Yes or No. The data from the personal interviews will be examined for themes, consistency, and discrepancies.

The decision to use surveys and interviews was based on several factors:

1. It allows for clearly identifying a single variable and comparing relationships between multiple variables.
2. Participants' confidentiality is protected within the survey responses.
3. Surveys allow students to express their views openly without external interference.
4. Previous research shows that surveys are effective for gathering information.
5. The survey aims to achieve a balanced stratified random sample with 50% female and 50% male participants (Neuman, 1997).
6. Surveys help minimize the researcher's influence.

The responses of Yes and No to each question were recorded and tabulated. The survey and interview questions were structured around theoretical concepts, and each theoretical topic was analyzed about the responses collected. Lastly, the interviews were treated as qualitative data. Qualitative research necessitates an in-depth exploration of human behaviour within its social context (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Personal reflections were organized as qualitative data and analyzed in detail within the final research findings.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The analysis and interpretation are based on the quantitative and qualitative insights collected through the field.

### **Quantitative Response**

Sixty students, 30 males and 30 females from grades 11 and 12, participated in the survey. Each question and the number of "yes" and "no" responses and their results are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Student Survey*

Questionnaire for students	Response Percentage	
1. Do you have a favourite subject?	Yes, 84%	No, 16%
2. Do you have a favourite teacher?	Yes, 78%	No, 22%
3. Does your favourite teacher teach your favourite subject?	Yes, 53%	No, 47%
4. Does your favourite teacher display an interest in you?	Yes, 69%	No, 31%
5. Does your favourite teacher encourage you to work harder?	Yes, 78%	No, 22%
6. Is it important that the teacher displays a personal interest in you?	Yes, 65%	No, 35%
7. Has it been your experience that you achieve higher grades when a teacher displays a personal interest in you?	Yes, 69%	No, 31%
8. Has it been your experience that a teacher has negatively influenced your success in achieving higher grades?	Yes, 61%	No, 39%
9. Do you feel that any teacher has ever made you feel you could take a risk in your learning? For example, it was okay to raise your hand and answer a question even if you thought you were wrong.	Yes, 81%	No, 19%
10. Has it been your knowledge that you have taken a risk in your learning in a setting where you were not made to feel worthy and respected?	Yes, 55%	No, 45%
11. If you answered yes to the previous question, did you positively respond to your risk-taking?	Yes, 56%	No, 44%
12. Do you feel that the teacher needs a sense of humour?	Yes, 90%	No, 10%
13. Do you feel that the teacher needs to create a caring environment?	Yes, 80%	No, 20%
14. Do you feel that your relationship with the teacher is important?	Yes, 86%	No, 14%
15. Did you get higher grades from the teachers who made you feel respected and worthy?	Yes, 85%	No, 15%
16. Do you think your relationship with a teacher impacts your success?	Yes, 85%	No, 15%
17. Do you think building positive relationships with teachers impacts your personal satisfaction outside of school?	Yes, 69%	No, 31%
18. If you replied yes to the previous question, do you think your success is influenced inside and outside school?	Yes, 92%	No, 8%



Table 1 shows that the response to the first three questions identifies the favourite teacher and subject. In 53% of the cases, the favourite teacher teaches favourite subjects. Similarly, the data does not indicate as strong a need for a teacher to display an interest in them as students, with only 69% of the students indicating this is a qualifying characteristic. However, 78% of the students said they work harder for their favourite teacher. The following data indicates that 65% of the students feel that it is important for teachers to display a personal interest in them. Further questions display the interdependence between the student-teacher relationship and its impact on academic success. Here, academic success is directly related to student-teacher relationships.

Again, the result showed that 81% of students experienced teachers encouraging them to take risks. Similarly, results, 86% of the respondents acknowledged that a teacher had made them feel worthy. Intestinally, 90% of the respondents favoured the idea that teachers need to have a sense of humour, and 85% acknowledged the teacher and academic success, the feeling of respect and worthiness, and their higher grades. Similarly, 69% of the respondents felt that a positive relationship with teachers impacted their satisfaction outside of school, and 92% of respondents think success is directly influenced by student-teacher relationships inside and outside the school. So, all these data suggest that a good relationship between the teacher and student is important, as the literature suggests they have, as well as my teaching experience.

### **Qualitative Insight**

The anonymous and experience-based nature of this survey meant it lacked targeted questions to identify which classes promoted positive student-teacher relationships. Additionally, it didn't enable pinpointing any links between these relationships, academic achievement, and attendance. As a result, the insights presented in this paper about academic success and attendance are derived from personal interviews. The participating students readily shared their learning experiences, recalling their basic years or discussing their current situations. A lack of positive interactions with teachers made it easier for students to recognize the impact a teacher can have. One student shared an intense memory of a teacher frequently hitting a desk with a meter stick, highlighting the need for educators to reflect on their behavior. Interestingly, this same student also recalled a positive experience where the teacher trusted them to make decisions regarding the annual's layout. The student described the teacher as exceptional, saying, "She

allowed us to choose the images for the annual and took the time to engage with us.” This emphasizes the importance for educators to understand that their actions can speak louder than their words.

Students highlighted the qualities of their teachers that made them feel valued and respected. Many shared instances where a teacher acknowledged their feelings, accepted them as they were, and provided a welcoming and supportive environment for their emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. For example, one teacher offered to listen if a student needed someone to reveal, leading one student to say, "The teacher made me feel like I was important." Characteristics such as compassion, understanding, respect, friendliness, and attentiveness are greatly appreciated by students. Numerous students mentioned having a favorite teacher, and they often worked harder to gain that teacher's approval, resulting in improved grades. Student S<sub>1</sub> said, "Yes, I put in more effort for teachers who have a supportive relationship with me because it feels more relaxed; otherwise, you feel like you're disappointing them." Other students noted that their increased effort and better grades were due to their teachers' encouragement, positive feedback, and belief in their abilities. These observations support the notion that students tend to perform better academically when they have positive interactions with their teachers.

Almost all the students interviewed indicated that teachers play a vital role in their success. Some student responses included:

- "Lots because if you dislike the teacher and they have a terrible attitude, then you won't pay attention or perform well."
- "Very important. I need to feel reinforced and silent."
- "Very important. If the teacher is fun and understanding, they motivate you to work. When they are strict and grumpy, it frustrates you, making you less inclined to do anything."
- "A teacher is crucial for guiding you through difficult times and helping you find the right answer."
- "It depends on specific teachers, but some make a significant impact. Some have completely influenced my grades."
- "If a teacher reminds a student that they believe in them and are willing to help, the student will thrive."
- "Very important. They create either welcoming or unwelcoming environments that encourage or discourage students from learning and trying."

- "It's essential because having a teacher you dislike makes it hard to put in effort."

Every student shared their perspective on success, connecting to their qualities, depending on the teachers who help them achieve their goals. The ideal teachers were those who recognized individual learning styles, instilled confidence, made students feel appreciated and respected, and were open to diverse learning abilities. The students' emotions were evident as they described their ideal educators.

During the interviews, the students highlighted the central role of the teachers to play in their academic and personal growth. They openly communicated how teachers had affected them, using expressions such as treated me as an equal, supported me like a friend, didn't mock me for my mistakes, and showed passion for their subjects. These comments reflect the significant impact that teachers' interactions with their students have on the overall learning experience.

## **Conclusion**

Teaching is a complex profession, but research indicates that a teacher's primary duty is to show genuine care for their students. Additionally, the emotional engagement highlighted in educational research supports these findings. Since effective teaching relies heavily on strong social skills, educators must be mindful of their social interactions and how they affect others. Teachers must foster an environment where they can connect with their students and instill feelings of safety and protection. This paper has underscored the significance of building positive relationships with students, with many indicating that teachers play a vital role in their success, and the effects of these relationships can have lasting impacts. Teachers who understand that learning is not solely a cognitive process display the traits associated with effective teaching. As previously mentioned in this study, 90% of the students believe that a sense of humour is an essential quality for a teacher. Incorporating humour in the classroom can help ease tensions, curb negative behaviour, and create opportune moments for learning. A classroom atmosphere that promotes enjoyment and encourages students to laugh at their errors, and the teacher fosters a sense of security and enhances the learning experience.

## Implications for Education

Establishing positive relationships between students and teachers is crucial for effective learning. Educators need to embrace this belief within schools as a core aspect of their teaching philosophy. While not all education systems prioritize this, the significance of fostering good student-teacher connections can be highlighted in several ways. Universities preparing future teachers could revise their admission criteria and course offerings to reflect this emphasis. Additionally, ongoing professional development can reinforce this idea for current educators. School administrators and personnel can also play a vital role by recognizing the qualities that make for ideal educators and promoting the hiring of those who align with that vision. Moreover, students are part of this process as well; they can learn to appreciate individual differences and practice tolerance, especially since they will encounter people they may not naturally get along with. Both parties must be actively engaged to build and maintain positive student-teacher relationships. Aspiring teachers should thoughtfully reflect on their motivations for entering the profession, while current educators should consider their reasons for remaining in teaching. Teaching encompasses more than just sharing knowledge; it's about connecting with students personally and allowing them to know you as well. This research shows that teachers significantly impact their students' lives. Most of us have been students and often recall the influence of a teacher more vividly than the subjects they taught.

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