



Effect of Teachers and Students Relationships on the Academic Engagement of Students: A Qualitative Case Study

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors BMA and DAW conceived of the presented idea. Author BMA developed the theory and performed the computations. Both verified the analytical methods. Both authors encouraged to investigate and supervised the findings of this work. Both authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript. Author BMA contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript. Author DAW wrote the manuscript with support from secretary. Both conceived the original idea. Both developed the theoretical formalism, performed the analytic calculations and performed the numerical simulations. Both authors contributed to the final version of the manuscript. Both authors contributed to the interpretation of the results. Author BMA took the lead in writing the manuscript. Both authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis and manuscript. Author DAW discussed the results and commented on the manuscript.

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Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the effect of teacher and student relationships on the academic engagement of students. The research approach used was the qualitative study employing the interpretive research paradigm which falls in the case study design. The subjects of the study were eight teachers and four students of Adama Science and Technology University. The study used purposive sampling. It employed qualitative data collection tools: interview guides, a focus group

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discussion guide and observation. The resulting analysis and interpretation provided a description of major themes that developed regarding strong teacher- student relationships, as well as, specific components to the interactions considered essential for the student's learning environment. Identifying specific factors associated with teacher-student interactions could provide valuable information to an educational learning community. The findings of the study indicated that the factor that affects teachers' motivational factors in student relationships were the work environment and students' disciplinary problems. The results showed that the instructors are motivated to teach nevertheless the resources, environment, theories of motivation and goals set influence the quality of the teaching-learning process. The study concluded that these factors should be upheld. Consequently, it is recommended that higher education should improve the working environment and working conditions in the university.

Keywords: Case study; learning; performance; student; teacher; teacher-student relationship.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Student-teacher relationships on the academic engagement are important to students' academic, social and emotional development, and consequently may affect the social and learning environments of classrooms and university [1]. Strongly supporting student-teacher relationships might promote students' feelings of safety, security and belongingness, and may eventually lead to higher academic achievements. Academic engagement of student is the quality and quantity of students' psychological, cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions to the learning process as well as to in-class/out-of-class academic and social activities to achieve successful learning outcomes [2]. According to the Schunk, Meece and Pintrich [3], the teacher and student relationships on the academic engagement of students is intended in an interactive, inspirational, fun, challenging, motivational for active participation and provides sufficient space for initiative, creativity, and independence in accordance with the talents, interests and physical and psychological development of students. Learning is a change from behavior or appearance, with a series of activities such as reading, listening and imitating. Learning also has a purpose as an effort to master material from a science. Learning is a modification or strengthening behavior through experience [1,4,5]. According to this understanding, learning is a process, an activity and not a result or goal. Learning is not only remembering, but wider than that, which is experiencing. According to the view of constructivism theory, student-oriented learning activities are described as learning where students must actively build their own knowledge. Nevertheless, there are many factors that

influence students' learning and source of the factors are too. For instance, factors that influence student learning in general are divided into internal and external factors [6,7]. Besides, in the qualitative study of Buckley and Lee [8] and the quantitative study of [9] demonstrated that the extent to which students are involved with both curricular and extracurricular activities is also indicative of their psychological well-being and distress.

In this era of globalization and technological advancement, teacher-student relationship is considered as a first step for every human activity. Teacher-student relationships play a vital role in the development of human capital and are linked with an individual's well-being and opportunities for better living. It ensures the acquisition of knowledge and skills that enable individuals to increase their productivity and improve their quality of life. This increase in productivity also leads towards new sources of earning which enhances the economic growth of a country [10]. In this regard, the quality of students' performance remains a top concern for educators. It is meant for making a difference locally, regionally, nationally and globally. Educators, trainers and researchers have long been interested in exploring variables contributing effectively to quality of performance of learners. These variables that affect students' academic performance are both inside and outside the school. These factors may be termed as student factors, teacher factor, family factors, school factors and peer factors [11,12]. Teachers are facilitators of the learning process. They are unique in that they are architects, managers and engineers of pedagogy.

Zee and Koomen [13] stated that good teachers were essential for the effective functioning of the education system and for improving the quality of

learning process. This result can be achieved when teachers are satisfied with their job. Job satisfaction enables teachers to put their maximum effort up on their work. The maintenance of high satisfaction and morale has long been an important objective for educators. Teachers develop performance style characteristics to their ways of relating to the world perceptually as well as cognitively. An effective teacher's development design should have an exhaustive measure of these factors so as to encourage necessary skills and attitudes amongst prospective teachers [10,5,7]. Currently, research on aspects of teaching related to quality in classrooms suggests that teachers' attitudes and beliefs about students are important factors in predicting excellence of education [9,14]. A teacher's personal interactions with his/her students can make a significant difference for students who are at risk for academic failure -- the importance of teachers' relationships with these students cannot be overstated [15]. The relationships that teachers develop with their students have an important role in a student's academic growth. Hallinan [16] described that "learning is a process that involves cognitive and social psychological dimensions, and both processes should be considered if academic achievement is to be maximized". Zee and Koomen [13] allude to teacher-student interaction as a factor that affects learning and academic performance of learners. By this [13] referred to situations where the teacher would use abusive language, threatens learners or shouts at them for various reasons. This resulted in the learners feeling inattentive in class due to fear or resentment for the teacher. Eventually, such learners tended to escape from school and perform poorly in the end. According to Penuel, Riel, Krause and Frank [17] the proponent of the humanistic paradigm states that an individual has freedom and ability to attain self-development or self-learning and is capable of directing his/her own learning as long as the environment is enabling. Therefore, teachers are the custodians of the teaching and learning overall processes.

Successful learning at university is the foundation of lifelong learning by individuals and the globalized knowledge for the society of the future [14]. Therefore, it is very important that every pupil at university is well set on this path and teachers are the ones who have the pivotal role to impart knowledge to students. According to Scheerens [5] teachers who are appointed today are not only the leaders of the next generation, but they also act as role models to

students. This author also added that if teachers are happy, motivated and satisfied with their teaching profession, then better student achievement will definitely result. Furthermore, it is increasingly recognized that the learning environment is an important factor in explaining students' motivation for school and their learning outcomes as well as teachers are key actors who shape the learning environment [18,3,19] and one of the teachers most important tasks is to create a learning environment that enhances and sustains students' motivation and engages students in learning. Beside, his study results provide support for further study of the inclusion of interpersonal relationships in the instructional setting and to what degree those relationships affect the students' learning environment. Consequently, the quality of the relationship between a student and the teacher will result in a greater degree of learning in the classroom [5,15,20].

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to self-determination theory students have three basic innate needs: to feel related to others, to feel competent and to feel autonomous Ryan and Deci, 2000b cited in [4]. The positive attitude of teachers can foster students' need for relatedness and the facility of structure can foster students' need for competence [9,20]. This study specifically focused on teaching strategies that are aimed at supporting students' need to feel autonomous in learning. The finding that many teachers rely on controlling strategies can partly be explained by teachers' underlying personal beliefs about what motivates students or their preferences towards a certain teaching style, but previous literature has also indicated that contextual conditions, such as school regulations, national standards or high-stakes testing towards controlling motivational strategies [21,22,23]. In general, teaching and learning enables students to acquire knowledge, develop skills and ability, and attitudes that make individuals to properly participate in the development of a country with his/her full potential. Nevertheless, there are many factors that may influence the quality of education as stated previously. Among many of them this study tried to instigate the impact of student and teacher relationships in student learning.

The quality of the relationship between a student and the teacher will result in a greater degree of learning in the classroom [24]. Hence, improving students' relationships with teachers has

important, positive and long-lasting implications for both students' academic and social development. Solely improving students' relationships with their teachers will not produce gains in achievement. However, those students who have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers will attain higher levels of achievement than those students with more conflict in their relationships. The aim of this study was to examine the effects of student and teacher relationships related factor to students' learning and academic performance in Adama Science and Technology University, Ethiopia and to establish measures to improve the learning and academic performance of learners.

This qualitative study addressed the following research questions:

- Why are teacher and student interactions essential to the learning environment?
- How do teachers describe their process for building relationships with their students?

1.3 Significance of the Study

A good deal of literature provides evidence that strong relationships between students and their teachers are essential to the development of all students in academic, social and psychological development [25,20,19]. Hamre and Pianta [20] report that positive student-teacher relationships are a valuable resource for students. They suggest that having a positive relationship with a teacher allows students to be able to work on their own because they know they can count on their teacher if problems arise-that the teacher will recognize and respond to the problem. This study will describe purposeful affective strategies and interactions with students that a teacher uses to effectively engage students in the learning and for better academic achievement. This is very useful feedback to curriculum planners to review the proper relationships between students and teachers in teaching in university. This study contributes to the field of education by providing teachers and administrators with guidance on relationship-building strategies that a highly effective teacher utilizes in a real world, authentic setting- the classroom.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative case-study design. This approach was selected because it has the

capacity to provide thick descriptions of the issue under study [26-28] and the capacity to capture differences in perspective [27]. The emphasis was to obtain a holistic view about quality teaching and learning, search for patterns and develop assertions that can be used to capture an in-depth understanding of quality teaching and learning in the context of Ethiopian higher education based on multiple stakeholders' perspectives. Furthermore, this study used a combination of primary and secondary data in answering the research questions that were outlined. Baxter and Jack [26] assert that qualitative research is characterized by natural settings, which implies studying behavior as it occurs, context sensitivity, that is considering situational factors, direct data collection, detailed narratives that provide in-depth understanding of the behavior, focusing on participants' understanding, generalizations that are induced from synthesizing gathered information, evolving and changing of the study as and when the study progresses, and multiple perspectives which lead to complex understandings and explanations. Hence, one of the most important tasks in the study-design phase was to identify appropriate participants who could inform important facets and perspectives related to the quality of teaching and learning.

2.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample of study included eight instructors and four students of the total of 12 participants. The instructors were from different courses besides with good experiences of teaching, since the experienced instructors had been in the university system long enough to understand the factors that affect the learner's academic achievement. The student and the instructor research participants were selected from Adama Science and Technology University as well the sample was drawn from deep investigation on the interaction skill factor, teaching and learning material and guidance/counseling factors affected students' learning and academic performance among students from first semester. The study participants were four students (two females and two males) and eight experienced instructors (four females & four males). The student and teacher participants represented their groups at the college level, and some of the female participants were chosen for their roles as active representatives of females at the university; these participants were selected because they had a direct link with the issues being investigated. Throughout the results and

discussion session of this paper, students were signified by (S) and teachers/instructors by (T). This number of respondents was enough because in qualitative research even a single respondent is enough for researchers to generate findings [26,29,28].

Furthermore, purposive sampling technique was used to select both student and teacher representative: targeting those who could best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study; that is, quality teaching and learning in Ethiopian higher education. The selection processes of teacher and student participants fit the criteria of an illuminative case to study and have the capacity to generate the necessary information-rich data for the present inquiry.

2.3 Data Collection Method

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted on one-to-one bases with senior teachers and experienced students at Adama Science and Technology University. The main purpose of interviewing these participants was to explore the existing teacher-student interaction in effective teaching and learning in higher education, and particularly in undergraduate programs. The semi-structured in-depth interview method was relevant for data collection of qualitative research approach [28]. In the context of the present study, semi-structured interviews were interactive strategies while the use of open-ended questions correctly fit in the non-interactive strategies. The use of this instrument also helps to acquire the views of the participants regarding factors that motivate teacher and students' effective relationships. Semi-structured questions guided the line of inquiry and answers were recorded on the interview protocol form with emergent follow up questions also recorded. Every attempt was made to make sure questions were asked in an objective, unbiased manner. The advantage of using interviews for this study was that they could provide a deeper understanding of the beliefs underlying teachers' and students' relationship and the contextual factors that they experienced. Halfway through the University year, teachers were interviewed at their own convenient places by the main researchers. Interviews lasted 35–45 minutes. Hence, those interviews were recorded and transcribed then after analyzed and reported.

Our teaching experiences as a university educator afforded us the opportunity to be

embedded in a variety of teaching-learning activities. These experiences provided a good opportunity for unique insight, understanding, and knowledge of teaching- learning processes. These experiences have shaped certain biases (the scientific double-edged sword), although every effort made on our parts to remain neutral as a qualitative researcher and let the data shape our analysis and interpretation. The participant was also given a statement of purpose detailing the intent of researchers' roles in the study as well as his/her roles. The statement of purpose made clear to participants that help them to participate in this case study as an illuminative and information-rich case. The researchers need to be mindful that our roles were known as of impartial observers and to remind the participants in the study of our purpose for being in the classroom. Besides, we consider our own previous roles and experiences as educators in this University as well as others to strengthen us in conducting this study (experiences with more than 25 years) of experiences in classrooms working alongside with teachers. Accordingly, Creswell [27] indicated that a qualitative researcher should use their own prior expert knowledge to demonstrate awareness of current thinking and discourse about the case study topic.

2.4 Data Analysis

According to Yin [28], "data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study". Yin suggested that every investigation should have a general analytic strategy to guide decision-making. The data analysis and interpretation provides major description themes that developed regarding teacher-student relationships. This study used thematic analysis [27], incorporating a description of the context and the processes observed, and an explanation of the elements explored in depth [30]. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis is a method which identifies and analyses patterns in qualitative research, is relatively faster to do and is accessible to neophyte researchers [28]. Data analysis was ongoing during the research process; this allowed the researchers to condense an extensive amount of information into a more manageable format and compare findings within and among transcripts [26]. To organise the data, the researchers read through line by line and thought about the meaning of each word, sentence and idea [27]. Themes that

work in relation to the coded extracts were retained. The researcher used ongoing analysis to define and name themes. To begin this data analysis interviews were transcribed down into data units and then, the units that refer to the same topic were combined. Once these data units were established, the coding process continued by labeling each data unit and sorting these codes into categories.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Data Presentation and Results

The purpose of this study is to assess the effect of teacher and student relationships on the academic engagement of students. The concept of teacher and student relationships on academic engagement, which has been well studied, is particularly important because it may provide a deeper understanding of the reasons for the academic achievement gap among students. The research problems were formulated as questions: 1) why teacher and student interactions are essential to the learning environment? And 2) how do teachers describe their process for building relationships with their students?

Research question 1

Why teacher and student interactions are essential to the learning environment? There are four (classroom climate, classroom layout, teacher interaction and instructional delivery) primary concepts related to this question that provide support for students learning and academic achievement. The researchers used recurring evidence from teacher interview statements and classroom observation notes, as well as corresponding criteria.

Virtually three of student participants asserted that student-teacher relationship is student-centered teaching, which signifies active learning, the participation of all students and the attainment of good results. In the same way, they viewed effective learning as including learning materials that are understandable, suitable learning environments and proper time for learning. Student participants agreed that effective teaching includes starting on time from the first day, keeping to the schedule and syllabus and early provision of handouts and teachers' support. Similarly teacher participants perceived that discovery learning, the association of theories with practice, appraisal mechanisms, provision of relevant support and authentic

assessment as important considerations in effective teaching and learning practices. One of the instructor participants (T5) stressed that "students' self-determination and readiness to learn do really matter". The other instructor participant (T7) pointed out that students' independent learning and intrinsic motivation are crucial components of quality teaching and learning. In support of this, one of the student participants (S4) said, 'Teaching is a guide [that] the instructor highlights to stimulate students for further study. Hence, learning has to be very well integrated with knowledge and practical skills.' These views reflect a broader perspective linking the components of teaching and learning. The four specific categories are detailed as classroom climate, classroom layout, teacher interaction and instructional delivery.

Contextual category 1

One of the teacher participant (T2) noted: Classroom climate-essential components are *build trust with students, set clear and consistent expectations, create consistent routines and procedures, create consequences for behavior* together, build a sense of community within the classroom and create student 'jobs' for sense of ownership of classroom.

This is consistent with the results of study [31] which confirmed that classroom climate as the culture of respect and caring the classroom inhabitants that is purposely created by the teacher. The teacher participant explained that for his/her, building a relationship with his/her students begins with the classroom environment. Further, teacher purposely creates a climate of community within his/her classroom that his/her students feel an integral part of teaching-learning process (T5). As one of teacher participant (T3) explains: You have to build trust between yourself and your students. Building accountability helps to establish trust and responsibility. Little things like being held accountable for your behavior and for completing your job. Students have classroom jobs they have to apply for. It gives them a sense of ownership of the class. Tells them "it's your classroom you don't have to ask me". I am building a community that everyone is a part of. They also earn privileges and rewards all the time. It's all positive and helps to foster independence.

The classroom climate also includes clear expectations that are established together

through consistent routines and procedures. Another teacher/instructor (T6) had a similar opinion: We create expectations for behavior and consequences together as a class in the first week of university. I think that is a key part of creating my classroom climate. I don't go in and tell them these are the rules; we establish them together. Providing information so the students know what they need to learn is also very important. They need to know what is expected of them.

Contextual category 2

Classroom layouts with purposeful design-Essential components are workstations organization of materials, traffic patterns and physical space.

Classroom layout refers to the physical environment of the classroom and reflects the purposeful placement of furniture, equipment, and materials to support student learning. This category reflects the relationship the teacher purposefully creates with his/her students as they interact within their learning environment. In he/she words, "it is not random"; it is the building block to how students interact with each other and with their learning environment. The one of the teacher participant (T3) said: My rug takes up a large area of my room because they need somewhere to sit together during whole group instruction-listening and constantly turning and talking to other students. Bookshelves run parallel to the computer station so students on the rug playing a math game are not distracted by the computer people. A long table is set up with materials students need like highlighters and sticky notes so students have a quiet place to work and spread out.

Workstations are areas created for specific purposes such as writing, math, science experiments, or time with the teacher for small group lessons [32]. Work stations can also be specifically designed for a particular student who has unique needs. As this teacher participant (T1) describes it, Some students can't sit still and I noticed they didn't like being around people while working so I made adjustments for him/her to accommodate learning style and created a space where she could go where she was more comfortable in the classroom – behind my desk.

The participant explains that this consistency lends itself to a sense of ownership of the classroom and personal responsibility for their

work. It also allows interacting with students. As the fourth teacher participant (T4) describes.

Physical arrangement is purposeful. I wanted class stations. They are in teams and I think that is important. They start at the rug, then to the computers, then the work table, then their seats, or with me at the table. Physical arrangement of the room is such that nothing is blocking my view from anywhere in this room. I can see the computers, the book cases, etc. so I can look up and comment and provide feedback.

According to the other teacher participant (T8), this ability to provide periodic feedback as students are working allows him to interact with his students in a purposeful way and provides opportunities for teacher and student interactions that are essential to student learning. As for classroom supplies and materials, the other study participant (T3) indicated that:

All materials are organized and labeled. Students take what they need. It is important they know where the materials are that they need and can easily access them. Everything is 'community'-just take what you need.

Contextual category 3

Teacher Interaction Behaviors

Teacher interaction behaviors refer to specific actions that allow for positive communication between the teacher and students. There were eight identified practices that exhibited during observation and explained during interviews; all considered essential to teacher and student relationships in a learning environment. Teacher Interactions: tone of voice, proximity to students, feedback to students, personal discourse, active listening, use of humor, and use of praise.

The teacher participant (T1) described in interviews, and demonstrated during observations in the classroom, how he/she used humor and praise even tone of voice consistently when interacting with students.

"Chaltu nice job looking at Mrs. while she talks"; "you need to be stern but caring"; "the tone of your voice is very important"; "you need to choose words that are kind and caring"; "use of humor helps with relationships with students. Besides, other teacher respondent (T8) said that "I use humor a lot when interacting with my students" and "I teach through the use of humor."

Active listening techniques were explicitly taught and modeled by the teacher. This example was observed during whole group instruction and recorded in researchers' observation notes: Teacher asks "Was he/she listening? How do I know?" (Students respond with a description of expected listening behaviors i.e. looking at the speaker, following the movement of the instructor etc. and then follow them.)

Proximity to students refers to being within arm's length of the student. Many instances of proximity were witnessed during observations. When the class was on the rug for whole group instruction, teacher participants (all) would sit cross legged on the rug with the students as part of their circle and instruct from that position. Of note were the following examples: Teacher kneels at the student's desk and gets on their eye level to talk to them providing feedback during instruction and teacher leans over the student like an embrace to talk to them and provide feedback and instruction.

Personal argument was also considered an one of an essential component as to one teacher participant (T7) built and maintained his relationship with his students, often sharing his own personal stories and pictures of his family and pets with his/her students. The study participants believed this made his/her students feel like they were an important part of life outside of school as well as in the school setting.

Feedback is continual throughout the day for this teacher. Everything about her (T3) instructional time and classroom layout is organized so she can have frequent contact with students as they are learning. In her (T3) words.

"You need to figure out the student and learn what they need. I look at student work and decide what to teach and how to teach it. I give students constant feedback".

Contextual Category 4

Delivering Instruction

The delivering Instruction category contains specific methods of interaction between teacher and student during instructional time that build on the teacher-student relationship as it applies to learning. These essential components of the interaction between teacher and student have a direct impact on the instruction and learning that occurs at every moment of engagement.

Delivering instruction- essential components, scanning and monitoring: - Wait time student interests, active listening, physical movement, motivating student equitability, animated delivery of instruction and re-teaching.

As stated previously, scanning and monitoring the students in this classroom is continual and serves to let the students know that the teacher is actively engaged in their learning at all times and available to them for assistance and guidance. One of teacher participant (T5) said that "I am always looking at what the groups are doing and I'm commenting so they know I am aware of what is going on. You have to know your students to know what they can and can't do. When they are ready for you, you need to be able to act."

Creating learning opportunities that attract student interests is also a purposeful act for this teacher and reflects the relationships he has built with students. Teachers engaged in 'active listening' throughout the day to capture student interests. Further, teacher participant (T4) said that "I think about the needs of students and also a lot about their personalities. Your kind of figure out the student and learn what they need. There are a lot of things I have invested to help students be successful. I listened to them talk about home and things they liked to do and use that information to motivate them and create lessons.

Research Question 2

How do teachers describe their process for building relationships with their students? In answering to this question one of the teacher participants (T7) had this to say as described the process for building relationships with students. The teacher respondent begins by building trust with students from the first day of school. This is accomplished through frequent contact and active listening to get to know his students. I will share own personal stories and pictures with students to draw them into life and make them feel a strong connection. One of the other teacher participants (T2) introduced to solicit their help to volunteer in the classroom, thereby drawing them into the teacher and student's classroom environment. This relationship building allows them to feel an integral part of the classroom. Students realize they have a role and responsibility in that partnership and it is to become learners and complete their school work. Further, the participant (T6) stated that "building

accountability helps to establish trust and responsibility”.

One of the teacher participants (T1) highlighted: “Traditionally, it used to be the case that classes start quite late and then the teacher overburdens students with make-up classes towards the end of the semester.” Similarly, a senior teacher (T8) stated: “By tradition, it has been the case that the students would not seriously do reading until a month or two weeks remained before the final exam.” One of the other teachers (T5) said, “Nowadays, the university is determined to [follow] the principle of first-day-first class”. Thus, students were not really learning so as to master the subject, but merely to pass the exam. The study participant indicates that this immediate contact reinforces the relationship between the student and teacher because they realize how invested student’s learning and how invested their learning. Another teacher participant (T4) offers this anecdotal support:

Further, the teacher participant (T4) sends resources-supporting materials to students to assist with homework and to reinforce the daily learning. Teacher participant (T4) points out that this adds to the relationship building process because students feel that the teacher knows their students well. All are invested in this community of learners the teacher has created. On the other hand, one of teacher participant (T2) describes his next steps in the process as establishing rules and consequences together that address expected behavior in the classroom. This behavior includes interaction between teacher and students as well as student and student. The respondent does not dictate the rules to students.

“I don’t go in and tell them these are the rules”. I tell them “my number one job is to keep you safe and help you learn”. We create expectations together and consequences together.

This collaborative process of creating group norms together allows the students to feel ownership of the classroom and feel cared for by the teacher to keep them safe. The study participant considers this another key component to building a strong relationship with his/her students that could enhance the learning environment purposefully creating.

A system for privileges is collaboratively created that students can earn for working hard. Privileges are based on student interests and

also serve as motivators to get school work completed. When asked how the privileges would be effective motivators to entice students to work harder, teacher participant (T8) replied:

“I just paid attention to them”. I noticed student kept gaining a certain privilege so I would prompt him saying “just do 2 sentences and you will get another nickel toward buying the privilege. Just do 3 sentences, etc.” This then increases the output for learning and using the privilege as a motivator to get to do it.

This participant reports that he/she intentionally studies student behaviors in order to anticipate potential problems either behaviorally or academically so he/she can be proactive in his/her response. He/she gives this example regarding a student who is behaviorally difficult but academically average:

I watch behaviors that would indicate he is approaching out, and then I give him a break. I give frequent breaks during the course of a lesson because I’m not going to ask him to do something when he is in that state.

Two student participants (S2&S4) stated that even some teachers download materials from the internet to use as handouts, although the contents have no relevance to the course. One of the two student participant (S2) commented that “some teachers appear in class just because they are obliged to do so since they are paid, maybe? These types of teachers start the course very late or even quit in between and then rush for the last few classes towards the end of the semester.” Furthermore, the other student participant (S4) continued, “Sometimes, they may finish the course content in two or three periods with a disorganized and insufficient lecture, I would say, a quick lecture picking a phrase from each subtitle.” This may be followed by a lengthy handout and an inappropriately demanding exam. In addition, other student participant (S3) noted the presence of teachers’ biases, particularly in marking. Besides, another student participant (S1) commented, “Some teachers did not like students. We are afraid of them since they are not concerned with students.” The other issue was lack of feedback. From the analysis results it is found that the most student participants agreed that, many teachers did not give students feedback on their assessments; instead, students only saw their scores. Students commented that they felt they could not complain about exams or discuss them with their teachers.

The teachers are able to anticipate and respond effectively to students because of the purposeful relationship she built with him that is based on observational data she gathers on each student. According to the study teacher participants, this allows the students to continue working productively after each break, and allows the students to continue working productively because a disruption in the classroom learning environment was averted.

3.2 Discussion

This study provides a description of experiences and procedures that guide the development and maintenance of relationships between a teacher and students. In answer to research question one, four primary categories emerged with supporting elements that were critical components of each category as described in the body of the chapter. The findings to support the answer to question two resulted in four fundamental procedures that the study participant follows to build relationships with students each year. The main purpose for this study was to explore the various aspects of teacher and student relationships as they occur in one particular classroom. The two research questions wanted to be answered in this study were: What specific components of teacher and student interactions are essential to the learning environment? How do teachers describe their process for building relationships with their students?

Most of the teacher participants in this study agreed that the expected outcome of effective teaching and learning is primarily to encourage students' independent learning, and thus ultimately to produce competent graduates. Moreover, the majority participants agreed that the teacher should act as a facilitator, giving guidelines and direction to students. This potentially determines the quality of teaching, particularly in the 21st century [33]. Similarly, most of the participants highlighted that the students should be active participants in the process of instruction, independently accomplishing the learning tasks with minimum support from their teacher. Equitability refers to a student's equal chance to be part of a lesson, activity, or response to a question. This participant uses 'sticks' in a can to randomly pull the names students to answer questions and participate in an activity. The other students can also determine whose turn to answer the next question, for example, "Sam, I'm going to ask

you to pick a friend to explain". According to the study participant: "students like when their peers notice them and their work; it provides positive reinforcement for them" and promotes relationship building.

Constructivist theorists [1] assert that an interpersonal framework is essential to a learner's school experience. The student participants of this study acknowledged the presence of some teachers in their respective colleges who taught courses in accordance with the schedule presented in the course outline, encouraged students' participation in class, prepared reasonable exams and assignments and considered the students' ability in determining the weight of the course content and assessment tasks. Also, they perceived the learning experience in life skills education courses as significantly helping them to gain meaningful learning and problem-solving skills. Consistent with the literature in this field, students made clear that they noticed when their teachers cared about their interests and needs [34,35]. This suggests that teachers should demonstrate that they care about students by placing the learners at the center of the educational process [19]. Besides, with this primary focus on caring, teachers can engage students actively in the learning process [36]. This ensures that student engagement is nurtured in a caring environment, which is essential for learning experiences to be fun, meaningful and enduring [13,37,38].

Support for the essential teaching-learning components of building trust with students, behavior management via consistent routines and procedures and creating consequences for behavior together [20]. Besides, teacher participants determined that emotional support and classroom organization were core domains of interaction that facilitate a learner's developmental progress as a result of their classroom experience. The findings in category one: classroom climate agrees with [20] who determined the essential components of their category emotional support included positive classroom climate and behavior management.

Feedback to students is considered as an important part of the teacher-student relationship dialogue and was found to be an essential component of contextual category three- teacher interaction behaviors. Similarly, Zee and Koomen [13] found that feedback to be an important

component of teacher interactive behaviors when they studied interactive teaching behaviors in their field-based study of effective teaching practices. As they describe it, feedback was associated with more teacher interaction with students that resulted in the ability to diagnose student misunderstandings and provide corrective explanations. This observational article also serves as evidence to support interest in teacher and students relationships as it applies to their role in constructing knowledge. As the study participant describes the process, "I look at student work and decide what to teach and how to teach it". Their purposeful analysis of students' progress allows providing guidance services to students that need to move their learning forward in a constructive way.

The inclusion of personal discourse as an essential component to category three- teacher interaction is important to this research study of teacher participants as they believe sharing their personal life with their students makes them feel like they are important to them in all aspects of life; and that this has a positive impact on their learning. There is a considerable amount of research to support the finding that teachers' interpersonal relationship with their students is a significant part of the classroom learning environment [39,1,40,31].

Lumpkin [36] asserts that the teacher should be constantly looking for ways to engage learners and motivate them so they want to learn. Most teacher respondents contend that the teacher should also be able to determine when the learner is having difficulty and be able to intercede to mitigate the problem. This case study research participant uses scanning and monitoring, motivating students, student interests, and active listening as methods of "constantly looking for ways to engage the learner and motivate them". The teacher creates learning opportunities that captivate students' interests and lets the students know he/she is actively engaged in the learning process. Furthermore, Stake [30] in support of active listening posits that "the way a teacher listens and talks to students helps become learners who think critically and deeply." This collaborative engagement throughout the learning environment allows a teacher to understand how a particular learner acquires knowledge and address the resulting needs of the learner in a more purposeful way (ibid).

Scheerens [5] contend that the need for the teacher to show a personal interest in students is

vital to their learning. Likewise, Slee and Skrzypiec [41] demonstrated that belief in showing interest in students as an individual has a positive impact on their learning. The study participants' interaction with their students have enabled their students to remain engaged in the instructional process for longer periods of time, and act on the purposeful guidance and feedback they give that moves their learning forward. A study of student work samples showed how the teachers' interactions during work sessions increased the students' ability to deepen their responses to questions resulting in higher learning.

In answer to research question two, the process used by teachers to build relationships with their students has four foundational steps. Teachers begin by building trust with their students, frequently engaging with them in conversations about their lives. Following Dunn [32] counsel that teachers are constantly looking for ways to motivate the learners, this study participant also engaged in actively listening to their students talking with each other to gain insight into potential sources of motivation for the students, and to gather information that is used to engage their learners through high interest materials and lessons. The third step is to collaboratively create a reward system that allows students to earn privileges for their hard work. This reward system is based on student interest and knowledge gained by the teacher as to what an effective motivator would be. Consequently, As Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder [42] determined that the reward system serves to keep students committed to the educational process.

In general, the study participants' responses reveal substantial reservations about the quality of teaching and learning in their respective programs. In fact, a decline in the quality of teaching and learning is a common problem for many higher-education institutions around the globe [43,44,45]. Consistent with current literature, the results of this study indicate that reform ideals may not be effective in bringing about lasting change in the provision of quality education in Universities [6,46,47].

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

Building and maintaining positive teacher-student relationships is essential for success in the

academic engagement of students. Through this case study research, it was found that the essence of a strong teacher and student relationship revolves around how it affects the ongoing teaching - learning process in a classroom. Each contextual category that was created as a result of this case study includes specific components of the teacher and student relationship that affect the classroom learning environment in a meaningful way as evidenced by student work samples and student responses to teacher interaction. The actions of this study participant and the resulting findings of this case study serve to support the contention that everyday interactions in the classroom do matter. The purposeful design of teachers' classroom environment served to enhance the learning and student engagement in their instruction. Students were able to anticipate their next steps in the learning process because they deliberately designed the physical space of their classroom allowing for a continual flow in the instructional processes.

The contextual categories revealed in this case study and the essential components embedded within the contextual categories serve as evidence for effective teachers' practices for building relationships with students that could have a positive effect on the learning environment. The study deliberately looked for ways to motivate their students by actively listening to them and incorporating their interests into their instructions to promote their continued engagement in the lesson; thereby enhancing cognitive growth. However, practical application of these strategies can be an elusive concept without knowing the specific steps to take to implement these strategies. The findings of this case study provided several strategies for practical ways to successfully build a relationship with students that could have an impact on their learning environment.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the results of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. The way forward for better quality teaching and learning in Ethiopian University requires multiple focus and actions that together constitute a paradigm shift from accountability to transformation.
2. This study recommends quality initiatives for Ethiopian universities through applying new and improvement-led strategies. Staff

development on how to use different pedagogical strategy, student empowerment in the required skills for quality learning and institutional supports (making the needed resources available and providing on-site professional supports) are critical.

3. Teachers need to understand the interest, and the students' behaviour to motivate and attract them to engage in actively in learning.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

During data collection process, the researcher considered and applied ethical values by clarifying the purpose of the research. Teacher and student participants were informed that they have the full right to agree or disagree to participate in the study. This was done by not disclosing the names of the respondents. Informed consent was explained to respondents before the study commences. Besides, the respondents were informed that they had the right to refuse to respond to the study and further that they could withdraw from the study whenever they felt any discomfort. Privacy and confidentiality of participants were upheld. Further, symbols were assigned to respondents during the process of data analysis. This was in accordance with what Yin [28] contends that research should all adhere to ethical imperatives. Finally after they got a clear understanding about the purpose of the study, written consent was taken for their willingness to participate in the study.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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