Teachers’ Perceptions on Effects of Teacher-Pupil Relationships on Pupils’ Behavior in Public Primary Schools in Langata Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: The study investigated effect of teacher-pupil relationships on pupils’ behavior in public primary schools in Langata sub-county. Three teacher-pupil relationships: closeness, conflict and dependence, were interrogated. A 28-items questionnaire was administered to 73 teachers. Significant differences in mean scores of teachers’ perceptions were found for “closeness” and “conflict” relationships, and no significant difference was found for “dependence” relationships. Moderate and negative closeness relationships were observed when teachers rated “good” pupils and “bad” pupils respectively; negative and moderate conflict relationship for “good” and “bad” pupils respectively; and moderate dependence for both “good” and “bad” pupils respectively. The study established that teachers’ perceptions differ on aspects of closeness and conflict relationships but converge on aspect of dependence relationships. As such, there is need to encourage teachers to foster positive teacher-pupil relationships, reduce their conflicting relationships with pupils and mold the pupils to acquire independence in future. Future studies should explore variables such as teachers’ gender, age, and teaching experience to capture the richness of teacher-student relationships within the classroom environment. Finally, the study calls for a more comprehensive study encompassing other variables be conducted in order to fully interrogate the causal factors pupils’ behavioral development.

Keywords: closeness, conflict, dependency, pupils’ behavior, teachers’ perceptions, teacher-pupil relationship

I. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Problem

A multiplicity of social problems in the society can be traced to the prevalent incidences of violence, truancy, frequent strikes and other antisocial behaviors in schools. However, schools are expected by and large to incubate pupils’ ultimate development by inculcating societal values [1]. Some of the predisposing factors for such antisocial behaviors in schools include lack of religious and pastoral influences, lack of moral and value formation, blame and disrespect towards teachers and, most importantly, teachers’ lack of time for students as some of the causes of violence and unrest in schools [2].

These arguments seem to attribute the students’ negative behaviour to the role played by the school, churches, home and the wider society. Given the fact that the school is the epicenter of change, liberation and conservation of what is considered to be the norms of the society, there is a tendency to expect the school to singly mold pupils into acceptable members of the society both behaviorally and intellectually while relegating the contributory roles of the home, church and society. As posited, the school is expected to be the place where growth and development of an individual occurs [3]. Thus as extensions of the home, schools are expected to nurture an all-round development of the child, in addition to performing their core functions.

However, school factors especially educational leadership, high expectations for student achievement, frequent evaluation of student progress, a safe and orderly climate and an emphasis on teaching basic skills are associated with student achievement [4]. Ordinarily, learners are left in the hands of the teacher who facilitates the learning process. As noted, what separates effective from ineffective leaders is how much they really care about the people they lead [5]. Therefore, teachers are expected to transcend the task of transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes and build good relationships with learners.

Teacher-student relationships are important for a number of reasons. Firstly, teacher-student relationships greatly influence students’ ability to adjust to school, to do well at school, and to relate to peers [6, 7, 8]. Secondly, teacher-student relationships have an impact on classroom management and affect learning process [9]. Furthermore, a stable teacher-student relationship impacts positively on a student’s developing sense of self and promotes resiliency in them [10]. Other studies have revealed that teacher-student relationships play an important role in students’ academic achievement, school engagement, self-esteem, and general socio-emotional well-being [11, 12, 13]. Other authors contend that effective teachers are those who, in addition to
being skilled at teaching, are attuned to the human dimension of classroom life and can foster positive relationships with their students [14, 15]. Teachers’ perceptions and beliefs about learners have been found to affect learners’ behaviours [16, 17]. Moreover, teacher attributions have significant implications for teachers’ perceptions of their own responsibility for students’ performance as well as their subsequent behaviour towards students [18, 19]. As relates to pupils’ behaviour, teacher-pupil relationship has been identified to have a significant influence on pupils’ overall school and behavioral adjustment [20], academic achievement [21], positive affect and attitude [22] as well as motivation [23]. Moreover, positive teacher-pupil relationships are linked to behavioural competence and better school adjustment [24] while negative teacher-pupil relationships are related to academic and behavioral problems in pupils [25].

Therefore, positive teacher-pupil relationships are necessary for effective teaching and learning [26, 27] and contribute to pupils’ school adjustment, including socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning [25, 28, 29]. It is argued that positive teacher-pupil relationships contribute to an improved sense of job satisfaction among teachers [30]. Other authors [14, 15] posit positive teacher-student relationships are characterized by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation. Further, evidence from qualitative studies suggests that positive teacher-pupil relationships with teachers reduce school dropout [31, 32, 33]. Other researchers have found that conflict and dependency on teacher-student relationships are related to unfavourable outcomes such as negative school attitude and avoidance to attend school [34] and hostile aggression [35]. On the contrary, students who enjoy a close and supportive relationship with a teacher work harder in the classroom, persevere in the case of difficulties, accept teacher direction and criticism, cope better with stress, and attend more to the teacher [36, 37].

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Previous studies on teacher-pupil relationships have focused heavily on instructional aspects of the relationship, and largely ignored the social and emotional aspects of teacher-pupil relationship [7, 28]. At present, relatively little is known about the extent to which teachers agree on their perceptions on the quality of their relationships with pupils, and about how these relationships are associated with student’s school behaviour. This study helps to address this gap by exploring teachers’ perceptions of teacher-pupil relationships in relation to the pupil behaviour. The pupil behaviour (categorized as “good” pupil or “bad” pupil) was used as the dependent variable while the teacher-pupil relationships (close, conflicting and dependent) constituted the independent variables of the study.

1.3 Research Questions

The specific questions that were addressed in the study were:
(i) What is the perceived effect of teacher-pupil relationship on pupil behavior when the relationship is perceived as close?
(ii) What is the perceived effect of teacher-pupil relationship on pupil behavior when the relationship is perceived as conflicting?
(iii) What is the perceived effect of teacher-pupil relationship on pupil behavior when the relationship is perceived as dependent?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in order to measure the effect of teachers’ perceptions on teacher-pupil relationships on pupils’ behaviour:

H₁: There is a significant difference in the mean scores of teachers’ perceptions of teacher-pupil closeness relationship for “good” and “bad” pupils.

H₂: There is a significant difference in the mean scores of teachers’ perceptions on teacher-pupil conflict relationship for “good” and “bad” pupils.

H₃: There is a significant difference in the mean scores of teachers’ perceptions on teacher-pupil dependence relationship for “good” and “bad” pupils.

II. Methodology

The study adopted an ex-post- facto design that sought to establish the extent to which teacher-pupil relationships influenced pupils’ behaviour in primary schools. The design was used because the independent variable (teacher-student relationships) had already occurred and could not therefore be manipulated. The population for the study comprised all public primary school teachers in Langata Sub-county, Nairobi County. There were 292 teachers (32 males and 260 females) in these schools. The study site comprised 13 public primary schools (four slum schools and 9 non-slum schools) and proportional stratified random sampling was used to select two slum schools and four non-slum schools. The
teachers in the sampled schools were further stratified on the basis of gender and simple random sampling was used to select the participants from each of the gender strata. A total of 73 teachers were selected for inclusion in the study. Some researchers [38] recommend a minimum of 30 participants for an ex-post facto research.

A Likert questionnaire designed for the study was an adapted, pilot tested and standardized teacher-student relationship behaviour scale of Pianta [39]. The questionnaire had three sections: Section A contained demographic questions such as teacher’s gender, age, and teaching experience and responsibility at school; section B had the teacher-student relationship (with two subscales for teachers’ perceptions about “good” and “bad” learners) and the last section sought the teachers’ suggestions on how to improve students’ behaviour through teacher-student relationships. Items 1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 18, 19, 23, 27, 28 of the scale measured teacher-student closeness, items 2, 3, 7, 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26 measured teacher-student conflict and items 8, 10, 12, 14, 20 measured teacher-student-teacher dependency. Each of the subscales had 28 items which were ranked on a 5-point Likert scale that was rated as follows: Definitely does not (1); Not really (2); Neutral (3); Applies (4) and Definitely applies (5). The instrument was piloted on 12 teachers and using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, the internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire was found to be 0.81 at 0.05 level of significance. This indicated a good internal consistency of the Likert scale hence the scale was adapted for the study. An alpha equal to or greater than 0.8 is considered as having good internal consistency [40].

The data analysis process consisted of two methodologies, Likert-type and open-ended item analysis. The Likert scale was clustered into three namely; closeness, conflict and dependence. A high score in the teacher-student relationship (4 or 5) showed a positive/secure and/or close relationship between the teacher and the student, a low score (1 or 2) showed more of conflict and/or dependence relationship while a middle score (3) showed a moderate relationship. Means were obtained for each of the clusters and a t-test computed for the teacher-student relationship scale scores at alpha level of statistical significance = 0.05. The open-ended item, which was constructed to capture the teachers’ suggestions on how teacher-student relationships can improve students’ behaviour, were first categorized and then coded in terms of the teachers’ responding rates. These were then analyzed in form of percentages.

III. Results

Out of the 73 questionnaires that were administered to the teachers, only 55 were returned. Hence the questionnaire return rate was 75.3 percent. About 85.5 percent of the teachers were females while 14.5 percent were males. Majority of the teachers (80%) were aged over 35 (M = 40; SD = 12.7). In terms of teaching experience, 52.7 percent of the teachers had a relatively long teaching experience (at least 20 years) compared to 23.6 percent who had a less than 10 years teaching experience (M = 16; SD = 7.4).

The results of teachers’ perceptions on pupils’ behaviour and hypotheses testing are as shown in Tables 1a, 1b and 2 respectively.

Table 1a: Teachers’ perceptions on their interactions with “good” pupils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCALE A (Good Pupil)</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If upset, this child will seek comfort from me</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. This child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. This child values his/her relationship with me</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When I praise this child, he/she beams with pride</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. This child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. This child tries to please me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. It is easy to be in tune with what this student is feeling</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I’ve noticed this child copying my behavior or ways of doing things</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. This child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. My relationships with this child make me feel effective and confident</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(For these 11 items, M = 3.5; SD = 1.3)

Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Despite my best efforts, I’m uncomfortable with how this child and I have gotten along</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Dealing with this child drains my energy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. This child feels that I treat him/her unfairly</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. This child whines or cries when he/she wants something from me</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. This child sees me as a source of punishment and criticism</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. This child easily becomes angry at me</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. This child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. When this child is misbehaving, he/she responds well to my look or tone of voice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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24. When this child arrives in a bad mood, I know we’re in for a long and difficult day. 3 21 7 10 7 2.9 1.2
25. This child’s feelings toward me can be unpredictable or can change suddenly. 8 16 3 15 7 2.9 1.4
26. This child is sneaky or manipulative with me. 11 22 11 3 2 1.8 1.6

Dependence
8. This child appears hurt or embarrassed when I correct him/her 13 17 12 3 4 2.3 1.2
10. This child reacts strongly to separation from me 8 9 5 12 16 3.4 1.5
12. This child is overly dependent on me 12 16 9 4 8 2.6 1.4
14. This child asks for my help when he/she does not really need help 10 10 6 11 3.0 1.5
20. This child expresses hurt or jealousy when I spend time with other children 3 13 13 11 8 3.2 1.2

(For these 12 items, M = 2.2; SD = 1.1)

Table 1b: Teachers’ perceptions on their interactions with “good” pupils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child</td>
<td>10 13 4 10 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If upset, this child will seek comfort from me</td>
<td>14 9 7 9 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. This child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me.</td>
<td>9 22 6 9 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. This child values his/her relationship with me</td>
<td>15 11 7 3 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When I praise this child, he/she beams with pride</td>
<td>9 6 6 10 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. This child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself</td>
<td>26 10 4 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. This child tries to please me</td>
<td>4 13 9 14 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. It is easy to be in tune with what this student is feeling</td>
<td>4 17 9 9 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I’ve noticed this child copying my behavior or ways of doing things</td>
<td>3 19 13 8 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. This child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me.</td>
<td>16 15 5 9 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. My relationships with this child make me feel effective and confident</td>
<td>2 12 4 15 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(For these 11 items, M =2.9; S.D =1.4)

Table 2: Results of Hypotheses Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil type</th>
<th>“Good” Pupil</th>
<th>“Bad” Pupil</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Pupil Relationship</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparing teacher-student closeness and pupil behaviour, the null hypothesis was rejected and we concluded that there exists a significant difference in teachers’ perceptions about the effect of teacher-pupil relationships on the behaviour of pupils for “good” and “bad” pupils. Moderate teacher-pupil relationships were
observed for teachers when they rated “good” pupils (M = 3.3; SD = 1.3) and negative teacher-pupil relationships when they rated “bad” pupils (M = 2.9; SD = 1.4).

As concerns teacher-pupil conflict relationship, the null hypothesis was rejected and we thus concluded that teachers’ perceptions on teacher-pupil conflict relationships differ for “good” and “bad” pupils. The study found a negative teacher-pupil conflict relationship for “good” pupils (M = 2.2; SD = 1.1) and moderate teacher-pupil conflict relationship for “bad” pupils (M = 3.4; SD = 1.3).

When teacher-pupil was measured on the dependence dimension, we failed to reject the null hypothesis hence we concluded that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of teachers’ perceptions on teacher-pupil dependence relationship for “good” and “bad” pupils. The results showed an almost equal dependence on the teacher by both “good” and “bad” pupils (M = 2.9; SD = 1.4 and M = 3.1; SD = 1.3 for “good” and “bad” pupils respectively). Indeed, the teachers seemed to concur on the statement that “the child reacts strongly to separation from me” (M = 3.4; SD = 1.5, M = 3.2; SD = 1.4).

Finally, teachers were asked to recommend strategies for enhancing positive pupil behavior through teacher-pupil relationships. Among the major suggestions raised were: enhancing guidance and counseling programs for all pupils especially those with problems (77.3 %), encouraging pupils to participate in co-curricular activities (66.7 %), giving incentives and rewards for good pupil behaviour (63.7%). Other suggestions included using child centered learning (60%), being more friendly/showing love and making pupils feel secure (38.2%), occasionally inviting resource persons to talk to the pupils (37.5 %) and talking to pupils’ parents and/or guardians when necessary (37.5 %).

IV. Discussion

The finding on the teachers’ perceptions on effect of close teacher-pupil relationship on pupils’ behavior parallels those of authors [36, 37] who reported that pupils who enjoy a close and supportive relationship with a teacher attend more to the teacher, an indication of close relationship with the teacher. Similarly, the finding further confirms author [15] position that positive teacher-student relationships are characterized by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation.

However, the teachers’ perceptions on conflicting teacher-pupil relationship were found negative for “good” pupils and moderate for “bad” pupils. This finding suggests that teachers endeavour to avoid conflicting situations with their relatively “good” pupils more than with “bad” pupils. This is not entirely surprising, as past studies have found that teachers would prefer to avoid the unfavorable outcomes conflict has on students such as negative school attitude, avoidance to attend school and hostile aggression [21, 35].

On the contrary, the finding on mean scores of teachers’ perceptions on dependent teacher-pupil relationship showed an almost equal dependence on the teacher by both “good” and “bad” pupils. This resonates with past studies that found dependency on teacher-pupil relationships is related to unfavorable outcomes such as hostile aggression [35]. More importantly, the findings are indicative of the need for teachers to indiscriminately show equal treatment to both types of pupils since they are overly dependent on the teachers for their development.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study established that teachers’ perceptions on their relationships with pupils differ on closeness and conflict relationships but converge on dependence relationships. As such, there is need to encourage teachers to foster positive teacher-pupil relationships as this ultimately influences the future behavior of the pupils. The study recommends a more comprehensive study encompassing other variables in order to fully appreciate the causal factors pupils’ behavioral development.

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References


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