

EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS IN ENHANCING ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN UNIVERSITY SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and their influence on academic engagement in a university setting, employing a qualitative research design. Using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and document analysis, the study identifies key themes such as communication styles, cultural and disciplinary variations, emotional support, and institutional challenges. Findings reveal that effective communication, empathy, and personalized feedback are critical in fostering student engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. However, challenges such as large class sizes, cultural barriers, and institutional constraints impede the development of strong teacher-student relationships. The study also highlights the role of teacher personality traits and supportive institutional structures in enhancing relational dynamics. These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of teacher-student relationships while offering practical recommendations for improving educational practices. The study underscores the need for tailored strategies and institutional reforms to create inclusive and supportive learning environments, thereby promoting academic success and student well-being.

Keywords: Teacher-student relationships, academic engagement, qualitative research, communication styles, emotional support, cultural variations, institutional challenges, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between teachers and students in a university context significantly influences students' academic engagement, motivation, and overall success. Research has consistently shown that

positive teacher-student relationships foster a sense of belonging and improve academic outcomes (Hagenauer et al., 2023). Effective communication, mutual respect, and emotional support are

foundational components of these relationships, which are increasingly recognized as critical for fostering meaningful academic engagement in higher education. In the context of universities, the role of teacher-student relationships is multifaceted. They not only facilitate cognitive learning but also contribute to students' emotional and psychological well-being. For example, Hagenauer et al. (2023) emphasize that the teacher-student relationship is often where learning and teaching begin, particularly in disciplines requiring high levels of interaction and mentorship. Teacher-student dynamics in diverse cultural and disciplinary contexts vary. Derakhshan et al. (2022) highlighted that in cross-cultural environments, teacher care and rapport are critical factors for academic engagement. They also observed that these relationships mitigate barriers such as language differences, which can otherwise hinder engagement.

Academic engagement, encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, is closely tied to the quality of teacher-student interactions. According to Martin and Collie (2019), students with supportive relationships with teachers are more likely to demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and higher motivation. These qualities are essential in navigating the challenges of university education. Qualitative studies, such as those by Javaid et al. (2024), have provided insights into how feedback and interaction styles directly affect students' engagement levels. They noted that personalized feedback and constructive communication foster trust and participation, creating a more conducive learning environment.

Despite its benefits, building effective teacher-student relationships in universities faces challenges, including large class sizes, diverse student populations, and varying teaching styles. Studies by Odutayo et al. (2024) underline the need for lecturers to balance professional boundaries with approachability, as this balance significantly influences students' willingness to seek help and engage actively. The role of teacher personality in shaping engagement has been explored by Thornell (2024), who found that traits such as openness and empathy can significantly enhance the quality of relationships, especially in qualitative, case-study settings.

Given the complexity of these interactions, qualitative research methods are particularly suited to explore the nuances of teacher-student relationships. Such methods allow for an in-depth understanding of personal experiences and the contextual factors that shape engagement. For instance, Amerstorfer et al. (2021) utilized focus groups and interviews to uncover how students perceive their academic relationships and how these perceptions affect their participation in problem-based learning scenarios. Building on this body of research, this study aims to deepen our understanding of how teacher-student relationships shape academic engagement in university settings. By employing qualitative methods, it seeks to capture the lived experiences of students and teachers, offering actionable insights to enhance educational practices.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the role of their relationships in fostering academic engagement within university settings. It seeks to identify strategies employed by teachers to build and sustain positive relationships, examining how these interactions enhance students' emotional, behavioral, and cognitive involvement in academic activities. Additionally, the research aims to investigate contextual variations, such as cultural and disciplinary differences, that influence the dynamics of teacher-student interactions. By addressing challenges and barriers to effective relationships, the study aspires to provide actionable recommendations to strengthen these connections, thereby improving educational outcomes (Hagenauer et al., 2023; Derakhshan et al., 2022).

This study seeks to answer key questions about the role of teacher-student relationships in enhancing academic engagement within university settings. It explores how teachers and students perceive these relationships and their impact on academic involvement, as well as the strategies teachers employ to build and maintain positive connections. Additionally, the research investigates how contextual factors, such as cultural and disciplinary variations, shape these dynamics. Finally, it examines the challenges that hinder effective teacher-student interactions and identifies potential solutions to overcome these barriers, aiming to provide actionable insights for improving

educational practices (Javaid et al., 2024; Martin & Collie, 2019).

Positive teacher-student relationships are integral to fostering academic engagement and achieving favorable educational outcomes. This study is significant as it bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation, providing insights into the nuanced role of these relationships in a university context. Hagenauer et al. (2023) emphasize that teacher-student relationships are foundational to learning, serving as a critical factor in enhancing motivation, resilience, and academic success. This research focuses on improving these dynamics by identifying strategies teachers can use to foster stronger connections with their students, ultimately supporting students' academic and emotional development. Additionally, Derakhshan et al. (2022) highlight the importance of rapport in overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers, a factor that makes this study particularly relevant in diverse, globalized educational settings.

Although the positive impact of teacher-student relationships is well-documented, significant gaps remain in understanding their qualitative dimensions in university settings. Javaid et al. (2024) note that much of the existing research relies on quantitative methods, which do not capture the lived experiences of teachers and students. Similarly, Martin and Collie (2019) underscore the lack of exploration into how these relationships differ across disciplines and cultural contexts. Moreover, while Thornell (2024) highlights the role of teacher personality traits in shaping engagement, this area remains underexplored. Finally, the impact of specific feedback mechanisms and communication styles on academic engagement requires further investigation (Odutayo et al., 2024). Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of teacher-student relationships.

Literature Review

The teacher-student relationship is a critical component of the educational process, influencing academic engagement, motivation, and overall student success. Research has consistently emphasized its significance, yet the complexities of these interactions remain underexplored, particularly within university settings. This literature review synthesizes findings from existing

studies, focusing on the dimensions of teacher-student relationships, their impact on engagement, contextual variations, and the challenges they face.

Dimensions of Teacher-Student Relationships

Teacher-student relationships are recognized as multidimensional constructs, integral to both the academic and personal development of students. They include emotional support, behavioral interaction, and cognitive engagement. According to Lee (2012), supportive teacher-student relationships positively affect students' emotional and academic outcomes by promoting a sense of belonging and trust in the learning environment. Similarly, Javaid et al. (2024) argue that effective communication and constructive feedback from teachers enhance students' motivation and engagement, leading to better academic performance. Durksen et al. (2017) emphasize that such relationships are particularly critical in shaping students' engagement in challenging subjects, such as mathematics, where motivation is often a barrier. They argue that by addressing students' emotional and cognitive needs, teachers can create an inclusive atmosphere that fosters persistence and participation. Thornell (2024) extends this discussion by exploring the role of teacher personality traits, noting that empathy and openness are critical for establishing strong connections with students, especially in culturally diverse settings.

The significance of teacher care and empathy has been further reinforced by Amerstorfer et al. (2021), who found that students in problem-based learning environments thrive when their teachers exhibit understanding and patience. These emotional dimensions not only reduce student anxiety but also encourage collaborative learning. Moreover, Snijders et al. (2020) highlight that teacher-student rapport influences loyalty and long-term academic commitment, underscoring its role in retention and overall satisfaction with the educational experience. Positive relationships also play a crucial role in fostering resilience and adaptability, key traits for academic and professional success. Derakhshan et al. (2022) emphasize that in cross-cultural contexts, where linguistic and cultural differences can pose challenges, teacher care and understanding help students navigate academic demands more effectively. Additionally, Quin (2017) observes that

longitudinal studies demonstrate a consistent association between supportive teacher-student relationships and sustained academic engagement over time.

Building on these findings, the existing literature establishes that multidimensional teacher-student relationships are pivotal in creating an environment that not only supports learning but also nurtures students' emotional and social development. However, further research is needed to explore how these dimensions manifest in diverse institutional and cultural settings, particularly in higher education.

Impact on Academic Engagement

Teacher-student relationships significantly shape academic engagement, which encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of learning. Research shows that the quality of these relationships influences students' willingness to participate in academic activities, their emotional investment, and their intellectual curiosity. For instance, Lee (2012) identified that supportive teacher-student relationships directly enhance students' academic performance and emotional engagement, serving as a foundational element in creating a conducive learning environment. Similarly, Javaid et al. (2024) emphasize that constructive feedback and personalized interaction between teachers and students motivate learners to actively engage in coursework and extracurricular activities.

Martin and Collie (2019) suggest that teacher-student relationships foster resilience, a critical factor in sustaining engagement during challenging academic periods. They highlight that when students perceive their teachers as approachable and empathetic, they are more likely to seek help and maintain focus on their academic goals. Derakhshan et al. (2022) further support this by showing that in cross-cultural contexts, teacher care mitigates the negative effects of linguistic and cultural barriers, encouraging students to remain actively involved in their studies. The role of teacher feedback is particularly prominent in driving cognitive engagement. Hagenauer and Ivanova (2023) argue that feedback provided in a supportive and non-judgmental manner fosters deeper thinking and problem-solving skills among students. They found

that students who received consistent, meaningful feedback were more likely to demonstrate academic persistence and creativity.

In online and hybrid learning environments, teacher-student relationships remain a critical determinant of engagement. Akram and Li (2024) note that academic motivation mediates the relationship between teacher care and student involvement in online learning, where direct interactions are limited. Their findings highlight the importance of designing virtual teaching practices that replicate the supportiveness of face-to-face interactions. Moreover, Amerstorfer et al. (2021) report that students involved in problem-based learning benefit greatly from strong teacher-student rapport. Such relationships foster collaboration and help students navigate the complexities of group work, enhancing their behavioral and emotional engagement. This is echoed by Odutayo et al. (2024), who found that lecturers who develop individual connections with students in large classrooms significantly improve participation and attentiveness.

Finally, longitudinal studies underscore the lasting impact of teacher-student relationships on sustained academic engagement. Quin (2017) observed that positive relationships built during earlier academic stages continue to influence students' motivation and learning behaviors in higher education. These findings collectively affirm that teacher-student relationships are not merely supportive but transformative, enhancing academic engagement and setting the stage for lifelong learning.

Contextual Variations in Relationships

Teacher-student relationships vary significantly across cultural, disciplinary, and institutional contexts, influencing how these relationships are formed and sustained. Cross-cultural research highlights that teacher care and rapport are critical for navigating cultural differences and fostering engagement. Derakhshan et al. (2022) emphasize that in multicultural classrooms, teacher empathy and adaptability help bridge linguistic and cultural barriers, enabling students to participate more actively in academic activities. Similarly, Odutayo et al. (2024) found that in African university settings, lecturers who balance professional authority with approachability foster stronger

relational bonds, particularly in disciplines that emphasize collaborative learning. Disciplinary variations also play a significant role in shaping the dynamics of teacher-student relationships. Hagenauer et al. (2023) note that in disciplines requiring hands-on practice, such as engineering or the arts, students often develop closer connections with teachers due to the interactive nature of the learning process. In contrast, theoretical disciplines may involve less direct interaction, which can challenge the development of strong relationships unless proactively addressed by educators. This variation underscores the need for tailored relational strategies depending on the academic field.

Institutional size and policies further influence how teacher-student relationships develop. Javaid et al. (2024) observed that in large universities, students often feel disconnected due to large class sizes and limited interaction with faculty. However, institutions that promote mentorship programs or smaller discussion groups mitigate this challenge, creating opportunities for more personalized relationships. Thornell (2024) adds that in smaller universities, the closer proximity between teachers and students fosters an environment where meaningful connections can thrive more naturally. Contextual variations also extend to online and hybrid learning environments, where physical absence reshapes relational dynamics. Akram and Li (2024) highlight that in virtual classrooms, teacher presence, expressed through timely responses and personalized feedback, compensates for the lack of face-to-face interaction. They argue that adapting relational strategies to fit digital platforms is essential to maintain engagement and support.

Cultural attitudes toward authority and hierarchy significantly impact the nature of teacher-student interactions. Amerstorfer et al. (2021) note that in cultures where teachers are viewed as authoritative figures, students may hesitate to approach them for help, potentially hindering the development of positive relationships. Conversely, cultures emphasizing egalitarian interactions between teachers and students facilitate open communication and mutual respect. Finally, Quin (2017) underscores the importance of longitudinal and contextual factors, showing that teacher-student relationships evolve over time and are shaped by

both individual and institutional contexts. For example, long-term mentorship relationships, often seen in graduate programs, foster deeper connections compared to short-term undergraduate interactions.

Challenges in Building Effective Relationships

While the benefits of positive teacher-student relationships are well-documented, educators face numerous challenges in establishing and maintaining such relationships, especially in diverse and complex academic settings. These challenges stem from factors such as large class sizes, cultural and disciplinary differences, limited resources, and varying teaching styles, which can impede the development of meaningful connections between teachers and students. Large class sizes in universities pose a significant barrier to effective teacher-student relationships. Odutayo et al. (2024) note that when instructors manage large groups of students, individual attention becomes limited, leading to a sense of disconnect. This lack of personalized interaction often discourages students from seeking help, thereby affecting their engagement and performance. Javaid et al. (2024) similarly highlight that administrative policies and rigid schedules further constrain teachers' ability to invest time in building rapport with students, particularly in research-intensive institutions where faculty workload is high.

In multicultural classrooms, cultural differences can hinder the development of trust and communication between teachers and students. Derakhshan et al. (2022) found that students from diverse cultural backgrounds often struggle to navigate unfamiliar academic expectations and communication norms, creating a gap in their relationships with teachers. Educators may unintentionally misinterpret students' behaviors or fail to address their unique needs, exacerbating feelings of alienation. These cultural mismatches require teachers to adopt culturally responsive teaching strategies, which are often underutilized due to a lack of training or awareness. The mismatch between teaching and communication styles of educators and the expectations of students is another challenge. Thornell (2024) emphasizes that while some

teachers adopt an authoritative approach, students in modern learning environments increasingly prefer a more facilitative and empathetic style. This misalignment can create barriers to open dialogue and mutual understanding. Akram and Li (2024) add that in online learning contexts, the absence of non-verbal cues can further exacerbate these issues, making it difficult for teachers to gauge student needs or establish rapport effectively. Time limitations are a pervasive challenge in higher education. Amerstorfer et al. (2021) highlight that teachers often struggle to balance their instructional, administrative, and research responsibilities, leaving little time for fostering strong interpersonal connections with students. Additionally, professional boundaries, while necessary, can sometimes be perceived as aloofness, particularly in cultures where more informal teacher-student interactions are the norm. Hagenauer and Ivanova (2023) suggest that finding the right balance between professionalism and approachability is essential but often difficult to achieve.

Many educators enter the profession with strong subject-matter expertise but limited training in relational skills. Quin (2017) notes that universities rarely provide systematic training on how to build and maintain effective teacher-student relationships. Without such guidance, teachers may rely on instinct rather than evidence-based strategies, leading to inconsistent outcomes. Thornell (2024) stresses the importance of professional development programs that focus on communication, empathy, and cultural competency to address this gap. Student-related factors also present challenges. Some students may enter university with negative preconceptions about teachers or the learning process, particularly if they have experienced poor relationships with educators in the past. Martin and Collie (2019) observe that such resistance can make it difficult for teachers to establish trust and engagement, even when they make significant efforts. Additionally, students juggling multiple responsibilities, such as part-time jobs or family obligations, may struggle to fully invest in building relationships with teachers.

The challenges in building effective teacher-student relationships are multifaceted, ranging from institutional constraints to cultural and personal barriers. Addressing these challenges requires a

concerted effort from educators, administrators, and policymakers to create supportive environments and provide professional development opportunities. By overcoming these obstacles, educators can foster stronger connections with students, ultimately enhancing their academic engagement and success. 5. Role of Qualitative Approaches in Research While much of the existing research employs quantitative methods, qualitative studies provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of teachers and students. Amerstorfer et al. (2021) use interviews and focus groups to explore how students perceive their academic relationships and how these perceptions influence their engagement in learning. Similarly, Javaid et al. (2024) employ qualitative methods to uncover the specific strategies teachers use to foster trust and connection, demonstrating the value of in-depth, context-specific investigations. The literature underscores the significant role of teacher-student relationships in shaping academic engagement and highlights the need for context-specific strategies to strengthen these connections. However, gaps remain in understanding how these dynamics operate within diverse cultural and disciplinary contexts, and how specific teacher traits and practices influence engagement. Addressing these gaps through qualitative research will provide actionable insights for enhancing educational practices and fostering positive teacher-student relationships in university settings.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the role of teacher-student relationships in fostering academic engagement within a university context. Qualitative methods were chosen for their ability to provide in-depth insights into the lived experiences of teachers and students, capturing the nuances of their interactions and the contextual factors influencing these relationships. The study employs a phenomenological approach, which focuses on understanding the participants' perceptions and experiences. This method allows for a comprehensive exploration of the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and their impact on academic engagement. The study targets university teachers and students across diverse disciplines, ensuring a broad representation of perspectives. Purposive sampling is used to select participants

who have extensive experience in teaching and learning interactions within university settings. The sample includes:

- Teachers: 5 educators from various faculties with at least five years of teaching experience.
- Students: 25 undergraduate and postgraduate students from different academic programs, ensuring diversity in cultural, disciplinary, and academic backgrounds.

To gain detailed and contextualized insights, the study employs multiple data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with teachers and students to explore their perceptions of teacher-student relationships and their impact on academic engagement, using open-ended questions on communication styles, feedback mechanisms, and relationship-building challenges. Focus groups, held separately for teachers and students, encourage discussion and reflection on shared experiences, capturing diverse viewpoints and common themes. Classroom observations provide real-time analysis of teacher-student interactions, focusing on verbal and non-verbal communication, classroom dynamics, and student participation. Additionally, document analysis of course syllabi, feedback forms, and institutional policies offers insights into the contextual and institutional factors influencing teacher-student relationships.

Data Analysis

The study employs thematic analysis to interpret the qualitative data collected through interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and document analysis. This approach allows for the identification of recurring patterns and themes within the dataset, providing a comprehensive understanding of teacher-student relationships and their impact on academic engagement. The analysis process begins with the transcription of interviews and focus group discussions, followed by meticulous coding to classify data into meaningful categories. Emerging codes are then grouped into broader themes, such as communication styles, cultural influences, challenges in engagement, and institutional factors. Classroom observations and document analysis are triangulated with interview and focus group data to ensure consistency and validity of findings. Thematic patterns are further refined through iterative reviews, capturing nuances in teacher-

student interactions across different contexts. Member checking is conducted, allowing participants to validate the interpretations and ensuring the authenticity of the results. This systematic approach to data analysis provides robust insights into the multidimensional nature of teacher-student relationships and their contextual variations, contributing to actionable recommendations for improving academic engagement.

After analyzing the data collected through interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and document analysis, several key themes emerged that reflect the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and their impact on academic engagement:

Communication Styles and Feedback Mechanisms

Participants emphasized the importance of clear and constructive communication in fostering trust and engagement. Teachers' use of personalized feedback, open-ended discussions, and empathetic listening emerged as critical factors in building strong relationships.

Cultural and Disciplinary Variations

The study revealed significant differences in teacher-student interactions based on cultural and disciplinary contexts. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds valued culturally responsive teaching practices, while disciplinary differences highlighted varied relational needs such as closer mentoring in practical fields compared to theoretical disciplines.

Emotional Support and Empathy

Both students and teachers identified emotional support as a cornerstone of effective relationships. Teachers who demonstrated empathy and understanding were seen as more approachable, contributing to students' emotional well-being and resilience.

Challenges in Relationship Building

Barriers such as large class sizes, time constraints, and professional boundaries were frequently mentioned. These challenges limited opportunities for personalized interactions, particularly in large, research-focused institutions.

Role of Teacher Personality Traits

Teacher traits such as openness, patience, and adaptability played a significant role in shaping relationships. Participants highlighted that teachers who displayed these traits were better able to engage students and navigate challenges.

Institutional and Structural Influences

Institutional policies, such as rigid schedules and lack of mentorship programs, were identified as significant constraints. Conversely, supportive

institutional structures, such as small group discussions and accessible office hours, were seen as facilitators of strong relationships.

Impact on Academic Engagement

The data underscored the direct impact of positive teacher-student relationships on academic engagement. Behavioral involvement (class participation), emotional investment (enthusiasm), and cognitive engagement (problem-solving skills) were all enhanced when students felt supported by their teachers.

Figure 1: Identification of Themes



Discussion

The findings of this study reveal key themes that underpin the dynamics of teacher-student relationships and their impact on academic engagement. These themes highlight the multifaceted nature of such relationships, contextual challenges, and opportunities for enhancing student engagement in university settings.

Communication Styles and Feedback Mechanisms

Effective communication emerged as a cornerstone of strong teacher-student relationships. Teachers who provide personalized feedback and maintain open channels of communication foster trust and engagement. This aligns with the findings of Javaid et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of

tailored feedback in enhancing academic involvement. The study highlights that empathetic listening and constructive dialogue create a supportive learning environment, enabling students to navigate academic challenges more effectively.

Cultural and Disciplinary Variations

The study underscores the influence of cultural and disciplinary contexts on teacher-student relationships. In multicultural settings, cultural responsiveness was identified as crucial in bridging gaps caused by linguistic and cultural differences. Derakhshan et al. (2022) argue that teachers who adapt their practices to students' cultural backgrounds enhance inclusivity and participation. Disciplinary differences also shaped relational dynamics, with practical fields requiring closer

mentoring compared to theoretical disciplines, echoing the findings of Hagenauer et al. (2023).

Emotional Support and Empathy

The emotional dimension of teacher-student relationships plays a pivotal role in academic engagement. Teachers who demonstrate empathy and provide emotional support were perceived as more approachable, contributing to students' resilience and motivation. This is consistent with research by Martin and Collie (2019), which shows that emotional connections foster a sense of belonging and reduce anxiety, particularly during challenging academic periods.

Challenges in Relationship Building

Despite the benefits, building effective teacher-student relationships remains challenging. Large class sizes, time constraints, and professional boundaries were identified as significant barriers. Teachers often struggle to provide individualized attention, especially in research-intensive institutions where administrative duties compete with teaching responsibilities. These findings echo Odutayo et al. (2024), who highlighted the institutional constraints that hinder personalized interactions.

Role of Teacher Personality Traits

The study reveals that teacher personality traits, such as openness, patience, and adaptability, significantly influence the quality of relationships. Thornell (2024) found that students responded more positively to teachers who exhibited these traits, particularly in culturally diverse settings. These findings suggest that teacher training programs should emphasize the development of relational skills alongside subject-matter expertise.

Institutional and Structural Influences

Institutional policies and structures were found to shape the opportunities for teacher-student interactions. Supportive policies, such as mentorship programs and smaller discussion groups, facilitated stronger connections, while rigid schedules and large classes were barriers. This aligns with Javaid et al. (2024), who highlighted the role of institutional culture in fostering meaningful relationships.

Impact on Academic Engagement

The themes collectively emphasize the transformative impact of teacher-student relationships on academic engagement. Students who felt supported by their teachers demonstrated higher levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. These findings reinforce the work of Quin (2017), who noted that positive relationships contribute to sustained academic success and lifelong learning habits.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide actionable insights for educators and administrators seeking to improve academic engagement through stronger teacher-student relationships. Practically, universities should prioritize training programs that enhance teachers' relational skills, such as empathy, effective communication, and cultural responsiveness. These programs can equip educators to better address the diverse needs of their students, fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. Institutions should also consider structural changes, such as reducing class sizes, implementing mentorship programs, and creating opportunities for more personalized interactions, such as small group discussions or one-on-one consultations. Additionally, integrating feedback mechanisms that are constructive and personalized can significantly improve student engagement, making them feel valued and understood. Such initiatives are particularly critical in multicultural and multidisciplinary settings where relational challenges are more pronounced. The identified themes offer actionable insights for educators and policymakers. Improving communication, fostering emotional support, and addressing institutional barriers can enhance teacher-student relationships, thereby boosting academic engagement. Additionally, teacher training programs should incorporate relational skill development to equip educators with strategies for building positive connections in diverse settings. Institutions must also prioritize policies that facilitate personalized interactions, such as reducing class sizes and promoting mentorship.

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improve academic engagement through stronger teacher-student relationships. Practically, universities should prioritize training programs that enhance teachers' relational skills, such as empathy, effective communication, and cultural responsiveness. These programs can equip educators to better address the diverse needs of their students, fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. Institutions should also consider structural changes, such as reducing class sizes, implementing mentorship programs, and creating opportunities for more personalized interactions, such as small group discussions or one-on-one consultations. Additionally, integrating feedback mechanisms that are constructive and personalized can significantly improve student engagement, making them feel valued and understood. Such initiatives are particularly critical in multicultural and multidisciplinary settings where relational challenges are more pronounced.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of teacher-student relationships by emphasizing their multidimensional nature, encompassing emotional, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions. It reinforces existing frameworks, such as relational pedagogy, which highlights the importance of mutual respect, empathy, and trust in learning environments. By identifying contextual factors such as cultural and disciplinary variations, the study expands the theoretical discourse to include the influence of diversity on relational dynamics. Furthermore, the findings underline the role of teacher personality traits, offering a novel perspective on how individual characteristics shape engagement outcomes. This theoretical foundation can guide future research aimed at developing more holistic models of teacher-student relationships that integrate cultural, institutional, and interpersonal factors, thereby enriching the broader educational theory. This discussion highlights the interconnectedness of these themes and their collective importance in fostering an environment conducive to student success. Future research should explore how these findings can be implemented across varying institutional and cultural contexts to maximize their impact on higher education.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into teacher-student relationships and their impact on academic engagement, it has certain limitations. First, the reliance on qualitative data, though rich and nuanced, may limit the generalizability of findings to broader populations. The study's sample, drawn from specific disciplines and institutions, may not fully capture the diversity of experiences in other educational contexts, particularly in different cultural or socio-economic settings. Additionally, self-reported data from interviews and focus groups may be subject to biases, as participants might present socially desirable responses. Observational data, while helpful, were limited to specific timeframes, which may not reflect the full scope of teacher-student interactions over an academic term. These limitations highlight the need for further research employing mixed methods to validate and extend the findings.

Future Research

- Future research could address the limitations of this study by adopting mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative insights with quantitative validation, providing a more comprehensive understanding of teacher-student relationships. Expanding the sample to include diverse institutional types, such as community colleges and international universities, would offer broader perspectives on relational dynamics. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to explore how teacher-student relationships evolve over time and their sustained impact on academic engagement. Moreover, future studies could investigate the role of technology in shaping these relationships, particularly in hybrid and online learning environments. Finally, exploring the intersectionality of factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status in teacher-student relationships could yield deeper insights into fostering inclusive educational practices.

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