

Chapter 64: The Impact of Strong Relationships between Teachers and Students on the Learning Process Building Leadership for Change through School Immersion

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Introduction

“I hate my math teacher” or “I do not want to go to school today because I do not want to attend my chemistry class”; these are some of our students' regular sayings or even our children at home when they have a hard time at school because of their teachers. In addition to this bad feeling, I have seen a variety of students who perform badly in specific subjects and more with teachers who usually do not realize the importance of this issue. It is worth mentioning that our students are intelligent enough to know when their teachers is not truly engaged. “Students can sense when a teacher is just in it for the money, and they resent it; they need someone excited about learning to engage them” (Rottmann,2015).

Students' attitude towards learning is important to their learning process, therefore, it will reflect crucially on their success and the desirable outcomes. The essential goal of education is to reinforce the mind with knowledge that enables students to use what they have learned to be productive members in society. The impact of strong healthy relationships between students and teachers can make a huge difference on the whole learning process. It may affect positively or negatively on the students' progress at school. During my period of immersion in the American schools as a Saudi teacher scholar in Khbrat program BLCSE, I have seen some of the best communications between students and their teachers and how this influences the all teaching stages and learning environments. The students participate effectively in the class, cooperate very well with each other, present every piece of information with great confidence, and most importantly know when to speak and what to say to their teacher.

The Statement of Purpose

In Saudi schools, teachers usually set massive boundaries between themselves and their students, considering these rules under the umbrella of good behaviour and they have to over control them or they will misbehave in the class. Regarding this issue, there is an enormous effect of these lines drawn by most of our teachers on the students and specifically on their learning process. Sometimes, the fear of losing respect or the failure of class management is the primary concern of those teachers, however, the main purpose of this research is highlighting the importance of close communication between teachers and their students, which it is definitely considered a great investment in our educational system. One regrettable problem is that many teachers do not really know their learners. As a matter of fact, most teachers do not set aside any time with their students to know about their background, their academic level in the desired subject, or their strengths and weaknesses, so that the teachers can build a successful learning environment that benefits every single one based on their needs. Teachers who neglect to show care and respect to the students will reflect negatively in the classroom in which many students are unable to be involved in a discussion or participate

with an opinion about a topic during the lesson, there are actually few students who are capable to present and have a voice.

If I compare American students and Saudi students, I would definitely say that there is a huge difference in the relationships, and it affects our young generation. Furthermore, it is necessary that every teacher should be aware of the influence of good relationships with our students and that we increase the importance of this awareness among the teacher community all over the country. The reason behind this idea is the incredible mindset growth in our generation and how we should treat them as adults not small kids, and try to build trust so that every student will accept learning and engage effectively. The issue usually starts at the beginning of the first day of school when every teacher does not realize the value of the first week and what students need. According to Wong (2004), "Students want to know who you are as a person and if you will treat them as people. It is important that you dispel any fears they may have about being in your class. The best way to do this is smile, exude caring, and communicate positive expectations" (p.109). Another important step as Sanfelippo & Sinanis stated "connecting with students on a personal level can be critical to their academic success"(P.137).

Once our students feel comfortable, know what they have to do, and what expectations are set for them, a kind of friendship should be built for a lot of reasons. Firstly, students need to feel comfortable so nothing will prevent them from being productive in the class. Secondly, it helps in building self-confidence, which is very important for every student so that no barriers will stop them from learning. Thirdly, the class environment will be more active which means students will collaborate and participate more effectively during the class. Finally, the core element of enhancing good relationship process is to be critical thinkers and problem solvers which of course enable them to be more functional in real life situations.

Literature Review

The relationships between teachers and students and what a teacher should know about their students have been discussed in many research articles. It actually can be reflected in many ways such as their behavior and academic performance. Donaldson (2012), stated a very important information about why teachers should know their learners. Once teachers know who their learners are and listen to their goals, it makes it easy to design different learning and motivation materials for example, knowing their personal learning goals, creating a collaborative learning environment. It is also important to provide an authentic application of content including alternatives. Moreover, having some reflective activities can help them to enhance their progress level.

Powell and Kusuma-Powell (2011), write about why educators have to know their students as learners. Providing a psychologically safe environment is what any human being needs before paying attention to learning. Building trust not only between the teacher and students, but also among other students as well will help in their learning improvement. The teacher should determine each student's willingness towards learning in order to encourage them to do it. Making the content and concepts of the curriculum relevant to the students by various methods and developing their emotional intelligence increase their flexibility of thought and becoming more responsible which eventually affect their present performance.

Northern(2017), said in his article about a study made by David Blazer who wanted to examine the effect of teachers on the students final outcomes at school. The findings showed that teachers influenced the students attitudes and behaviour. The largest impact was on the

students happiness and also their self-efficacy. However, the positive results were focused on the students happiness and their engagement in the class. Finally, teachers in some area need additional training or professional development on this subject.

The quality of teacher- child relationships and its impact on the students' outcomes which has been mentioned in a study made by Hamre and Pianta(2001). They found out that using an early intervention program using test scores, work- habit ratings, and discipline records from kindergarten through eighth grade showed a strong link between the type of relationships and the students' academic and behavioral performance. It also showed how this preventative intervention program can predict and lead to enhancing school outcomes and vice versa.

Meador(2019), talked about the importance of building positive relationship on the first day of school with students which is considered the key element that fosters an academic success. Although it can be challenging and may need some time for the teacher, but it is essential to earn their trust early. For those who find it difficult, they can use helpful strategies that help them to overcome this barrier. Meador presents useful tips like giving students some structure in the classroom to make them feel safe and well guided by their teachers. The teachers themselves should show enthusiasm and passion to their students, otherwise students will respond negatively like their teachers. Positive attitude should be presented and leave all personal issues at home. The sense of humor and telling stories might be difficult to some teachers but when it is incorporated inside the class, it cheers the students and breaks any chance of boredom. Moreover, fun learning will gain their interest to learn, so teachers can get the greatest benefit from this strategy a lot. Students may tend to tell personal opinions or stories and teacher should show caring and attention to them. This will reflect on them positively and as a result of that respect can be mutually acquired. Lastly, there are students who definitely need an extra time to promote them and follow their classmates, so, teachers should support them and help them.

Another research by Roorda, Koomen, Spilt and Oort (2011), that used meta-analytic approach to investigate the association between teachers-students relationships showed that there is a significant evidence that positive and negative relations do make an affect although it is not enough for full engagement and achievement. There are other factors such as instruction quality, autonomy support and more which do affect the students' academic learning success.

The Implementation Plan

It is essential to solve any problems in life by making a plan in order to get organized and not to waste time. Hence, the starting point will eventually lead to the desired outcomes. According to Hicks (2018), the first step when solving problems in the workplace is identifying the issue, with which this paper is mainly concerned. The idea of establishing a special bond between the students and their teacher and how it affects positively on their learning should be related to every teachers' interest and their educational tendencies. Presenting the outcomes of this project is the second step towards facing any educational obstacles. While many teachers may not believe in this path, do not see the existence of this huge gap in their teaching styles, or even create another barrier between themselves and their students, listing different solutions should be presented. Integrating this third step is highly important and inevitable. The fourth and fifth steps are about evaluating and choosing the options or solutions which came from the previous step. Measuring these options can be seen by actual evidence, subsequently the main element will lead itself automatically. Listing all

agreement points whether by the researcher of this plan or other teachers who support the idea as Hicks mentioned as the sixth and the seventh beneficiary of Hicks's steps. Moreover, throughout the period of the implementation plan, the school year, there are variable changes that might show up so a manageable agreement should be set that helps in following up with the whole process.

However, the success of this plan needs to be proved practically on the target goal which is the case of this study, the students. Since this kind of problem in Saudi schools might be unknown among many teachers who usually do not give a specific concentration on their students' psychological development and readiness towards learning rather than finishing the curriculum. They actually do not pay enough attention on how to build a good relationship with their students first. In other words, the validity of the importance of this relationship between teachers and students and how it affects their academic growth must be demonstrated through an accurate implementation plan.; otherwise many educators will underestimate the value of this process. As a matter of fact, this plan requires gradual implementation, first with internal then external changes of the school environment, internal and then external change of the school environment. The whole process will take the entire school year, but will be divided into periods. I will work from the inner circle very well and later on spread the plan to the benefits of the educational process.

The internal change of school environment:

I need to build the foundation stone of this project which means working with my students inside the classroom. This step is considered the the primary step for changing what the class environment used to be: rigid and lacking a comfortable communication. Students are not only the center, but also the main goal that will prove its worthiness and most importantly the final results that show why every educator needs to change their regular educational pattern.

1-Inside the classroom, students and teacher

The focus at this stage should be on the students, as their progress in learning is the eventual end goal. Building a strong relationship between the teacher and the students starts in the first two weeks using different techniques. The teacher will distribute a questionnaire to the students so that their feelings and feedback about previous teachers will be clear. The questionnaire can be done either on papers or electronically. After that, knowing what the students' needs and what they expect can help the teacher reflect positively upon their expectations. The next step that the teacher should take is to exploit the first two weeks of the semester effectively in several ways; questions, discussions, and icebreaker activities. This stage helps the teacher know all points of strength and weakness of her students in order to make it easy on the teacher to overcome every barrier and increase all the strength points. Trust plays a crucial role at this stage. Mutual trust can accelerate expectation towards successful goals. "Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships" (Covey,)

2- Inside school, the teacher and other teachers

This stage includes a change in the school environment, and then training programs for the other educators in the same district. Although this project is valid to any grades at the beginning of the school year, choosing a specific school to start the program is more important than any randomness.

The external change school environment:

This stage is not a literal change; it is more about conveying the advantage of the idea.

Every educator should be aware of this side of the program in order to apply it in all other schools to all different grades. The result of the questionnaire helps a lot to identify the gap from the perspectives of the students and teachers, both of whom may deny the existence of the problem.






Presenting the final outcomes proves the project's validity and successfulness.

The procedure takes place at schools or training centers by workshops and presentations.

Sharing social media platforms helps to illustrate the big picture to a great number of teachers. This way facilitates the spread of the program to the largest number of educators. The timeline of holding this stage of the entire program will be during the school year, the external change will be during the second semester for three reasons:

- 1- The researcher teacher needs some time to spend with students in order to create the bond between them.
- 2- The process of evaluating the students' academic progress, particularly the low level and shy students, requires time, various activities, documenting data.
- 3- Organizing the project content, making arrangements with supervisors and other teachers by finding the best suitable time and place are necessary for displaying the project. Presenting valuable well- ordered information helps increase the agreement.

The American experience during our time of immersion inside these schools and the university as well has brought to mind some simple details that need to be shown and applied inside our schools. Although many would think that this observation is nothing or unworthy, I strongly believe that any change should start from the small neglected details, and once we work on our weaknesses the results will be astonishing. These internal and external changes are necessary in order to hold this program into all parts of the country.

Implementation plan				
Year	Phase	Target group (s)	Time.	Expected result(s)
2020-2021 				

The first semester	The internal change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused groups of high school students • Teachers and school faculty 	All school year	Measured academic progress
The second semester	The external change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers in the school district 	3 days maximum	Increase awareness and apply
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers in the whole kingdom 		

The Assessment and Evaluation Plan

The reason for doing any kind of project is to examine its effectiveness by evaluating its outcomes. Evaluation is a systematic process to understand the overall organization of a program, the way it works. Evaluation results can be used to maintain or improve program quality and to ensure that future planning can be more evidence-based. Evaluation constitutes part of an ongoing cycle of program planning, implementation, and improvement (Patton, 1987).

The evaluation process of this project will depend on both quantitative and qualitative tools. The qualitative tools are going to be used during the internal change of school environment. Measuring the success of how a good relationship between students and teachers affects positively on their learning progress will be concentrated at this stage on focus groups of high school students in English classes the reason for choosing this particular subject and grade is related to my background in the field. The sample group and subject can be applied to all grade levels.

The quantitative tool will be applied on the focus group of students by fostering several connection techniques that help to build a good relationship with the students. Before that step it is very important to get some background information, including of all the students' attitudes towards the subject of English in general and their previous grades elementary school. I will then focus on those who do not like English and always perform poorly on tests and assignments because the high level students will not show that great of an influence on the project. They either like the subject or care about their future education, so their scores are already high. This background information will help to get concrete data of how the change of attitude can make a difference. I will make a comparison at the end of the semester between

the eventual academic enhancement and how those techniques have developed their motivation to learn to their previous academic performance.

Building relationships techniques examples:

- Ice breaker activities.
- explain the day's agenda.
- find weaknesses in the students performance.
- private personal meetings.
- quizzes and exams.

The first week of the school year plays a crucial part in the project. An Ice-Breaker is a method used to improve students' motivation in communicating with each other which solves the common classroom issues such as boredom, tiredness, low enthusiasm, and unwillingness to study (Panngua, 2016). It prepares the students with enthusiasm and increases their expectations of the teacher and the subject after they get to know each other well. Explaining the agenda draws an accurate plan that directs them throughout the year. Next, once the teacher (the researcher) discovers their weaknesses early by either diagnostic exam, it makes it easier to handle and solve. The private personal meetings will take place during the whole year between the teacher and the students individually. Asking questions and having discussions with each other will give every one of them the opportunities to express them and convey their concerns or problems with the subject, so at this time the teacher can keep tracking their students along with their progress. The project requires tangible data equally to the previous methods that support the final results, so that's why exams and quizzes are a logical and beneficial tool. The last action at the end of the semester is setting a meeting with the principal and teachers inside the school to present the significance of the project. This project will hopefully stimulate teachers to apply it with their students.

During the external change of school environment, I will be using the results of the questionnaire that will has already sent to most of the teachers in my city, Bishah, at the beginning of the school year. Sending this questionnaire at that time is mainly to give the questionnaire enough time needed to be answered, collected, and analyzed.

Sample Questionnaire:

At what point in the semester do you have all of your students names memorized?	1-after one week.	2-after two weeks	2-after a month
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How do you know about every student's special needs and circumstances?	1- the school informs the teacher orally at the beginning of the year	2- all teachers are given a report of their students' private status	3-the teachers discover the status of their students by themselves during their time with them
How often do you spend the first week of school doing activities that help you get to know your students?	1-Always	2-Never	3-Sometimes
Do you have private meetings with your students throughout the year?	1-Yes	2-No	3-Only low level students
Do you make a diagnostic academic evaluation at the beginning of the year to your students?	1-Yes.	2-No	3-Sometimes
How do you evaluate the students' performance and proficiency levels	1-Quizzes and Tests.	2-Discussions	3-Participating in the class.
When do you set final goals for the students?	1-At the beginning of school.	2-During the school year.	3-I never set goals for them.
There are many teachers who focus more on finishing the school book than working on the students' weaknesses.	1-Agree	2-Disagree	3-Both.
Setting strict boundaries between the teacher and the students promotes their academic level.	1-Agree	2-Disagree	3-I do not know.

Do you think developing a close relationship with students will help their learning?	1-Yes	2-No	3-Maybe
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There are two results that will be presented to all teachers in my district during the second semester of the same school year. This particular time allows me to present the results of the questionnaire which should highlight my point about the gap that exists in our teaching system. After that, presenting how the techniques mentioned earlier with the comparison grades of the focused students have promoted their academic development, and also changing the relationship would change their attitudes towards learning and start giving an effort in English subject. Providing facts and evidence will prove the successfulness of the project and will eventually encourage all teachers to do the same. The last indispensable step is to use social media platforms to spread the final outcomes to increase awareness as well as the importance of the project.

To conclude, enhancing the educational process includes not only a massive change in the system, but also some minor changes inside classroom doors can make an outstanding desirable advance. The incredible experience from Khebrat program provides a variety of inspirations that differ from one participant to another; however, it helps to achieve the eventual meaningful goal of improving education, which will fulfill the 2030 vision of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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