
Critical Evaluation On Teacher-Child Relationship And Its Effects On Academic Achievement And School Adjustment

INTRODUCTION

Concerns related to children lacking the skills which is a requisite for success in early elementary school classrooms have moved forward in recent years. As the number of children facing difficulties in this setting has increased (Pianta, 2004) it has become crucial to facilitate early school success, for example pre-academic, social, and behavioral skills (Lyon, 2002). There is comprehensive compliance in the developmental history that early relationships with adults play a crucial role in child development. An emerging body of literature offer that relationships with teachers shape children's development in important forms during the early school years (Pianta, 1999). Young children's relationships with teachers predict social and academic success (Kathleen, 2008). There is an agreement amongst researchers that the nature of young children's relationships with teachers forecasts social and academic performance in school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). The nature of children's relationships with their early school teachers is increasingly recognized as a patron to school adaptation (Birch & Ladd, 1997). This essay focuses on the teacher- child relationship in early school years and its effects on child's school adjustment and his/her academic achievement. The theories that will contribute to this essay will be the Transactional Model of Development and Attachment Theory.

Teacher-child relationship is dependent on child characteristics and teacher's attitudes on these characteristics may determine this relationship. There is indication suggesting that teacher-child relationships are carved by the teacher's approach towards student's dispositional traits (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). Children displaying antisocial behaviors, such as aggression and withdrawal, often have negative relationships with teachers. Their antisocial behavior in school has been related to teacher-child relationships. A recent study conducted, concluded that teacher-child relationship quality was predicted by the interaction between children's shyness and language ability (Rudasilletal.,2006). Particularly, shy children with higher language ability were perceived by teachers as dependent, whereas less shy children with lower language ability were perceived as con?ictual & problematic. In another study conducted, boys were more prone to be perceived as having teacher-child con?ict and girls are more likely to be perceived as having teacher-child closeness (Armstrong & Essex, 2005). Both studies indicate that teacher's approach incorporate with child attributes to anticipate teacher-child relationship quality. However, the contributions of child temperament to teacher-child relationship quality have been unexplored, and invariably in association with gender. Hence, gender and temperament might be considered as one of the factors of conflictual teacher-child relationship and its direct effects on child's academic development.

Shyer children are the ones who are uncertain towards new surroundings. They showcase more prudent behaviors than children who are bolder, who approach uniqueness with ease (Posner & Kieras, 2006). "Shyness describes an individual's style of responding to people, items, or events in the environment that are new or unfamiliar" (Rudasil, 2009; p:109). There is indication that young children's shyness roots are from awareness in infancy. Reactive infants show higher motor and vocal reactions to stimuli, and these behaviors are precursors for shyness when children are 14 and 21 months (Kagan et al., 1992). Therefore, children that are shy are

likely to have been highly reactive as infants and display fear reactions toward peculiar or unfamiliar stimuli (Hershey & Fisher, 2001). Children classified as not shy are more likely to have been low-reactive as infants, and approach-oriented in unfamiliar situations. Hence, high reactivity in infancy and fear in consequent years seem to commit to children's shy behavior in school (Rimm-Kaufman & Kagan, 2005). Therefore, shy behavior in school might lead to low closeness and conflict in relationships with teachers and peers affecting the overall academic performance.

Children's temperament, gender and child-teacher initiated interactions play a crucial role in identifying the quality of teacher-child relationships. A study conducted by Rudasil et al., (2009) was to extend understanding of the role of such factors on teacher-child relationship. Participants were children and their first-grade teachers from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (NICHD SECCYD). Later, mothers were also recruited in this study. Data was collected at two-time points (54 months and first grade) and the data collection took place in the laboratory settings and observation method in classrooms (NICHD SECCYD, 1993). "The findings showed that children with lower levels of shyness were more likely to have relationships with teachers that were higher in conflict and closeness" (Rudasil et al., 2009). Studies suggest that shy children tend to make lesser bids for attention from teachers (Coplan & Prakash, 2003). Moreover, higher levels of shyness may bring risks to children's relationships, whereas low levels may assist in the successful construction of relationships. Contrastingly, high levels of shyness are associated with children's lower levels of aggression and more empathy (Rothbart, Ahadi & Hershey, 1994), implying that shyness may aid to positive relationships and is also associated with internalizing behaviors (Rothbart, Ahadi & Hershey, 1994). Shyness, however does not directly affect the academic performance but it surely affects the school adjustment.

The advancement of positive teacher-child relationships is invariably multi-determined. "Child characteristics, teacher characteristics, and attributes of the social environment contribute to the nature of children's relationships with teachers" (Eisenhower, Baker, & Blacher, 2007; Rudasil, Rimm-Kaufman, Justice & Pence, 2006). Better relationships with teachers are formed by fusion of elevated levels of closeness and low levels of conflict. "Closeness in teacher-child relationships are characterized by warmth, positive affect, and open communication. In contrast, conflict reflects negativity, hostility, and difficulty in managing children's behavior" (Pianta, 1999). Positive teacher-child relationships permits children to evolve and use adequate social skills to mediate and maneuver challenges. Such relationships also equip children with school support systems that operate as safety nets in academic and social positions and promote children's positive approach of school in general (LaParo, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004; Pianta, 1999).

Children navigate their interests and relationships specifically with regards to social resources. Social resources could be the warmth, open communication and positive affect in children. In the absence of such social resources, children are more prone to avoid school, encounter loneliness, and display lower levels of academic and social competence (Birch & Ladd, 1997). In the recent studies, associations have been established between teacher-child relationship quality and overall child well-being across a broad range of domains, including behavior issues, classroom adjustment, peer relationships and academic achievement by researchers (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Birch and Ladd (1997) investigated relationships between kindergarteners and their teachers and asserted that those students who have closer and less dependent relationships had higher visual and language scores on

standardized tests, have higher levels of teacher–child closeness anticipated appreciable work habits and fewer internalizing and externalizing problems in later school years (Baker, 2006). A recent study using data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care, O’Connor and McCartney (2007) established that high quality teacher–child relationships from pre-kindergarten through third grade encouraged children’s academic success in third grade.

Considering an attachment approach on teacher–child relationships, one of the first appropriate questions is whether the teacher–child relationship can be considered an attachment relationship. Since a very long time, Attachment Theory’s key aspect was parent-child relationship as the primary context of child development. In the recent times, teacher-child relationship has been studied from an attachment perspective, where teachers, especially in early childhood, are “alternative caregivers” (Howes, 1999). The Attachment theory model postulates that if children feel emotionally secure and can communicate adequately with their teachers, they will effectively be able to dedicate their energies and attention to learning (Howes, 1999; Pianta, 1999). Indications have been found for comparison between the patterns of separation-reunion behavior towards teachers and parents (Howes & Ritchie, 1999), as well as for the expected links of such behavioral patterns with teacher sensitivity (Ahnert, Piquart, & Lamb, 2006). These similarities predict that the teacher–child relationship could have an “attachment component” (Cassidy, 2008, p. 14) and that the teacher may deliver the function of brief attachment figure (Zajac & Kobak, 2006). Attachment towards teachers might lead to expectations which could not be met all the time by the teacher. If they aren’t met the grief could lead to issues with peers and school adjustment.

Research, however focuses on teacher-child relationship from the perspective of conceptualizing and operationalizing the quality of the relationship. Recent studies focused on preschool and elementary school, and the affective quality of teacher–child relationships that have mostly been defined in terms of the relationship dimensions of closeness, conflict, and dependency. These dimensions have most frequently been assessed using the Student–Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) (Pianta, 2001). There are multiple contributions proposed to explain attachment perspective to the teacher-child relationship out of which three will be discussed. First, the STRS which determines the teacher’s perceptions of the quality of the interpersonal relationship with a child, the reciprocal behavior of the child towards the teacher, and the child’s and teacher’s feelings and thoughts about each other.

Second, attachment theory and research focus on the effect of “teacher sensitivity or responsiveness” to children’s aspirations as a “central proximal determinant or antecedent of relationship quality” (Buyse, Verschueren, & Doumen, 2011). This significance has also found its way to the assessment of teacher–student interactions. Thirdly, an attachment approach guides research hypothesis with regards to the consequences of teacher–child relationship quality and the intervening mechanisms explaining these effects. However, the contribution of the attachment perspective, the harmony of attachment behavioral processes in the teacher–child relationship is predicted to depend on several factors, including the child age, vulnerability and gender (Verschueren, 2012). Therefore, it is inaccurate to say that Attachment Theory can be used based on bonds or the centrality of specific relationships, in this case teacher-child relationship as it does not provide a fully convincing study relating to its direct impact.

One of the main limitation of Attachment Theory is that even though children may direct

attachment behaviors toward their teacher, and the teacher may play the role of secure base and haven, this does not mean that children have a “full-fledged” attachment association with their teacher (Cassidy, 2008). Most children build such an absolute and durable attachment bond with their parents. The teacher–child relationship, however, is usually not exclusive or absolute, nor durable. In most educational systems, teachers for a class changes every school year. Also, teacher–child relationships tends to be less absolute, as the teacher is to all the students and not one in the classroom. Furthermore, principally in secondary and higher secondary education, children interact with several teachers throughout the day. Although, this bond cannot be thought of from an attachment perspective in a wider range it might be inaccurate to consider that it does not have an impact on the child and that, it does not affect the child’s academic performance.

The transactional model characterize development due to the current interaction between the child and the experiences administered by the environment that is, the family and the broader social context (Sameroff, 1995). Broader social context includes teachers; hence teacher-child relationship. The model describes that, the child affects the environment as much as the environment affects the child and is in turn impacted by those environmental effects he has constructed. Child’s developmental result at any point in time is the outcome not of the influences of the environment or the influences of individual child characteristics, but of the complicated relationship between the child and the environment over time. In the transactional model, experiences equipped by the environment are not considered as independent, but rather are carved by, and carve, the individual’s developmental trajectory (Sameroff & Mackenzie, 2003). Therefore, the teacher-child relationship and its positivity or negativity is reciprocal interaction. It might lead to conflicts and issues in academics and school adjustment.

Transactional model of development provides the context where both teacher and child are responsible for their relationship with each other. Sutherland (2005) in his study explained Patterson’s coercive interaction cycle that has been applied to teachers’ interactions with students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD). “A student may disrupt class, thereby escaping or avoiding academic instruction, and the teacher may subsequently provide less academic instruction to this student and make fewer academic demands to escape or avoid aversive interactions” (Sutherland, 2005: p.3). Furthermore, Long, Wood, and Fecser (2001) discussed interactive influences between teachers and students while acting-out/conflict cycles. It is more likely that odd factors present in classrooms for students with EBD may commence to an increased likelihood of bidirectional negative effects between teachers and students. Provided the complex behaviors and academic problems of many students with EBD, teachers may react atypically to inappropriate (and appropriate) behaviors. The limitation of the transactional process is that it focuses on teacher-child relationship considering the EBD in teachers and children which is absurd. It might be true to a level of transaction between the two, but it doesn’t not really showcase how that affects the child and his/her academic performance.

Applications

The earthly interactions within children and teachers are the foundation for the formation of teacher–child relationships. There is strong evidence that positive teacher–child relationships are crucial, and may encourage outcomes for the “riskiest” (Sabol, 2012 ; p.222) children, program developers and policymakers have begun implementing programs specifically designed to alter relationship quality through more direct actions related to knowledge or

behavioral change, often called process-oriented professional development (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). Interventions like “banking time” (Driscoll, Pianta, 2010) were evaluated on improving teacher–child relationships. “In Banking Time, a set of one-on-one child-directed sessions occurs between the teacher and child that are specifically designed to foster positive teacher–child relationships” (Sabol, 2012). Results indicated that teachers casually assigned to the Banking Time intervention reported higher perceptions of closeness with children. Moreover, children who participated in Banking Time showed gains in teacher-reported task orientation and competence, and lower teacher-reported adjustment issues compared to peers in the same classroom who did not participate in the intervention. Another intervention, Teacher–Child Interaction Training for encouraging positive interactions in preschool classrooms by Lyon and colleagues (2009). “Teacher–Child Interaction Training provides group training and practice for interacting with groups of children. Teachers are observed, and coaches provide feedback on their classroom practices. Non-experimental results indicated a mean level change in positive interactions between teachers and children from baseline to the end treatment” (Sabol, 2012; pg. 223). Such intervention plans can be encouraged in schools to accomplish the positivity in this relationship.

Conclusion

The essay concludes that relationships with teachers consists an important context for children’s development during the early school years of the child which affects their early and later academic performance. The essay explained teacher-child relationship with regards to that Attachment Theory and the Transactional Model of Development. It further concludes that Attachment Theory might not be able to explain the bond with keeping teacher as the central figure. Transactional Model of Development also cannot be accurately related as the studies conducted shows the teacher-child relationship in terms of Emotional Behavioral Disorders. However, both the theories explain the basis of unbalanced and positive or negative teacher-child relationship and the causation is clearly understood.

REFERENCE

1. Ahnert, L., Harwardt-Heinecke, E., Kappler, G., Eckstein-Madry, T., & Milatz, A. (2012). Student–teacher relationships and classroom climate in first grade: how do they relate to students’ stress regulation? *Attachment & human development*, 14(3), 249-263.
2. Birch, S. H., & Ladd, G. W. (1997). The teacher-child relationship and children's early school adjustment. *Journal of school psychology*, 35(1), 61-79.
3. Breeman, L. D., Wubbels, T., Van Lier, P. A. C., Verhulst, F. C., van der Ende, J., Maras, A., ... & Tick, N. T. (2015). Teacher characteristics, social classroom relationships, and children's social, emotional, and behavioral classroom adjustment in special education. *Journal of School Psychology*, 53(1), 87-103.
4. Burchinal, M. R., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Pianta, R., & Howes, C. (2002). Development of academic skills from preschool through second grade: Family and classroom predictors of developmental trajectories. *Journal of school psychology*, 40(5), 415-436.
5. Buyse, E., Verschueren, K., & Doumen, S. (2011). Preschoolers' attachment to mother and risk for adjustment problems in kindergarten: Can teachers make a difference? *Social Development*, 20(1), 33-50.
6. Cassidy, J. (2008). The nature of the child's ties.
7. Coplan, R. J., & Prakash, K. (2003). Spending time with teacher: Characteristics of

preschoolers who frequently elicit versus initiate interactions with teachers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18(1), 143-158.

8. Diaz, A., Eisenberg, N., Valiente, C., VanSchyndel, S., Spinrad, T. L., Berger, R., ... & Southworth, J. (2017). Relations of positive and negative expressivity and effortful control to kindergarteners' student-teacher relationship, academic engagement, and externalizing problems at school. *Journal of research in personality*, 67, 3-14.
9. Eisenhower, A. S., Baker, B. L., & Blacher, J. (2007). Early student-teacher relationships of children with and without intellectual disability: Contributions of behavioral, social, and self-regulatory competence. *Journal of School Psychology*, 45(4), 363-383.
10. Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child development*, 72(2), 625-638.
11. Howes, C., & Ritchie, S. (1999). Attachment organizations in children with difficult life circumstances. *Development and Psychopathology*, 11(2), 251-268.
12. Kagan, J., & Fox, N. A. (2006). Biology, Culture, and Temperamental Biases.
13. Karine Verschueren & Helma M.Y. Koomen (2012) Teacher-child relationships from an attachment perspective, *Attachment & Human Development*, 14:3, 205-211, DOI: 10.1080/14616734.2012.672260
14. La Paro, K. M., Pianta, R. C., & Stuhlman, M. (2004). The classroom assessment scoring system: Findings from the prekindergarten year. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104(5), 409-426.
15. Ladd, G. W., & Burgess, K. B. (1999). Charting the relationship trajectories of aggressive, withdrawn, and aggressive/withdrawn children during early grade school. *Child development*, 70(4), 910-929.
16. Maldonado-Carreño, C., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2011). Teacher-child relationships and the development of academic and behavioral skills during elementary school: A within- and between-child analysis. *Child Development*, 82(2), 601-616.
17. Moritz Rudasill, K., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Justice, L. M., & Pence, K. (2006). Temperament and language skills as predictors of teacher-child relationship quality in preschool. *Early Education and Development*, 17(2), 271-291.
18. Palermo, F., Hanish, L. D., Martin, C. L., Fabes, R. A., & Reiser, M. (2007). Preschoolers' academic readiness: What role does the teacher-child relationship play?. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22(4), 407-422.
19. Pianta, R. C. (1999). Enhancing relationships between children and teachers. American Psychological Association.
20. Pianta, R. C., & Stuhlman, M. W. (2004). Teacher-child relationships and children's success in the first years of school. *School psychology review*, 33(3), 444.
21. Rhoads-Drogalis, A., Justice, L. M., Sawyer, B. E., & O'Connell, A. A. (2018). Teacher-child relationships and classroom learning behaviours of children with developmental language disorders. *International journal of language & communication disorders*, 53(2), 324-338.
22. Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Kagan, J. (2005). Infant Predictors of Kindergarten Behavior: The Contribution of Inhibited and Uninhibited Temperament Types. *Behavioral Disorders*, 30(4), 331-347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019874290503000409>
23. Rothbart, M. K., & Bates, J. E. (2006). Temperament. In W. Damon & N. Eisenberg (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Social, emotional, and personality development* (6th ed., Vol. 3, pp. 99-166). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
24. Rucinski, C. L., Brown, J. L., & Downer, J. T. (2017). Teacher-child relationships, classroom climate, and children's social-emotional and academic development.

-
25. Rudasill, K. M., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. (2009). Teacher–child relationship quality: The roles of child temperament and teacher–child interactions. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 24(2), 107-120.
 26. Rydell, A. M., Bohlin, G., & Thorell, L. B. (2005). Representations of attachment to parents and shyness as predictors of children's relationships with teachers and peer competence in preschool. *Attachment & human development*, 7(2), 187-204.
 27. Silver, R. B., Measelle, J. R., Armstrong, J. M., & Essex, M. J. (2005). Trajectories of classroom externalizing behavior: Contributions of child characteristics, family characteristics, and the teacher–child relationship during the school transition. *Journal of School Psychology*, 43(1), 39-60.
 28. Sointu, E. T., Savolainen, H., Lappalainen, K., & Lambert, M. C. (2017). Longitudinal associations of student–teacher relationships and behavioural and emotional strengths on academic achievement. *Educational Psychology*, 37(4), 457-467.
 29. Stuhlman, M. W., & Pianta, R. C. (2002). Teachers' narratives about their relationships with children: Associations with behavior in classrooms. *School Psychology Review*, 31(2).
 30. Sutherland, Kevin & Oswald, Donald. (2005). The Relationship Between Teacher and Student Behavior in Classrooms for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Transactional Processes. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 14. 1-14. 10.1007/s10826-005-1106-z.
 31. Terri J. Sabol & Robert C. Pianta (2012) Recent trends in research on teacher–child relationships, *Attachment & Human Development*, 14:3, 213-231, DOI: 10.1080/14616734.2012.672262
 32. UCINSKI, C.L., BROWN, J.L. and DOWNER, J.T., 2018. Teacher–child relationships, classroom climate, and children’s social-emotional and academic development. *Journal of educational psychology*, 110(7), pp. 992.
 33. Verschueren, K., & Koomen, H. M. (2012). Teacher–child relationships from an attachment perspective. *Attachment & human development*, 14(3), 205-211.
 34. Zajac, K., & Kobak, R. (2006). Attachment. In G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke (Eds.), *Children’s needs III: Development, prevention and intervention* (pp. 379–389). Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychologists.
 35. Sameroff, A. J., & Mackenzie, M. J. (2003). Research strategies for capturing transactional models of development: The limits of the possible. *Development and psychopathology*, 15(3), 613-640.