THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONS AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND MENTAL RESILIENCE AMONG STUDENTS IN ARAB SOCIETY IN ISRAEL

Ali Nabeel

Ph.D. student

Department of Psychology

Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"

Abstract: This research study examined the relationship between teacher-student relations and the advancement of emotional wellbeing and mental resilience among students in Arab society in Israel. The research study based on the description of the phenomenon in terms of the theoretical literature through the presentation of the main important concepts of teacher-student relations, mental resilience, emotional mental wellbeing, and the teacher's role in the advancement of the wellbeing and resilience among students. The different conclusions and insights that arise from this research study can delineate a clear picture of the importance of the teacher's role and the system of relations with the students for the advancement of different sides in them, particularly wellbeing and mental resilience.

Keywords: teacher-student relations, mental resilience, emotional wellbeing, Arab society

Introduction

Different teachers perceive differently the nature of the reciprocal relations between them and their students and among the students themselves. Bruner (2000), an American psychologist considered one of the leaders of educational thought in recent decades, provides for teachers a series of recommendations that will help them strengthen the reciprocal relations with their students, including the encouragement of the student's personal involvement and the development of the student's independence, the creation of an environment rich in stimuli and learning aids, full availability to the students, patience,

choice of learning challenges that are close to the student's world, flexibility that will allow them also to research topics that are not included in the curriculum, and so on.

The relations between the teacher and the student have been of interest to researchers engaged in education for a number of decades. Over the years, this engagement was in the following areas: mutual expectations of the teacher and the student, ways to inculcate discipline in the students and class management, teaching and learning as social mediators, the teacher's perception of self-efficacy, and the teacher's emotions and beliefs and their influence on the belonging to the school. In the past decade, the research has focused on the teacher-student interpersonal relations and the teacher's support as a resource that enables children at risk to develop the ability to endure failure in the school. One of the perceptions of teacher-student relations is based on attachment theory and the contribution of the traits of the teacher's empathy and attachment to the development of different positive attributes among the students. The research studies indicate that the school framework creates constant daily interaction between teachers and students. In the classroom, the influence between teachers and students is reciprocal. According to Gamble and Gamble (1993), the effect of the teacher-student interaction can be emotional, physical, cognitive, or a combination of the three together. It was found, for example, that the nature of the interaction especially influences the students' feeling and mental wellbeing, their mental resilience, and their academic achievements.

Mental well-being is a dynamic state that allows people to be happy and content with life, to find purpose in their lives, to realize their innate potential, to create and maintain relations with others, and to feel in control of their lives (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). This strengthens positive qualities in the person, like happiness, satisfaction with life, self-fulfillment, and positive psychological functioning (Lang & Bachinger, 2017). Different research studies (Khawaja, Ibrahim, & Schweitzer 2017) have found that the advancement of the mental wellbeing is a supreme and important aim that influences different aspects in the lives of adolescents and children and that the advancement of the mental wellbeing is influenced by different variables such as the mental resilience, depression, anxiety, and social support. However, the strong need arises to examine in greater depth the influence of the relationship between the social support of teachers and the mental wellbeing of

adolescents, for mental wellbeing is important to the adolescents' healthy development (Guo, Tomson, Keller, & Söderqvist, 2018). Accordingly, the present research study investigates the relationship between the support of the teachers and the adolescents' mental wellbeing and the influence of negative emotions and resilience in this relationship.

In this research study we examine the relationship between teacher-student relations and the advancement of student wellbeing and mental resilience. The theoretical model at the basis of the present research is the attachment theory of Bowlby (1973), which maintains that the system of attachment facilitates the coping with distress. The assumption at the basis of this research study is that in a situation of distress and threat the system of attachment is deployed, when its goal is to maintain closeness to the distinct and preferred adult who can help reduce the distress and instill a sense of security. Another assumption of the present research study is based on the arguments of attachment researchers regarding the contribution of the encounter with a figure who is not parental, who acts as a "secure base" and helps the mental health. The figure of the teacher, as an attachment figure who acts as a "secure base", is available, accepting, and close and helps the student both develop mental resilience and use coping strategies in the routine in general and at a time of distress in particular (Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak, & Popper, 2007).

Teacher-Student Relations

The relations between the teacher and the student have been of interest to researchers who engage in education for a number of decades, but it is possible to attribute the lack of research focus on teacher-student relations to the difference and variety of theories upon which the different research works were based. In addition, it is possible to ascribe the lack of research focus on student-teacher relations to the disconnection between the different approaches and to the use of different terms and a different language between researchers and people in the field. It appears that this difference represents the absence of theoretical models that emphasize intelligently the role of the many contexts in the child's development throughout the lifecycle (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2002). The literature has reported that there is a long-term relationship between teacher-student relations and success in the school. In greater detail, negative relations with teachers in the kindergarten

were found to correspond with negative learning and behavior outcomes during the eighth year of studies. In addition, a research study that evaluated the relationship between the quality of the teacher-student relations and academic and social skills found a relationship between the quality of the relations and the student's ability to acquire these skills (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2002). A relationship was also found between the quality of the teacher-student relations and the student's cooperation with the teacher and the student's positive relations with those his age.

Parent-child and teacher-child interpersonal relations are dyadic relations with a key role in the arrangement of the child's behavior in small groups. As aforementioned, the assessment is that the teacher-student relations are similar to the parent-child relations. Just as in the parent-child relations the child depends on the parent to provide his needs and requires the parent's help in the organization of the environment, so too in the teacher-child relations the child needs the teacher's help to acquire new skills and to integrate in the new social environment in the school. Indeed, it was found that positive relations between the teacher and the student help the student feel secure and support the student's learning in that they allow the student to use the teacher as a resource for learning (Pianta et al., 2002). It was further found that children who can establish positive relations with the teacher, especially with the teacher through whom they first are acquainted with the school, will tend to succeed in the school.

The educational system of relations between the teacher and the student and between the student and the teacher, or what Bokovza (2010) called the educational context, includes feelings of love and desire. The relationship between the teacher and the student exists in a protected intimate space, loving and liberating, which may be realized and be a central and meaningful part in the education process. The school setting creates a constant daily interaction between teachers and students. In the classroom, the influence between teachers and students is reciprocal. According to Gamble and Gamble (1993), the effect of the teacher-student interaction can be emotional, physical, cognitive, or a combination of the three together. It was found, for example, that the nature of the interaction especially influences the students' feeling and mental wellbeing as well as their academic achievements.

Friedman and Krongold (1993) noted that the system of relations between teachers and students, as it is expressed in the students' opinion, includes the students' reference to three aspects in the teachers' behavior:

1. Relationship, humaneness, and intimacy: a most central aspect in the reciprocal relations between the teacher and the teacher's students is associated with the teacher's displays of closeness with the students. The students are interested that the teacher display towards them a warm, humane, and even intimate attitude, serve as a source for guidance and advice, and help in solving their personal problems and support beyond the academic field.

2. The expression of trust and an attitude of respect: Another aspect in the mutual relations between the teachers and the students is linked to the trust and respect of the teachers towards their students. The students are very sensitive to this topic, they always feel that the teachers think they are liars, they do not feel very good when the teachers exhibit towards them suspicion and distrust. In addition, the students are most sensitive to teachers' condescending behavior, and they find it difficult to accept it. They feel the teachers are always preaching morality.

3. The atmosphere during the lessons: Another aspect indicated by the students is associated with the atmosphere in the class during the lessons. The students greatly appreciate that in the class there is a pleasant atmosphere. The teacher is considered a good teacher if he teaches well, and he gets additional points when he displays a sense of humor and creates an easy and calm atmosphere in the lessons.

The teacher-student relations are based on attachment theory. The main focus of attachment theory is on the formation and dissolution of relations, and as such it includes descriptions and explanations about factors and phenomena that influence the emotional relationships between children and those who care for them (Bowlby, 1973). According to attachment theory, the first role of attachment relations is to serve as a source of security for the child, especially in situations that spark tension and anxiety. The assumption is that children who hold regular and continuous relationships with adults during their first year of life develop an internal work model of these emotional relations, a model that includes emotions, beliefs, and expectations. In other words, they develop mental representations

regarding the emotional-social factors in the environment, about others, about themselves, and about their relations with those who are special for them (Bowlby, 1973).

Mental Resilience

Mental resilience or mental endurance is a term that describes a positive psychological ability to cope with situations of stress and crisis and to adapt to the life circumstances caused by these situations. Mental resilience is also a personality measure for the prediction of the ability to cope with future distress and is associated with abilities and attributes such as self-efficacy, sense of control in the individual's life, feeling of involvement, and a purpose in life and flexibility in the adjustment to unexpected changes (Shemesh & Shemesh, 2010). According to the American Psychological Association, (APA, 2009), mental resilience is not an innate attribute that the person has or does not have; rather, it is a combination of thoughts, behaviors, and actions that can be learned and developed in every person. They note a number of factors that contribute to mental resilience, and the main factor depends on supportive and caring relations inside and outside of the family. Lahad (2006) defines mental resilience as the sum of all the efforts that the person puts forth in life. This is an inherent ability to recover by the person himself, with the help of others, or through other means, despite short or lengthy falls. In his opinion, a situation of stress may develop into a crisis following repeated attempts to get out of it, which do not resolve the problem.

Resilience is a trait or process intended for dealing with different events. In this research study, resilience is defined both as an internal psychological potential and as a dynamic process of dealing with disruptive, pressuring, or challenging life events (Epstein & Krasner, 2013; Stainton, Chisholm, Kaiser, Rosen, Upthegrove, Ruhrmann, & Wood, 2018). The positive causes of resilience among adolescents are assets and resources; assets refer to the individual's internal factors of protection, such as self-efficacy, ability, and coping skills and resources are the individual's external positive factors, such as the parents' support or adults' guidance (Stainton et al., 2018).

Grotberg (1995) broadens the concept of mental resilience not only in the personal aspect but also in social contexts: this is a universal ability that enables the person, the

group, or the community to prevent, to reduce, or to overcome the destructive outcomes of difficulties, crises, and traumas. The concept brings us to the understanding that there is here coping with a new situation, which is threatening, frightening, and unusual in its intensity. According to the model of Folkman and Lazarus (1985), all the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral efforts are invested in order to reduce the pressure created in the conflict with the threatening environment. This model focuses on the importance of the cognitive factor in the coping with the stress and in the way in which we absorb and evaluate the information relevant to the threat and our coping. Alongside this assessment, we weigh the resources available to us for dealing with the danger. Such behavior allows us, at least ostensibly, to acquire a degree of control over the experience of the threat and danger that arises within us.

Teacher-Student Relations as Advancing Wellbeing and Resilience among Students

The teacher's personal attributes can influence different dimensions in the student especially the building of a positive system of relations. Thus, Carkhuff (1969) noted that caring teachers who exhibit empathy towards their students help the creation of an interpersonal system of relations with the students and thus identity and understand the needs of others. Teacher-student relations in a school environment are a reliable system of relations between the student and the teacher who provides guidance, support, and encouragement. Teachers have the ability to create informal mentoring relations with the students that build endurance and increase involvement. Through the examination of the nature of the relations between teachers and students and how they can be created with students, the teachers can obtain the ability to influence positively the young people's lives and to enable their future success. The literature indicates that interactions between the teacher and the student contribute to the quality of the learning environment in the class as well as to motivation, self-esteem, and resilience (Cipriano, Barnes, Kolev, Rivers, & Brackett, 2018).

Different research studies have examined the attachment relations with teachers in the elementary and secondary schools. It was found that safe relations with the teacher are

especially important when the significant figures in the child's family do not provide security. In these cases, the significant relation with the teacher may serve as a protective and compensatory factor. Alongside negative representations of relations, with the parents for example, the child will build a positive representation that will guide him in at least some of the future situations in his life (Ahnert, Harwardt-Heinecke, Kappler, Eckstein, & Milatz, 2012). One of the important predictors of safe relations with significant others is sensitive behavior on the adult's part; the teacher's sensitivity is defined as awareness of his students' academic and emotional needs. Therefore, a sensitive teacher is a teacher who constantly provides comfort, calm, and encouragement. He is aware of the problems and emotional distresses that may awaken in the student and pays attention to the student's lack of understanding and difficulties in the studies. When the teacher is sensitive, it is possible to see that the students feel comfortable searching for his support and guidance, participate in the lesson freely, and do not fear erroneous or mistaken statements in the learning process. A significant emotional connection with the teacher can also be a factor of protection for children who are found at potential risk, as in the cases of children who come from a poor social-economic background, children who begin the school studies with low preparation relative to the norm, or children who have emotional or cognitive adjustment difficulties (Shoyer & Gur-Yaish, 2014).

Different research studies (Khawaja et al., 2017) found that the advancement of the mental wellbeing is a supreme and important objective that influences the different aspects in the lives of adolescents and children and that the advancement of the mental wellbeing is influenced by different variables such as the mental resilience, depression, anxiety, and social support. However, the strong need arises to examine in greater depth the influence of the relationship between the social support of the teachers and the mental wellbeing of the adolescents, so that mental wellbeing is important to the adolescents' healthy development (Guo et al., 2018).

In this context of social support, research studies showed that the adolescents' health and mental wellbeing are influenced by different factors in advancing their social environment and the degree of social interaction between different social systems, including direct interactions of adolescents with teachers, parents, friends, and others in

their immediate environment (Ferguson, Kasser, & Jahng, 2011). Accordingly, teachers can provide adolescents with different dimensions of support that influence their development, such as emotional support, academic support, and functional support (Ansong, Okumu, Bowen, Walker, & Eisensmith, 2017). Hence, the teachers' support may be a protective factor influencing the adolescents' mental wellbeing. A number of research studies have found that the support from the teachers has a positive impact on the adolescents' psychological wellbeing, mental health, happiness, and satisfaction (Alivernini, Cavicchiolo, Manganelli, Chirico, & Lucidi, 2019). Research studies also have proved the relationship between teacher support and adolescent depression and social anxiety (Pössel, Burton, Cauley, Sawyer, Spence, & Sheffield, 2018).

In the end, we must not forget that : „Children are not miniature adults and their problems are not the miniature problems of adults. In order to understand them correctly, we must remember that child development has a heterochronic nature, to know the stages of neuropsychological child development and take into account its sensitive periods. This knowledge would protect us from wrongly constructing our diagnostic hypothesis and would help us to correctly plan the therapeutic process." (Krasteva-Ivanova M, 2020)

Research studies (Rosenberg, Ophir, & Asterhan, 2018) on the teachers' support have identified the component of resilience as a potential mediator in the relationship between the teachers' support and the adolescents' mental wellbeing. They found that good teacher-student relations and communication can improve the resilience, which was identified as a protective factor against the mental health problems and that may explain the positive influence of the teachers' support on the adolescents' mental wellbeing (Wilson & Saklofske, 2017). On the basis of the literature, it is possible to propose that the teachers' support, as an important resource for the adolescents, may advance negative emotions and further facilitate the adolescents' mental wellbeing. In other words, students who perceive themselves as receiving less support from teachers may feel that they lack value and are not loved. Indeed, adolescents tend to suffer from deficiencies in the self system that are expressed in the low satisfaction of the need for autonomy and in poor academic performances and in general are more vulnerable to negative emotions (Zhang, Fu, Liu, & Liu, 2018). Research studies also proved that students who receive critical

feedback from the teachers and other staff members in the school tend more to show higher levels of anxiety, educational tension, and symptoms of depression. However, the teachers' support can significantly lessen the adolescents' anxiety and depression. Moreover, they found that the negative emotions are negatively associated with satisfaction with their lives (Yu, Li, Wang, & Zhang, 2016).

References

Ahnert, L., Harwardt-Heinecke, E., Kappler, G., Eckstein, T., & Milatz, A. (2012). Student-Teacher Relationships and Classroom Climate in First Grade: How Do They Relate to Students' Stress Regulation?. *Attachment and Human Development, 14*, 249-263.

Alivernini, F., Cavicchiolo, E., Manganelli, S., Chirico, A., & Lucidi, F. (2019). Support for Autonomy at School Predicts Immigrant Adolescents' Psychological Well-Being. *J. Immigr. Minor. Health* 21, 761–766.

American Psychiatric Association – APA. (2009). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Ansong, D., Okumu, M., Bowen, G. L., Walker, A. M., & Eisensmith, S. R. (2017). The Role of Parent, Classmate, and Teacher Support in Student Engagement: Evidence from Ghana. *Int. J. Educ. Dev.* 54, 51–58.

Bokovza, G. (2010). Eros in the Educational Context, *Imagination and Action*, 13, 195-207. (Hebrew)

Bowlby, J. (1973). Attachment and Loss, Vol. 2: *Separation*. New York: Basic Books.

Bruner, G. (2000). *The Culture of Education: Articles on Education in Context*. Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, HaKibbutz HaArtzi. (Hebrew)

Carkhuff, R.R. (1969). Helper Communication as a Function of Helpee Affect and Content. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 16*(2), 126-131.

Cipriano, C., Barnes, T. N., Kolev, L., Rivers, S., & Brackett, M. (2018). Validating the Emotion-Focused Interactions Scale for Teacher-Student Interactions. *Learning Environments Research*, 1-12.

Davidovitz, R., Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P., Izsak, R., & Popper, M. (2007). Leaders as Attachment Figures: Leaders' Attachment Orientations Predict Leadership Related Mental Representations and Followers' Performance and Mental Health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 93*: 632-650

Epstein, R. M., & Krasner, M. S. (2013). Physician Resilience: What It Means, Why It Matters, and How to Promote It. *Acad. Med.* 88, 301–303.

Ferguson, Y. L., Kasser, T., & Jahng, S. (2011). Differences in Life Satisfaction and School Satisfaction among Adolescents from Three Nations: The Role of Perceived Autonomy Support. *J. Res. Adolesc.* 21, 649–661.

Folkman, S., & Lazarus R. S. (1985). If It Changes It Must Be a Process: Study of Emotion and Coping during Three Stages of a College Examination. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 48, 150–170.

Friedman, Y., & Krongold, N. (1993). *Reciprocal Relations between Teachers and Students: The Student's Viewpoint*, Jerusalem: The Henrietta Szold Institute. (Hebrew)

Gamble, T. K., & Gamble, M. (1993). *Communication Works* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Grotberg, E. (1995). *A Guide to Promoting Resilience in Children: Strengthening the Human Spirit. Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections, v. 8*. The Hague-NO: Bernard Van Leer Foundation.

Guo, C., Tomson, G., Keller, C., & Söderqvist, F. (2018). Prevalence and Correlates of Positive Mental Health in Chinese Adolescents. *BMC Public. Health* 18:263.

Khawaja, N. G., Ibrahim, O., & Schweitzer, R. D. (2017). Mental Wellbeing of Students from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds: The Mediating Role of Resilience. *Sch. Ment. Health* 9, 284–293.

Krasteva-Ivanova M, The primary interview in the individual psychological practice, Publisher: UP, VFU "Chernorizets Hrabar", ISBN: 978-954-715-707-1

Lahad, M. (2006). *Fantastic Reality: Creative Guidance in Therapy*. Tivon: Nord Press. (Hebrew)

Lang, G., & Bachinger, A. (2017). Validation of the German Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) in a Community-Based Sample of Adults in Austria: A Bi-Factor Modelling Approach. *J. Pub. Health* 25, 135–146.

Liu, R. D., Zhen, R., Ding, Y., Liu, Y., Wang, J., Jiang, R., & Xu, L. (2018). Teacher Support and Math Engagement: Roles of Academic Self-Efficacy and Positive Emotions. *Educ. Psychol.* 38, 3–16.

Pianta, R. C., Stuhlman, M., & Hamre, B. K. (2002). How Schools Can Do Better: Fostering Stronger Connections between Teachers and Students. In J. E. Rhodes (Ed.), *New Directions for Youth Development: A Critical View of Youth Mentoring* (pp. 91-107). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pössel, P., Burton, S. M., Cauley, B., Sawyer, M. G., Spence, S. H., & Sheffield, J. (2018). Associations between Social Support from Family, Friends, and Teachers and Depressive Symptoms in Adolescents. *J. Youth Adolesc.* 47, 398–412.

Rosenberg, H., Ophir, Y., & Asterhan, C. S. C. (2018). A Virtual Safe Zone: Teachers Supporting Teenage Student Resilience through Social Media in Times of War. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* 73, 35–42.

Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The Structure of Psychological Well-Being Revisited. *J. Person. Soc. Psychol.* 69, 719–727.

Salomon, G. (2000). *Technology and Education in the Era of Science*. Tel Aviv: Zmora Beitan Press. (Hebrew)

Shemesh, A., & Shemesh, R. (2010). Advancement of the Mental Resilience in Education-Therapy Work with Youths at Risk, *From Disconnection to Inclusion*, 16, 128-143. (Hebrew)

Shoyer, S., & Gur-Yaish, N. (2014). "Teacher, Can I Speak to You?" A Look at the Teacher's Professional Responsibility from a Perspective that Emphasizes Systems of Relations, *Devarim*, 7, 47-63. (Hebrew)

Stainton, A., Chisholm, K., Kaiser, N., Rosen, M., Upthegrove, R., Ruhrmann, S., & Wood, S. J. (2018). Resilience as a Multimodal Dynamic Process. *Early Interv. Psychiatry* 13, 725–732.

Wilson, C. A., & Saklofske, D. H. (2017). The Relationship between Trait Emotional Intelligence, Resiliency, and Mental Health in Older Adults: The Mediating Role of Savouring. *Aging Ment. Health* 22, 646–654.

Yu, C. F., Li, X., Wang, S. J., & Zhang, W. (2016). Teacher Autonomy Support Reduces Adolescent Anxiety and Depression: An 18-Month Longitudinal Study. *J. Adolesc.* 49, 115–123.

Zhang, D. H., Fu, D. M., Liu, H. Y., & Liu, L. M. (2018). Effect of Perceived Teacher's Autonomy Support on Students' Achievement: The Mediating Role of Autonomy Psychological Need and Intrinsic Motivation. *Teach. Educ. Res.* 30, 79–86.