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Correlation Between Teachers' Communication Practices and Students' Self-Esteem: Students' Perspective²

Extended summary

Given that teacher-student communication can impact one's self-esteem and that self-esteem is a personal construct and an individual feeling of every person, it is necessary to investigate students' perspective on which teachers communication practices contribute to their self-esteem. This is especially relevant considering the observed slight decrease in self-esteem as children transition into formal schooling, alongside with the significant impact of teacher-student communication on students' self-esteem. Hence, it is crucial to examine the relationship between teachers' communication practices and student self-esteem. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to determine how students with low and high levels of self-esteem perceive the impact of teachers' communication practices on their own self-esteem. More precisely, this paper focuses on the perceptual differences between students with low and high self-esteem regarding the communication practices they consider to have the most significant impact on their self-esteem. The reason for examining students' perspectives lies in the fact that students develop an awareness of their values and identity through communication with teachers, therefore, it is justified to examine their perspective. Furthermore, the reason for including only the viewpoints of students with low and high self-esteem, i.e. excluding students with average self-esteem, is the assumption that their

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perspectives diverge significantly. For this purpose, a study was conducted involving a sample of 120 participants. The research sample consisted of seventh and eighth-grade students from three elementary schools. The reason for sampling participants aged 14–16 lies in the fact that this developmental stage is characterized by the stabilization of the self-concept into patterns of high or low self-esteem, which this study aims to examine. The level of students' self-esteem were measured using the standardized Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. In order to gather data on teachers' communication practices, a Teachers Communication Practices Scale was specifically developed for the purposes of this study. This scale comprised four categories, each further divided into several subcategories: (1) Affectivity in communication, including the subcategory a) active listening; (2) Nonverbal communication practices and the subcategories: a) proxemic communication (use of space), b) facial expression, c) paralinguistic communication (pitch, speed of sound, etc.), then d) temporal communication (use of time), e) haptic and d) kinesthetic communication; (3) Participatory communication practices and its subcategory a) interactivity between students and (4) Presence of feedback. It is important to note that the number of items within each category was carefully balanced to ensure equal representation, thereby preventing any disproportionate emphasis on a particular category or its subcategories. The obtained data were processed through descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages).

The results of this study indicated that the same teachers' communication practices may have varying effects depending on the students' level of self-esteem. Thus, practices such as demonstrating empathy, respecting students' feelings, active listening and physical gestures such as handshaking, alongside involvement in discussions, debates, and collaborative work, are perceived as supportive by students with high self-esteem, i.e. as practices that to a great extent or completely affect their sense of self-esteem. In contrast, those students with low self-esteem perceive these practices as less influential, i.e. as practices that to a lesser extent affect their self-esteem or as practices that do not affect their self-esteem at all. On the other hand, students with low self-esteem perceive practices such as making distinctions between students, highlighting errors in front of the entire class and comparing grades with those of their peers as factors that completely impact their self-esteem. In light of these results, we consider it crucial for teachers to exclude from their communication those practices that are perceived as negative by students with low self-esteem in order to prevent the further development of negative self-perception among these students. In addition, the pedagogical implications of these findings primarily concern raising teachers' awareness of the the significance of their communication and its impact on students' personalities, ensuring that such communication is tailored to each student's individual level of self-esteem. In other words, these findings should encourage teachers to reflect on how to utilize communication to foster the development of students' positive self-esteem during every lesson. Additionally, the findings can serve as a framework for teachers to maintain and reinforce those practices that support students with high self-esteem, but at the same time as guidelines for developing specific strategies essential for students with low self-esteem. In this regard, future studies could focus on identifying the most successful communication strategies that students with low self-esteem perceive as effective, thus facilitating the development of a comprehensive model of teachers communication designed to support all students regardless of their self-esteem levels.

Keywords: communication practices, self-esteem, students, teachers

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