Caring Behavior of Teachers: Investigating the Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers and Students in Lahore

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Abstract

This study is designed to investigate perceptions of teachers and students about caring behavior of teachers. The purpose of the study is to gain better understanding about factors that play a role in the development of teachers' caring behavior and teacher-student caring relationship. A scale employed by King and Chan (2011) has been adopted for this purpose. The revised scale consists of four main factors (Sense of Respect and Trust, Interpersonal Relationships, Academic Support, and Classroom Management), and twenty two items. Data were collected from 403 grade 9 students and 156 secondary school teachers who belonged to seven public secondary schools in Lahore. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. The study revealed that both the teachers and students gave great importance to the teachers' caring behavior. They agreed to the top two factors i.e. Sense of Respect and Trust, and Classroom Management. The opinions differed about the priority of the other two i.e. Interpersonal Relationships and Academic Support. When it came to individual items, the differences were more prominent as four out of top five items were different. There were no statistically significant differences based on teachers' gender and education level, but their experience made a difference with less experienced teachers showing more inclination towards caring behavior. The study recommends the teachers to develop a culture of respect and care in the classroom by showing respect to the students, developing a culture of greetings, calling them with their proper names, appreciating good behavior, and involving them in decision making.

Keywords: *caring behavior, teacher behavior, classroom environment, teacher-student relationships*

1. Introduction

Lack of quality schooling and education hampers the overall growth of a country (Arum, 2011; Williams, 2011). Realizing this, educational policies and reforms have been introduced in Pakistan since its creation. Unfortunately, most of them do not focus on the improvement of students' inclusive learning

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experiences, but their test scores measured through uniform tests (Arum, 2011). No doubt, intellectual growth is important; but students' social, behavioral, and emotional development is as important if not more (Lee, 2012). When the emphasis is on the students' academic output only; their emotions, feelings and other aspects that affect and shape their overall personality and human values may be ignored (Hoffman, 2009). Teaching and learning are interlinked with emotional encounters and interactions since education is provided in a social environment (Hargreaves, 1998). Caring is an essential trait of a positive and healthy personality which is essential for a healthy and positive teacher-student relationship (Kim & Schallert, 2011). Consequently, it should be mandatory for teachers to know how to care, and create caring environment for students (Sinha & Thornburg, 2012). If teachers are unaware how students recognize or react to their care, it may often result in gap of caring communication (Knestling, 2008). This may ultimately lead to unbalanced growth of the students where content knowledge may be imparted, but personality and human values are ignored. This study investigates this important aspect of teaching and learning by exploring perceptions of secondary school teachers and students about caring behavior.

1.1   Objectives of the Study

Research objectives of this study included to:

1. investigate the teachers and students' perceptions about caring behavior
2. find out difference and similarities in perceptions of students and teachers
3. investigate how influential the demographic variables (gender, experience and education level) are in determining the teachers' caring behavior.

1.2   Significance of the Study

This study will be significant especially for teachers because through this they can understand the importance of caring behavior to the students. It may also tell them how they can show their care effectively. The study can also help to improve teacher-student relationship as they will learn the importance of caring. Findings of this study will therefore enhance interpersonal relationships between the students and the teachers and classroom environment which will ultimately improve not only the quality of education, but also students' psychological and social behaviors.

2. Literature Review

A caring learning environment should be the main focus of all policy makers and educators (Noddings, 2012). Walker (2008) said that the students liked and appreciated those teachers who loved and cared for them. Noddings (2010) stated that the success of an education system cannot be achieved unless the teachers created and developed an environment that made the students feel

that they were being cared for. In this way, the students will also learn to care for others.

Noddings (2012) said that the principle of care was an interpersonal principle. Talking about mutuality and teacher-student relationship, he further said that mutuality was an important constituent in interpersonal principle; but teacher-student relationship was not alike. The relationship between teacher and student can be defined as cared-for and acknowledged (Noddings, 2012). The students mostly respond to the teachers' care in term of respect, love and also care (but of different degree). The response of student is also essential as it strengthens the caring relation.

Teachers mostly come to school knowing how to teach and manage the students. They also utilize their life experiences to interact with the students (James, 2010). It is important that they also know about the caring behavior and how to promote it. Sinha and Thornburg (2012) said that teachers must be aware of the fact that caring did not occur in a void; the cared-for must recognize the care. They thought that only in that way, it can become reciprocal and bring the desired change (Sinha & Thornburg, 2012).

For the last two decades, researchers have become quite keen to investigate the significance of teacher-student association since it affects the students' academic outcome and behavior (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011; Pantic & Wubbels, 2012; Roffey, 2012). Teaching and learning can be improved by instilling feelings of association in a caring school environment (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Lombardi, Murray, & Gerdes, 2011; Badinelli et. al, 2012). Research has also shown that effective teacher-student relationships have a constructive effect on overall achievement of the students (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Gay, 2010; Averill, 2012).

Developing teacher-student connections and caring environment can not only improve the students' personality, but also play a key role in the improvement of their academic success (Noddings, 1984, 2012; Tosolt, 2008; Hachey, 2012). Arum (2011) stated that the lack of focus of reforms about student-teacher relations has adversely affected the achievement of national education goals. Teachers must maintain good relations with students to know them fully prior to knowing what they actually need to develop and learn (Pantic & Wubbels, 2012). When students realize that their teachers not only want to impart knowledge, but also to care for them as individuals; they pay more attention to their studies (Pattison, Hale, & Gowens, 2011).

According to Lombardi, Murray, and Gerdes (2011), effective teacher-student relationships play a key role for better adjustment and outcomes of students, particularly for those who are at the risk of failure. Roorda, Koomen,

Spilt, and Oort (2011) found that effective teacher-student relations not only brought favorable outcomes for at-risk students, but were also significant for better academic outcomes for students with low learning and socioeconomic background.

Caring environment in schools and classrooms can overcome cultural differences and issues which may affect students' learning outcomes (Gay, 2010). Effective classroom environment is strongly connected to teacher-student relationships that successfully address cultural issues by identifying students' background, and individual requirements (Gay, 2010; Averill, 2012; Pantic & Wubbel, 2012).

An effective teacher-student relationship is also likely to prevent the dropout rates of students because once students feel associated with their teachers; they may stay in school (Badinelli et. al, 2012). Teachers also benefit personally and professionally from positive connections they build with their students (Hargreaves, 2000; Roffey, 2012). Positive teacher-student relationships not only help the students, but also improve teachers' lives by bringing enjoyment, lowering stress, and improving their well-being (Hargreaves, 1998, 2000; Roffey, 2012). All of these are considered important factors for teachers' motivation, which has crucial impact on learners. If the teachers are satisfied with their professional life, they will invest more in the well-being of their students (Roffey, 2012). Therefore, less effective relations may result in the professional failure for the teachers, and their rejection by the students (Hargreaves, 1998).

According to sociologists, teacher-student relationships play a vital role in better social structure. Effective education reforms that transform the society only occur when teachers understand and care for the emotional, ethical and intellectual requirements of the students (Cohen & Hamilton, 2009). Unfortunately, the education reforms in Pakistan have generally ignored this aspect. They mostly focused on interactions between educators and formal syllabus (Arum, 2011). Similarly, research about caring behavior of the teachers in Pakistan is quite rare. This study tries to decrease some of this knowledge gap.

3. Research Methodology
3.1 Research Design

As the study aimed to investigate perceptions of the teachers and students from different schools, it was decided to use quantitative research method. Quantitative research method allows data collection from a large number of participants in comparatively limited amount of time (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010). Also, as there has not been a lot of research about caring behavior in Pakistan, it is more reasonable to conduct quantitative study at first to get a general picture.

3.2   Population of Study

Data were collected from public secondary schools in Lahore. According to School Education Department, Government of the Punjab, there are 153 boys and 180 girls' public high schools in Lahore (School Education Department, 2020). Students of grade 9 classes, and teachers teaching in those schools were taken as the population. Grade 9 students were selected as they were mature enough to understand the questionnaires and respond to them appropriately.

3.3   Sample and Sampling Techniques

Out of 331 schools, 7 were selected randomly. Later data were collected from 403 students and 156 teachers from them. All the students belonged to grade 9, while the teachers had been teaching grade 9 and 10.

3.4   Instrumentation

This study used the scale employed by King and Chan (2011). The researchers further modified the scale according to the Pakistani context. The original scale had 30 items, and the one adapted for this study had 22 items. Eight items were deleted during pilot testing. No item was added or modified. It consisted of four main factors: Classroom Management (CM) which consisted of 5 items, Academic Support (AS) having 7, Interpersonal Relationship (IR) of 5, and Sense of Respect and Trust (SRT) of 5 items. A pilot study was conducted for checking the reliability of the modified and adapted scale. The reliability value was .882.

3.5   Data Collection

With a permission letter obtained from district education officer, researchers visited the schools personally and gathered data with the help of the principals. Some of the questionnaires were filled on the spot while others were collected later. This whole process took around 5 months.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data findings are divided into two main parts: finding out the teachers and students' perceptions about the caring behavior, and the differences and similarities between them; and the influence of the demographic variables in determining the teachers' caring behavior.

4.1   Perceptions of the Teachers and Students about Caring Behavior

There were 7 items for AS and 5 each for SRT, CM, and IR each. As a result, there were maximum of 35 points (on five point Likert scale) for AS, and 25 for each of the other three. First mean score of all four factors was taken using formula $x = \Sigma x / n$ (Σx is the sum of all collected values of items, and n is total number). As the number is different (35 for AS, and 25 for other three), collected means does not represent the true picture. The mean (x) is then divided by the

maximum items values for each factor. That would give a score from 0 to 1 with 1 being the perfect score.

Table 4.1

Teachers and Students' Responses about Factors

Sub-scales	N	Teachers Mean (mean/max item value)	SD	N	Students Mean (mean/max item value)	SD
Sense of Respect and Trust (5 items)	156	22.15 (0.886)	2.88	403	20.81 (0.832)	2.79
Classroom Management (5 items)	156	21.32 (0.853)	2.00	403	19.58 (0.783)	3.60
Interpersonal Relationships (5 items)	156	20.33 (0.813)	2.46	403	18.87 (0.755)	4.19
Academic Support (7 items)	156	28.14 (0.804)	3.62	403	26.99 (0.771)	3.18

Descriptive statistics show that both the groups rated SRT as the most important factor while CM came second. Teachers rated IR as third and AS as fourth respectively while the students went the other way round.

Table 4.2

Teachers and Students' Responses about Each Item of the Four Factors

Teachers' Responses			Students' Responses		
Items (Factor)	Mean	SD	Items (Factor)	Mean	SD
Give students opportunities to make decisions that affect them. (SRT)	4.84	.417	Ask students for their opinions. (SRT)	4.49	.764
Are positive with students (CM).	4.73	.445	Greet students when entering the classroom. (IR)	4.45	.729
Call students by their names. (IR)	4.70	.460	Reward good behavior. (CM)	4.38	.806
Maintain eye contact with students when talking to them. (SRT)	4.63	.664	Hold high expectations for student achievement. (AS)	4.18	.740
Create an environment where students feel safe. (CM)	4.47	.501	Give students opportunities to make decisions that affect them (SRT)	4.13	.882
Enforce the same rules for all students.(CM)	4.36	.850	Make time for students before and after school. (AS)	4.07	.999
Ask students to help with classroom tasks.(SRT)	4.35	.864	Recognize students for extra-curricular	3.99	.961

			achievement. (IR)		
Hold high expectations for student achievement. (AS)	4.34	.527	Step in when students tease each other. (CM)	3.95	.895
Inform parents about their student's progress (AS).	4.29	1.223	Create an environment where students feel safe. (CM)	3.94	1.164
Give students hints when they do not understand or respond. (AS)	4.24	.626	Call students by their names. (IR)	3.93	1.485
Ask students for their opinions. (SRT)	4.19	.951	Provide students with "treats" and "rewards" on special occasions. (IR)	3.93	1.263
Take a personal interest in what students do outside their class. (IR)	4.15	1.187	Inform parents about their student's progress. (AS).	3.92	.933
Provide students with "treats" and "rewards" on special occasions. (IR)	4.14	.686	Maintain eye contact with students when talking to them. (SRT)	3.89	.745
Greet students when entering the classroom. (IR)	4.13	.964	Ask students to help with classroom tasks. .(SRT)	3.84	1.321
Reward good behavior. (CM)	3.91	1.006	Return work promptly with meaningful feedback. (AS)	3.83	.914
Recognize students for academic achievement. (AS)	3.87	.746	Recognize students for academic achievement. (AS)	3.78	.985
Display students' work. (AS)	3.86	.791	Give students hints when they do not understand or respond. (AS)	3.75	1.424
Step in when students tease each other. (CM)	3.85	1.190	Take a personal interest in what students do outside their class. (IR)	3.74	1.178
Return work promptly with meaningful feedback. (AS)	3.80	.657	Are positive with students. (CM).	3.70	.681
Recognize students for extra-curricular achievement. (IR)	3.78	.694	Enforce the same rules for all students. (CM)	3.60	1.400
Make time for students before and after school. (AS)	3.74	1.207	Display students' work. (AS)	3.45	1.048
Joke around with students. (IR)	3.55	.939	Joke around with students. (IR)	3.28	1.509

Table 4.2 shows the responses from the teachers and students about each of those 21 items. It shows that when it came to individual items, the preferences were different.

A look at the top five items selected by both the students and teachers shows a very interesting picture. Teachers selected two items from SRT (Give

students opportunities to make decisions that affect them, Maintain eye contact with students when talking to them), two from CM (Are positive with students, Create an environment where students feel safe), and one from IR (Call students by their names). The students on the other hand selected two items from SRT (Ask students for their opinions, Give students opportunities to make decisions that affect them), and one from CM (Reward good behavior), IR (Greet students when entering the class), and AS (Hold high expectations for student achievement) each. Amongst the top five items, only one was selected by both of the groups (Give students opportunities to make decisions that affect them), while other four were different, showing how the things were prioritized differently.

It is interesting to note that the points considered most important from the students' perspective mostly talked about empowering them (Ask students for their opinions, Give students opportunities to make decisions that affect them), positivity from the teachers (Hold high expectations for student achievement), appreciation (Reward good behavior) and politeness (Greet students when entering the class). Students generally considered a teacher to be caring and considerate if he/she had those qualities. Teachers, on the other hand, thought that empowering the students (Give students opportunities to make decisions that affect them), positivity (Are positive with students), safety (Create an environment where students feel safe), giving respect (Maintain eye contact with students when talking to them), and respecting individuality (Call students by their names) were the top ways of showing their care.

4.2   Influence of Demographic Variables in Determining the Caring Behavior of the Teachers

The third objective of the study is about the influence of demographic variables in determining the caring behavior of the teachers. This study focuses on three demographic variables: gender, experience and education level. The findings relating to them are as under.

It is often assumed that how male and females judge caring behavior is different. To investigate this, both teachers and the students were divided into two groups based on gender, and then independent t-test was used to see if there were any statistically significant differences about caring behavior. The results (Table 3) show that there are no gender based statistically significant differences about caring behavior of teachers. However, mean values show that teachers' mean scores (M= 91.68, F= 92.14) are greater than students' mean score (M= 86.23, F= 86.25), indicating that teachers have more understanding about the caring behavior, and give it more value than students.

Table 4.3

Independent Sample t-test on the basis of Gender

ID	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teachers	Male	69	91.68	6.84	-.375	.708
	Female	87	92.14	8.08		
Students	Male	196	86.23	13.65	-.017	.986
	Female	207	86.25	11.56		

A one-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of teachers' teaching experiences on their perceptions about caring behavior. Participants were divided into five groups (Group 1: 1-5 years; Group 2: 6-10 years; Group 3: 11-15 years; Group 4: 16-20 years; and Group 5: 20+ years). The results (Table 4) show that there is a statistical difference at the p < .05 level in the five categories of teaching experience: $F (4, 151) = 244.180$, p = .000. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean score between the groups was quite small. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .86.

Table 4.4

ANOVA Test on the basis of Teaching Experience

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7633.26	4	1908.316	244.18	.000
Within Groups	1180.09	151	7.815		
Total	8813.35	155			

As the results are significant, it was decided to run LSD Post Hoc Test of Multiple Comparisons. However, only significant differences are discussed here.

Table 4.5

Post-hoc of Multiple Comparison using Tuckey hsd Test based on Teachers' Experience

Comparison	Mean Difference	Sig.
1-5 years VS 6-10 years	14.879[*]	.000
6-10 years VS 1-5 Years	-14.879[*]	.000
11-15 Years VS 1-5 Years	3.518[*]	.000
16-20 Years VS 1-5 Years	2.702[*]	.000
20+ VS 1-5 Years	10.589[*]	.000

[*] The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4.5 indicated that the teaching experience contributes in the caring behavior of teachers. It shows that the group 1 and group 2 (1-5 years and 6-10 years of experience respectively) have highest level of understanding about the caring behavior. Maybe it is because that those who are new to the profession are more excited and passionate about it hence putting in more emotions and feelings. On the other hand, as teachers start getting more experienced and older,

they may start taking it as routine, hence depriving it of the passion and emotions that they once had.

Table 4.6

ANOVA Test on the basis of Education Level

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1522.618	3	507.539	10.58	.000
Within Groups	7290.740	152	47.965		
Total	8813.359	155			

The next question was to identify if the teachers' education level makes any difference. A one-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of education level on the perceptions of the teachers about caring behavior. Participants were divided in four groups (Group 1: Up to F.A/ F.Sc; Group 2: B.A/ B.Sc; Group 3: M.A/ M.Sc; Group 4: M.Phil/ Ph.D). There was a statistical difference at the $p < .05$: $F (3, 152) = 10.581$, $p = .000$. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .17, showing very small effect size. It means that education level did not have significant effect on caring behavior of the teachers in this study.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the study reinforce the findings of the previous studies which point out the importance of caring behavior of teachers (Gay, 2010; Averill, 2012; Pantic & Wubbel, 2012). Both the teachers and the students in this study valued caring behavior of teachers, and believed that it could be helpful for teachers to employ caring behavior which is apparently deficient in current school systems (Noddings, 1992). One of the reasons is that sometimes teachers prefer control to care for the sake of managing the class better (McLaughlin, 1991).

This study identified the factors and items that both the groups thought were important in improving caring environment in a classroom. Both of them agreed about the top two factors i.e. SRT, and CM. Many researchers have also talked about SRT as a key element to develop caring environment in a classroom (Ennis & McCauley, 2002; Pantic & Wubbels, 2012). Literature also shows that good classroom management skills help the students not only academically, but also personally and socially (Elias & Schwab, 2006; Landau, 2009). Opinions of the teachers and the students differed about the priority of the other two. Students gave more importance to AS while the teachers ranked IR higher. IR subscale had a comparatively lower mean score, but was still considered important by both the groups. It is also aligned with the previous research (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Lombardi, Murray, & Gerdes, 2011; Badinelli et. al, 2012). The low score (especially by the students) may be due to the traditional beliefs where the

teacher is giver and the caring one (Rogers & Webb, 1991), rather than teacher-students relations based on mutuality. As a result, teacher-students' relations were perceived by the students as respecting and respected ones rather than both groups respecting each other equally. Students gave more importance to AS, as they were likely to be more concerned in numbers and grades. It may be due to the fact that students are mostly judged in terms of test scores and marks (Volante, 2004).

Teachers gave higher points to opportunities to students to make decisions, respond positively, try to remember their names and call them with name so that the sense of respect and affiliation can be developed. The teachers also believed that making an eye contact with students when talking to them, and providing such environment where students can feel safe were important. Students preferred items like teachers greeting them when they enter classroom, teachers asking for their opinions, rewarding the students' good behaviors, holding high expectations for their academic achievement, and trying to give opportunities to them for making decisions to involve them in the whole teaching-learning process. Generally, both groups thought highly about the points which would indicate positivity, empowering and respecting the students. Traditional ideas of teachers dominating and controlling the class, and the students simply giving respect and following them, are still prevalent in many countries (Thomas, 2013). Pakistani schools and classrooms have traditionally been dominated by the teachers with students expected to take orders from them. It is good to see that both teachers and students now believe in reciprocity and mutuality although not at the same level. As the findings indicated that the teachers were still believed to be more entitled to get respect and give care.

Caring behavior of the teachers not only increases the teacher-students relationships, but also creates a conducive and positive environment. In which, students do not study because of fear or pressure, but because of motivation and love (Pattison, Hale, & Gowens, 2011). It not only helps improving the students' academic performance, but also in shaping their personality in a positive and civilized way. Previous research also emphasized on empathy and care by the teachers as it would help the students in becoming better human beings (Walker, 2008). In the current world and especially Pakistan where lack of caring behavior, mutual respect and tolerance have been hurting and harming peace, harmony and overall prosperity of the society (Ahmar, 2011; Ahmad et. al, 2014); there is an acute need to instill sense of care, love and empathy. Education can be one of the most important tools for developing caring behavior and humanistic values hence creating an environment of peace, love and care (Harris, 1988; Salomon, 2004). Unfortunately, by and large, education systems ignore

these aspects and merely focus on imparting content knowledge. This is ripe time that the educationists and reformers shift their focus, and start using education as a tool for promoting love, care and harmony. This can only happen when teachers understand the value and importance of creating a caring environment in the classroom, and help the students understand and pick those values. By doing this, overall educational environment is likely to become caring, civilized and positive. It will not only help the schools in becoming better educational institutions; but also in improving overall social and human values in the country, making it a more tolerant, loving and caring place to live in.

6. Recommendations

This study comes up with the following recommendations.

1. While developing education policies, policymakers should also focus on aspects which help developing humanistic values amongst the students.
2. Teachers should not only preach and exhibit care and kindness, but also acknowledge and appreciate when the students are demonstrating it. In this way, students will be encouraged and those positive values will be strengthened.
3. Teachers must treat the students in a respectful manner and also encourage the students to behave with one another in the same way. This will develop a culture of respect and trust in the class.
4. Teachers should call the students by their name rather than generic words like boy, girl, *bachay* (child) etc. It will give them identity and respect.
5. Teachers should develop the culture of greetings in the class through practice and preaching. Simple words like *Assalam-o-Alaikum*, Good Morning; *Shukriya*/ Thank you and Welcome should be used frequently in the class.
6. Students should be asked for their opinion in different matters to give them a sense of participation. In this way, they would feel more responsible and work harder in accomplishing the goals.

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