

# The Effects of Teacher-Student Relationships on Academic Achievement – a College Survey

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## Abstract

*An attitude of support in the learning environment can positively affect academic outcomes. Educational risks associated with the absence of a positive relationship between teachers and students include: high rates of college dropout, low self-efficacy, and low self-confidence. The vast majority of sociological research concerning the relationship between teachers and students deals with secondary school and high school years. The present study concentrates on the academic trajectory of college students. The first objective of the present study is assessing the impact of the teacher-student relationship on academic achievements starting from the hypothesis that teachers' respect, trust and care positively influence students' performances. The second objective is presenting the psychosocial profile of a good teacher in the vision of the questioned students. The study confirmed that equal treatment, the teachers' patience and extracurricular availability remain important throughout the entire educational process. Concerning the psycho-social profile of a good teacher, qualities that concern providing emotional comfort have the highest share. The present survey brings into light the deficiencies of emotional education in Romanian educational system. The research underlines the importance of didactic training of the teaching staff and the necessity of counseling services.*

**Keywords:** *academic achievement, learning environment, teacher-student relationship, psychosocial profile, educational risks.*

## Introduction

There are consistent empirical results from longitudinal surveys which indicate that students improve both academically and socially from positive teacher-student relationships.<sup>1</sup> More precisely: an attitude of support in the

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<sup>1</sup> K. R. Wentzel, "Sociometric status and adjustment in middle school: A longitudinal study," *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 23(1), (2003), 5-6.

learning environment can positively affect academic outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of sociological research concerning the relationship between teachers and students deals with secondary school and high school years.<sup>3</sup> Psychosocial studies regarding the developmental significance of the quality of the teacher – student relationship show that students who perceive their teachers in a positive way, as being warm and close, are more motivated to improve their academic achievements.<sup>4</sup>

### *Study's objective and methodology*

The present study concentrates on the academic trajectory of college students. The general motivational theory we start from affirms that students' perception of their relationship with their teachers is important in the process of reaching academic performance.<sup>5</sup> Having in mind the psychometric distinction between aptitude and achievement,<sup>6</sup> relationships designated as positive from a socio-educational standpoint between students and their teachers can be characterized through psychosocial indicators like closeness, warmth and positivity.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the educational risks associated with the absence of a positive relationship between teachers and students include: high rates of college dropout, low self-efficacy, and low self-confidence.<sup>8</sup>

The first objective of the present study is assessing the impact of the teacher-student relationship on academic achievements starting from the hypothesis that teachers' *respect, trust* and *care* positively influence students' performances. The

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<sup>2</sup> D. Yun Dai and R. J. Sternberg, *Motivation, Emotion, and Cognition (Integrative Perspectives on Intellectual Functioning and Development)* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, Mahwah, 2004), 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> S. L. Dika and K. Singh, "Applications of social capital in educational literature: A critical synthesis," *Review of Educational Research* 72(1), (2002), 31-32.

<sup>4</sup> J. N. Hughes, T. A. Cavell and V. Willson, "Further support for the developmental significance of the quality of the teacher–student relationship," *Journal of School Psychology* 39(4), (2001), 289-300.

<sup>5</sup> F. Pajares and L. Graham, "Self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings," *Review of Educational Research* 66(4), (1996), 543.

<sup>6</sup> J. B. Carroll, *Human cognitive abilities: A survey of factor-analytic studies* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1993), 29.

<sup>7</sup> U. Orth, R. W. Robins and K. F. Widaman, "Life-span development of self-esteem and its effects on important life outcomes," *Journal of personality and social psychology* 102(6), (2012), 1272.

<sup>8</sup> B. J. Zimmerman, A. Bandura and M. Martinez-Pons, "Self-motivation for academic attainment: The role of self-efficacy beliefs and personal goal setting," *American Educational Research Journal* 29(3), (1992), 663-676.

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second objective is presenting the psycho-social profile of a good teacher in the vision of the questioned students.

The target population consisted of second and third year Bachelor Degree students of “Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava from Romania for the reason that they have sufficient experience to be questioned with regard to the different aspects of the teacher-student relationship. First year students have not been surveyed because their expressed opinions would reflect mainly the experience of pre-university education. The population was designed for a proportionally multilayered sampling on faculties and study programs. A number of 411 questionnaires have been validated, representing 15% of the total of the investigated population.<sup>9</sup> It was an anonymous, questionnaire - based inquiry. The questionnaire had the following taxonomical structure: 2 open questions, 8 items with attitudinal-scale type responses (Likert Scale), 1 item with dichotomical responses (yes/no) and 1 item with ordinal-scale responses.

#### *Survey's results*

Student's general perception on the relation between teachers' attitude and academic performances has been explored through a direct evaluation question. A percentage of 77.6% of students considers that teachers' attitude “largely” and “greatly” influence their academic performance.<sup>10</sup> The detailed results will be presented within the frame of the conceptual dimensions of “mutual respect”, “care” and “mutual trust” in connection to the influence they have on declared academic outcomes.

#### THE “MUTUAL RESPECT” DIMENSION

Students' *representations* on the importance of *respect* for and from their teachers have been explored. Students wish to be respected as human persons in the University's educational environment (90% of responses). Accepting expressed opinions (87.6% of responses), respecting teaching time (78.6% of responses) and punctuality (74.5% of responses) are the concrete expectations related to the manifestation of teachers' respect towards them.<sup>11</sup> The existence of model teachers (90.1% of responses) and the active participation at courses and seminars are also considered extremely important (86.6% of responses).

As far as *the perception of the respect* paid by teachers is concerned, correlating the two scores of the responses of item R4, it is observed that, although

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<sup>9</sup> See Annex 4.

<sup>10</sup> See Table 9.

<sup>11</sup> See Table 1.

88.8% of students declare that they feel respected by teachers, only 58.2% “can make mistakes without being judged.” The obvious statistical gap indicates a possible deficiency of the learning environment suggesting that the occasional mistake is exaggeratedly sanctioned.<sup>12</sup>

The freedom of critical expression inside the educational institution is an important related issue. Analyzing the results we ascertain that the scores of positive appreciation represent 89.2% of responses (average scores = 49.34%, superior scores=39.86%).<sup>13</sup> Comparing the responses to the item referring to the importance of accepting students’ opinions to those that evaluate effective freedom of critical expression at USV, we ascertain that superior scores at the first item represent 87.6%, while at the second only 39.8%.<sup>14</sup> There is again a statistical gap between the students’ expectations and the reality perceived within the institutional environment.

Another key issue is the way students react to authority. To assess the extent to which students accept teachers’ authority we used a specially designed item which refers to class management in the circumstances of potential deviant behavior. The majority of students (72.5%) recommend a firm attitude on the teachers’ side.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, a percent of 64.5% (265 of responses of 411) consider that the disturbance of courses by classmates must be promptly sanctioned while continuing to feel respected by their teachers “to a great and large extent.”<sup>16</sup> The correlated responses suggest the acceptance of the teacher’s authority in class without reservations.

#### THE “MUTUAL TRUST” DIMENSION

Students are aware they need guidance (91.5%), are convinced of the good intentions of their teachers (77.2%) and willing to receive their suggestions (78.6%).<sup>17</sup> A significant smaller percentage (66.5%) of students considers that trust as being a mutual one.<sup>18</sup> This suggests a degree of low self-confidence.

#### THE “CARE” DIMENSION

For the majority of students equal treatment (95.6%) and patience (94.9%) are of the most importance. Extracurricular availability (82.9%) and support in implementing personal projects (79.8%) follow. The index of interest for personal

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<sup>12</sup> See Table 2.

<sup>13</sup> See Graph 1.

<sup>14</sup> See Table 3.

<sup>15</sup> See Table 4.

<sup>16</sup> See Annex 2.

<sup>17</sup> See Table 5.

<sup>18</sup> See Table 6.

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needs has a lower score (73.8%).<sup>19</sup> The majority of the students (85.2%) actually perceive teachers care for their professional future.<sup>20</sup> Overall, students consider that teachers are genuinely preoccupied with their academic success. With regard to the final assessment of the teacher-student relationship, the distribution of answers that denote positive appreciation is the following: 61.6% of students appreciate their relationship with USV teachers as “good” or “very good”, while 29.7% only consider it satisfactory. Average scores, not superior ones, are preponderant (satisfactory – 29.7%, very good – 17.8%).<sup>21</sup>

#### THE INFLUENCE OF MUTUAL RESPECT, CARING AND MUTUAL TRUST ON DECLARED ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Analyzing the manner in which teachers’ respect, the trust they awaken in students and the care they manifest for their professional future influences declared academic results has led to the following results.

The percentage of students that declared superior results while they felt respected by their teachers to a “large” and “a great extent” is 59.45% (239 of 402 expressed responses) as opposed to the 27.36% (110 of 402 expressed responses) which reported only average results. Hence, perceiving the teachers’ *respect* positively influences declared academic results.<sup>22</sup>

A percentage of 47.13% (189 of 401 expressed responses) of students who obtained superior results the previous year declare that teachers trust in them as opposed to the 17.7% (71 of 401 expressed responses) who obtained average results. In consequence, perceiving teachers’ *trust* in their students positively influences academic results.<sup>23</sup>

A percentage of 59.6% of surveyed subjects (235 of 394 of expressed responses) who “feel that their teachers wish for them to succeed professionally” obtained superior results as opposed to the 25.8% (102 of 294 of expressed responses) who obtained average results. Becoming aware or teachers’ preoccupation with the professional journey of their students positively influence academic success.<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion, provided that the results may be partly due to other reasons (differences regarding learning capacity, lack of honesty in declaring academic results), perceiving the *care* and *respect* of teachers towards their students

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<sup>19</sup> See Table 7.

<sup>20</sup> See Table 8.

<sup>21</sup> See Table 14.

<sup>22</sup> See Table 10.

<sup>23</sup> See Table 11.

<sup>24</sup> See Table 12.

positively influences academic performances of the surveyed subjects, whereas the indicator of trust is far behind.<sup>25</sup>

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This has been realized through organizing the desirable and amendable character traits into two categories: the first concerns the psycho-affective aspect of the teacher-student relationship (278 versus 79 responses)<sup>26</sup> and the latter the quality of the didactic act in terms of teaching and manner of assessment (226 versus 175 responses).<sup>27</sup>

Regarding the first category, qualities that regard *providing emotional comfort* have the highest score: *patience* and *calm* – 47.8% (133 of 278 responses), followed by the capacity to *communicate* and *empathize* – 30.6% (85 of 278 responses). *Tyrannical behavior* and *impulsivity* are most frequently amended – 34.2% (27 of 79 responses). *Irony* and *contempt* are also amended – 33% (26 of 79 responses) followed by *lack of punctuality* – 11.4% (9 of 79 responses) which denotes the need for respect from their teachers.

With regard to the *quality of the didactic act*, students expect that their teachers be *competent* and *dedicated to teaching* – 51.3% (116 of 226 responses), *disinterest* and *incompetence* being largely amended – 61.1% (107 of 175 responses). With regard to the *manner of assessment*, *indulgence* is one of the top expectations – 29.2% (66 of 226 responses), the most amended character traits being *harshness* and *exaggerated exigency* – 26.3% (46 of 175 responses).

In conclusion, surveyed students consider that a good teacher must, in the following order: provide emotional comfort to students, be competent and dedicated to teaching, have communication capacity, be indulgent in the manner of assessment and respect his students through punctuality.

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<sup>25</sup> See Table 13.

<sup>26</sup> See Tables 15.1,15.2

<sup>27</sup> See Table 15.3

*Final conclusions*

Students consider that teachers are preoccupied with their academic success and that their attitude influences their personal performances “largely” and “greatly”. The survey’s results denote that for students the existence of model teachers and the need to be respected as human persons in the University’s educational environment are primary in order of importance. Their concrete expectations are: acceptance of personal opinion, observance of teaching time and punctuality.

With regard to the perception of the respect from their teachers during courses and seminars, appreciations are positive, but the study points out the existence of a series of psychosocial problems in the learning environment: students accept the teacher’s authority without reserve, but affirm that the occasional mistake tends to be exaggeratedly sanctioned. With regard to the freedom of critical expression within the University there is a perceived gap between the real possibility offered by the institutional environment and students’ expectations.

Students acknowledge the need for guidance from teachers, are convinced of their good intentions and willing to receive their suggestions. The study confirms that equal treatment, the teachers’ patience and extracurricular availability remain important throughout the entire educational process. Interest in their personal needs is less significant.

Perceiving the care that teachers manifest for their professional future and their respect towards them as persons contributes the most to the improvement of academic performances. The teacher-student relationship is evaluated as being between “satisfactory” and “very good” by the large majority of surveyed students.

Concerning the psycho-social profile of a good teacher, surveyed students consider that a good teacher must, in the order of importance: be calm and patient, competent and dedicated in the act of teaching, have communication capacity, be indulgent in the manner of assessment and respect his students through punctuality. The qualities that concern *providing emotional comfort* have the highest share. Confirming the results of previous studies<sup>28</sup> the present survey brings into light the deficiencies of emotional education in Romanian educational system. The research underlines the importance of didactic training of the teaching staff and the necessity of psychotherapeutic counseling services.

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<sup>28</sup> K. Karen, M. Thisjs and L. Schakel, “The relationship of emotional intelligence with academic intelligence and the Big- Five,” *European Journal of Personality* 16 (2), (2002): 103-104.

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### **Annexes:**

*Table 1: percentage scores for item R1 in descending order (extracted from Annex 1)*

It is important (to)	To a great extent	To a large extent
the existence of a model teacher	66,7	23,4
to respect the student as a person	71,8	18,2
accept students' opinions	51,8	35,8
students' participation in class	41,8	44,8
respect teaching time	37	41,6
teachers' punctuality	37	37,5

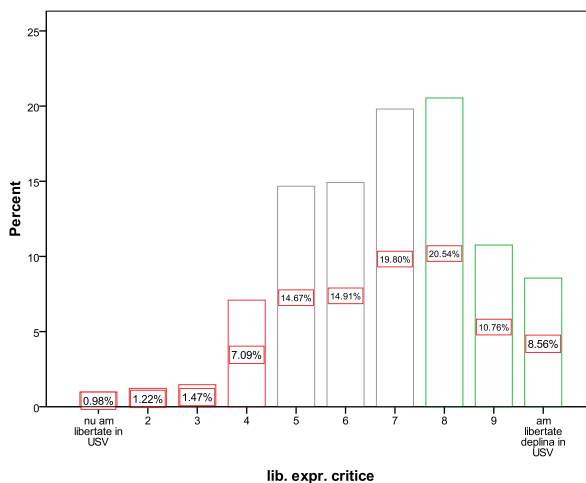


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*Table 2: percentage scores for item R4.*

<i>During courses and seminaries, you :</i>	<i>To a great extent</i>	<i>To a large extent</i>	<i>To a small extent</i>	<i>To a very small extent</i>	<i>It is not of importance</i>	<i>No response</i>
feel respected by teachers	28,2	60,6	8,8	1,7	0,7	-
can make mistakes without being judged	20,7	37,5	31,4	8	1,9	0,4

*Graph 1: Percentage scores for item R2*



*Table 3: percentage scores of responses to items R1.5 and R2*

accepting students’ opinions important “to a great and large extent”	87,6%
the freedom to express oneself critically, highly evaluated (above 8)	39,8%

*Table 4: percentage scores for item R2*

Manner of management in case a colleague is disturbing the course	%
Ignore him	4,9
Discuss with him after class	22,4
Reprimand him and continue	31,9
Eliminate him from class	40,6
No response	0,2

*Table 5: percentage scores for item I1*

It is true that:	To a great extent	To a large extent	To a small extent	To a very small extent	No	No response
you need teachers’ advice	50,4	41,1	6,8	1,5	0,2	-
you are convinced of their good intentions	30,2	47	19,2	2,9	0,5	0,2
accept their suggestions	36	42,6	18	2,4	0,7	0,2

*Table 6: percentage scores for item I2*

It is true that:	To a great extent	To a large extent	To a very small extent	I don't know	No
teachers trust in you	13,9	52,6	14,4	18,2	1

*Table 7: percentage scores of positive responses for item G2 in descending order (extracted from Annex 3)*

It matters:	to a large and a great extent
equal treatment	95,6
patience	94,9
extracurricular availability	82,9
support in the implementation of personal projects	79,8
interest for their personal needs	73,8

*Table 8: percentage scores for item G3*

You feel that:	Yes	No	No responses
your teachers want you to succeed professionally	85,2	11,2	3,6

*Table 9: percentage scores for item E1 in descending order*

Teacher's attitude influences your academic results:	%
greatly	40,9
largely	36,7
little	14,6
very little	3,2
not at all	1,9

*Table 10: frequency of responses to item R4.1 on the basis of the reported average of the previous year*

		previous year average			
		no answer	8-10	6-8	under 6
The perception of teachers' respect	to a great extent	3	80	31	0
	to a large extent	4	159	79	2
	to a small extent	0	17	16	1
	to a very small extent	0	3	3	1
	it is of no importance	0	1	1	1

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*Table 11: frequency of responses to item I2 on the basis of the reported average of the previous year*

		previous year average			
		No answer	8-10	6-8	under 6
The perception of their teachers' trust in them	to a great extent	0	47	10	0
	to a large extent	4	142	61	0
	to a very small extent	0	27	28	3
	there is none	0	1	2	1
	nu ştiu	2	43	29	1

*Table 12: frequency of responses to item G3 on the basis of the reported average of the previous year*

		previous year average			
		No answer	8-10	6-8	under 6
Awareness of the preoccupation with their professional success	No answer	2	2	3	0
	yes	4	235	102	1
	no	0	19	23	3

*Table 13: percentage scores that describe the importance of the “care”, “respect” and “confidence” dimensions in descending order*

Teacher-student relationship dimensions:	%
care	59,6
respect	59,4
trust	47,1

*Table 14: percentage scores of teacher-student relationship appreciation in USV*

Teacher-student relationship appreciation in USV:	%
very good	17,8
good	43,8
satisfactory	29,7
unsatisfactory	7,3
completely unsatisfactory	0,7
no answer	0,7

*Table 15.1: frequency of responses to open questions P1 and P2*

Desirable traits:	No.	Amendable traits:	No.
patience and calm	133	tyrannical behavior and impulsivity	27
ability to communicate and empathy	85	inability to communicate and interact	17
availability and support	32		
sense of humor	5		

*Table 15.2: frequency of responses to open questions P1 and P2*

Desirable traits:	No	Amendable traits:	No
punctuality	19	irony and contempt	26
courtesy and respect	4	lack of punctuality	9

*Table 15.3: frequency of responses to open question P1 and P2*

Desirable traits:		Amendable traits:	
competence and dedication	116	incompetence and disinterest	107
indulgence	66	exaggerated exigency and harshness	46
integrity and correctness in grading	22	incorrectness	4
good organization and presentation of the lesson	18	disorganization in teaching	12
creativity and innovation capacity	4	routine behavior	6

*Annex 1: percentage table of responses to item R1*

It is important:	To a great extent	To a large extent	To a small extent	To a very small extent	It is of no importance	No answer
the existence of the model teacher	66,7	23,4	6,3	0,5	2,2	1
to respect the student as a person	71,8	18,2	5,6	1	1,5	1,9
to accept students' opinions	51,8	35,8	7,5	1	2,2	1,7
students' participation in class	41,8	44,8	9,5	1,2	2,2	0,5
to observe teaching time	37	41,6	15,8	1,9	2,7	1
the teacher's punctuality	37	37,5	18	3,2	2,9	1,5

*Annex 2: frequency cross-table with the answers to items R3 and R4.1*

Management of deviant behavior	Teachers' respect	To a great extent	To a large extent	To a small extent	To a very small extent	It is of no importance
	To ignore him	7	10	3	0	0
	To discuss with him after class	31	51	6	2	2
	To reprim him and to continue	29	86	14	2	0
	To ask him to exit the classroom	49	101	13	3	1

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*Annex 3: percentage table of responses to item G2*

It is of importance that teachers manifest:	To a great extent	To a large extent	To a small extent	To a very small extent	It is of no importance	No answer
equal treatment	66,2	29,4	2,2	1	1,2	-
patience	67,6	27,3	3,4	0,5	1,2	-
availability	48,4	34,5	12,2	2,9	1,9	-
interest in personal needs	34,1	39,7	18,5	4,4	3,4	-
support with the implementation of personal projects	46	33,8	15,1	3,4	1,5	0,2