

Impact of Teacher-Student Relationship (TSR): A Comparison Study Between Students With and Without Intellectual Disability

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Abstract

This is a comparison study conducted between students in the mainstream and SPED schools. In total, there were 364 participants; 200 students from a mainstream secondary school and 164 participants from two SPED secondary schools in Singapore. Specifically, this study examined if students in SPED schools differ from their peers who are in mainstream school in their way of experiencing teacher-student relationships. In addition, this study also looked at which particular domains of the teacher-student relationship that predict both behavioural and socio-emotional adjustment among students with and without intellectual disability. All participants were administered a survey to measure their teacher-student relationships, behavioural adjustment and socio-emotional adjustment in schools. The independent sample t-test analyses showed that students in the SPED schools reported significant better teacher-student relationships, as compared to their typically developing peers in the mainstream school. This finding is interesting as it is inconsistent with past similar research in the literature. This finding could be due to how educational policy for individuals with special needs differ in Singapore context in comparison to other countries such as the America. The multiple regression analyses further revealed that teacher-student relationships have strong influence on students' behavioural outcomes, both among students in SPED and mainstream schools. Specifically, absence of conflict, presence of nurturance and positive rapport with their teachers and these factors were protective of students from engaging in behavioural issues such as truancy, disobedience, and defiance. In terms of students' socio-emotional outcomes, the multiple regression analyses showed that teacher-student relationships have influence only among students with ID, but not those in the mainstream schools. Specifically, the findings seem to suggest that it is important for students in SPED school to feel accepted or liked by teachers so as to enhance their emotional regulation and problem solving ability. We will discuss the implications of these findings in the light of teacher education with respect to teacher-student relationships.