

POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING

[RELASI POSITIF ANTARA GURU DAN SISWA UNTUK PEMBELAJARAN YANG EFEKTIF]

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Abstract

The distance between teacher and students can affect students' performance in the teaching and learning process. On the other hand, a Christian teacher as an agent of reconciliation should build a positive relationship with the students by showing love and caring as God does it first to us. Thus, this paper aims to know the importance and the possible ways of creating a positive teacher-student relationship for effective learning. Through the literature review, the writer found that a positive teacher-student relationship has impacted students' performance, by which they will be more confident and motivated to participate in the learning process. Hence, the teacher must be flexible and be able to select the most suitable ways to build a positive relationship. It is recommended for the next researcher to find ways to embed the boundaries amid positive relationships.

Keywords: Students' performance; teacher-student relationship; Christian teacher; learning process

Abstrak

Jarak antara guru dengan siswa dapat mempengaruhi prestasi siswa dalam proses belajar mengajar. Di sisi lain,

seorang guru Kristen sebagai agen rekonsiliasi harus membangun hubungan guru-siswa yang positif melalui tindakan kasih dan kepedulian seperti yang telah Allah lakukan lebih dahulu. Oleh karena itu, makalah ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pentingnya dan cara-cara yang memungkinkan untuk menciptakan relasi guru-siswa yang positif. Melalui kajian literatur, penulis menemukan bahwa relasi ini memberikan dampak bagi prestasi siswa, dimana mereka lebih percaya diri dan termotivasi untuk berpartisipasi dalam proses pembelajaran. Maka, guru Kristen harus mampu untuk menjadi fleksibel dan mampu untuk memilih mana cara yang paling tepat dan cara yang harus dihindari dalam membangun relasi guru-siswa yang positif. Disarankan kepada peneliti selanjutnya untuk menemukan bagaimana cara menanamkan batasan di tengah-tengah relasi yang positif.

Kata Kunci: Prestasi siswa; relasi guru-siswa; guru Kristen; proses pembelajaran

Introduction

Aultman, Williams-Jonson, & Schutz said that creating a positive teacher-student relationship will significantly affect the teaching and learning process (as cited in, Paschal et Mkulu 2020). Effective teaching methods and strategies would not be able to work well in students' learning process if the teacher and the students do not have a good relationship (as cited in, Cherian & Mau 2003). Thus, if the teacher and the students do not have good relationships inside and outside the classroom, the learning process would not run effectively and this may cause conflict or problems between the teacher and the students in the learning process.

Based on the previous study conducted by Maulana et al. (2011), he found that most students said that their teachers prefer to keep their distance physically and psychologically from students because of the teaching methods culture in Indonesia. A teacher is a highly respected occupation, and it makes them teach directive and authoritatively.

Besides that, most teachers prefer to give spoken punishment to students and expect students to be afraid and not misbehave while learning English (Putri et Refnaldi 2020). These two case examples showed that teachers in Indonesia need some discipline development to make them act as whole teachers who do care about their students' needs and feelings rather than only transferring material.

As Buchori found in his research many teachers in Indonesia are uni-disciplinary which are lacking knowledge of sociology, psychology, and communication which affects classroom practices (as cited in, Zulfikar 2010). The teacher would not know about their students' needs and feelings because of the arrogancy in creating distances and no positive relationship between the teacher and the students. The teacher wants to emphasize his/her authority as a teacher so they can do all things including yelling, setting unimportant boundaries, and neglecting students' feelings and needs. These attitudes will affect the classroom practices and it is needed to be redeemed.

Gale & Densmore (2003) said that teaching is not only talking about transferring the material to the students well, but it is more than that which is doing something that can improve students' development. As Wolk said a good teacher must be able to create a democratic environment that allows teachers to respect and understand students' abilities (as cited in, Zulfikar 2010). On the other hand, in Christian education, a teacher is an agent of reconciliation. The teacher will do this by telling students that our values have been distorted by sin and have broken the relationship between God and other people. However, God still keeps blessing us, thus humans need to live and stick to God's values and character. Humans need to love all people including teachers and students by creating relationships, since loving others is the art of loving God (Knight, 2006).

In this paper, the writer will focus on the teacher's role in creating a positive relationship with the students. Pianta said that the teacher-student relationship is both the teacher's and students' responsibilities, but the one who has more power and capability to create this is the teacher than the students (as cited in, Vitto 2003). According to Knight (2006) one of the qualifications of a Christian teacher is social qualification. A teacher must think of arranging a class with pleasure, creativity, challenge, and joy and be passionate about the various characters of students to build a connection with them (Dahal, 2013). It

can be seen in God with His disciples where He never gives unimportant boundaries, but He mingles and engages with them to make the more interesting study. This paper will answer these research questions:

1. How does the teacher-student relationship matter in Christian education?
2. What are the possible ways to create a positive teacher-student relationship to support the teaching and learning process?

Constructivism in Student's Learning Process

Yilmaz (2008) explains that students have the capacity to give questions, solve problems, and construct knowledge and theories while in the teaching and learning process. However, the goodness of humanity is distorted and changed since humans prefer to reject God and chose their own way which drives them to be aggressive, alienated, brutal, and selfish (Knight, 2006). Students are part of human beings who are also created by God with those strengths and weaknesses. They get free will from God to choose and decide, whether they want to obey and be responsible or not (Van Brummelen, 2015). All in all, each of the student is God's child who has fallen to sins, but still mirroring God's likeness. Committing sins and having weaknesses do not mean they cannot do good things, but they need help and guidance from adults to be able to use their strengths in living in this sinful world.

Constructivism is how someone acquires knowledge by interpreting their experience (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Constructivism is gaining knowledge from human construction activities, both individually and socially (Candra & Retnawati, 2020). Similarly, Burrows & Brown (2019) stated that constructivism is linking new information to previous experience in building prior knowledge and learning which focus not only on the outcome or product but more likely on the learning process. In addition, Muhagir (2014) stated that constructivism is student-centered where the students are the ones who decide and are responsible for their learning performance. All in all, constructivism is the growth of new knowledge and understanding after following individual or social activities. People are not just sticking to their own beliefs, but they will renew their beliefs continuously based on recent experiences.

According to Toraman & Demir (2016) the key to the success of learning in constructivism is students need to have a positive attitude, interest, and high level of motivation towards the lesson. The students will be more confident, motivated to express their ideas, feelings, and thoughts, and better in class performance if they have a supportive environment and relationships with the teacher (Iqbal, Courtney, & Rashid, 2019). Contrastly, the students will increase their passive-aggressive behavior in the classroom if teachers cannot build a supportive environment and relationship. As Iqbal et al. (2019) found in their research that the students will deal with a bad experience and think that the teacher does not care at all about their feelings, and it drives them to not actively participate and tend to avoid eye contact with the teacher while learning in the class. The memory of teachers acting badly or unsupportive like anger, scolding, or using verbal punishment to the students will be recorded and drive them to misbehave (Iqbal et al., 2019). In summary, the students will view everything that happened in the learning process as an experience. The students will act and perform in the classroom according to their experience of the learning environment and the relationship that they have with the teacher.

Teacher's Character and Action in a Supportive Class Environment

The teacher is part of a human being who is created by God as an imago dei who has strengths and weaknesses. Similar to students, the teacher's nature is also being distorted by sin and it broke God's likeness in themselves which made the teacher not wholly good, responsible, right, and rational anymore (Knight, 2006). God gives us a good role model as stated in Matthew 5:44 therefore, we do not only love good people but also our enemies. Therefore, all humans including teachers and students should love and care for each other as a personal acceptance of God's love for us by building a positive relationship (Knight, 2006). It is not easy to build a positive relationship in this broken world with broken people, but God strengthens a teacher to be an agent of reconciliation. In brief, even though having limitations, a teacher is not wholly broken and she/he is still precious and is God's partner as an agent of reconciliation. In this process, the teacher must realize his/her sinful nature which also needs Christ to transform his/her life first. This will be counted as a spiritual qualification as a Christian teacher, where the teacher should have a harmonious spiritual life with

God first, then he/she will be able to be a good role model for the students (Knight, 2006).

In constructivism concepts, students are expected to have successful learning if they get a meaningful experience and a supportive environment (Iqbal et al., 2019) and students are the ones who decide and are responsible for their own learning (Muhagir, 2014). This must be redeemed, since if the students are only spooned by good things in the class, and they could get it by only putting more effort, it might make them rely on themselves and think they can earn all things through their efforts. They will forget about the creator, and not need other people as everything always runs well based on their standards. In this part, a Christian teacher must take a role in redeeming this philosophy, to bring students back to God-centered not human-centered. The teacher needs to always convey and convince all students about God's truth by building a positive teacher-student relationship, so the teacher will know about students' needs and characters and be able to make the class atmosphere balanced.

A positive teacher-student relationship will also lead the teacher to create a supportive class environment that enables the teacher and students to work together and make a positive change in their lives (Dormer & Woelk, 2018). As Christian teachers, we need to set up an environment class with open communication, acceptance, and understanding which will drive students to be thoughtful, respectful, and willing to share, instead of feeling fearful, selfish, and competitive (Vryhof, 2011). Lastly, Priyatna (2017) also said that a Christian teacher should follow what the Bible says by not only doing his/her job in front of the class, but the teacher should be willing to sit together with the students in hearing their complaints and needs.

A Christian teacher must be able to show his/her different actions while teaching compared to other teachers who are not Christian. Van Brummelen (2015) said that a Christian teacher should teach sincerely and enthusiastically, tell the truth, provide time to discuss students' strengths and weaknesses, and scold their inappropriate behavior but also forgive and give them a chance to change. Teachers as humans will feel difficulties in doing this since they have to be firm and love simultaneously. However, Van Brummelen (2015) also stated that being firm in the class does not mean that the teacher cannot love the students, or otherwise, teaching with love in

the class does not mean that the teacher cannot be firm to the students, but both of these aspects must be balanced. Hence, a Christian teacher needs to walk with God to understand students' weaknesses and be the best teacher for them to change (Van Brummelen, 2015). All in all, a Christian teacher has to greet all students to come to God with love by treating them fairly whatever their culture, background, status, personality, and economy are.

A Positive Teacher-Student Relationship in The Classroom

Christian & Hidayat (2020) explained that students need a supportive environment to develop their potential maximally by having a positive and assertive interaction between teacher and students such as showing care, acting fairly, and being brave to express their feelings and needs. This can be called as an authentic relationship, which will drive the students to work together and create a positive change in their lives and communities especially in the learning process (Dormer & Woelk, 2018). In brief, a positive teacher-student relationship is needed to fulfill any barriers or conflicts during the learning process and it can be used as an approach to deal with students' conditions, feelings, and needs.

By having a positive teacher-student relationship, the teacher will be easier to encourage students to not only learn about the content or have fun in the classroom, but the teacher also can develop students' potential to be able to give a positive contribution to the class or other communities (Knight, 2006). Paschal & Mkulu (2020) said that students who have positive relationships with their teachers will gain a higher level of achievement during the learning process than students who have not. In addition, this relationship can detect what students are concerned about and feel about during the learning process. The teacher will be able to give compliments in the midst of students' struggles and be connected with them in order to make an improvement (Vitto, 2003). Lastly, Jones & Jones (2007) found that students behaved more conducive in the learning process when they have a positive relationship with the teacher. In brief, a positive teacher-student relationship will help the teacher to know more about the students and how he/she should teach them, and the students will attain more learning achievement or improvement in the learning process.

A positive teacher-student relationship can happen if the teacher can create a balanced student's social cognition and knowledge by getting to know each student, nurturing and caring, expecting the best, and building trust (Cherian & Mau, 2003). As Bada & Olusegun (2015) said that teachers should create a meaningful process by providing discussion time and asking students to involve and engage in dialogue with the teacher or their friends. Furthermore, Jones & Jones (2007) also mentioned that the teacher should be able to create clear behaviour standards, give a chance to the students to explain or express themselves and be humorous and calm in responding to students' behaviors. Besides that, Majoribank mentions that a teacher needs to embrace her/his students to look closely at their learning styles and what kind of factors can affect students' achievement and behavior in the class (as cited in, Zulfikar, 2010). For instance, when there is a student failed in almost every English test, a teacher should explore factors influencing the student's learning result without making bad assumptions or stereotyping. All in all, the teacher should take more role in building this positive relationship since they have more power to ask students what to do. Besides that, the teacher also needs reflection time and willingness to receive any feedback from the students.

Metode Penelitian atau Pendekatan Pembahasan

This paper uses a qualitative descriptive method to investigate the importance of positive teacher-student relationship in the learning process. This study did not use any instrument, hence the writer uses literature review to collect the data and information from several literatures, then analyse and synthesize the information to gain a deeper understanding and be able to answer the research questions.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationship Matters in Christian Education

A positive teacher-student relationship is crucial since it affects the way students behave and perform in class and most significantly, this relation matters in Christian education, firstly, God created us as social beings who should be in a loving relationship with Him and other people (Graham, 2003). Similarly, Hoekema (1986) also said that both teachers and students are human beings who must accept, belong, love, and support each other as God already does it first to us. He accepts and loves humans as His children even though we keep rebelling with our

sinful nature. His love can be seen through His death on the cross to save us. God is the perfect model and the best reason why we need to keep relationships with other people, thus we need to love Him first. Hoekema said that loving God means we must trust, obey, thank, and pray to Him, then He will enable us to love other people. Loving others means accepting diversity and being willing to help each other to be a better person. So, both teacher and student should enrich each other, where they will not see their strengths as a path to enrich his/herself only, but as a path to help others, share burdens and joys, heal others' hurts, complete each others' needs, and love others as we love ourselves (Hoekema, 1986).

Secondly, Graham (2003) said that Christians need to demonstrate God's character who humbled Himself by always prioritizing the good of others over Himself. As Sproul (2023) also explained Christians must be able to have Agape in their hearts as a reflection of God's love which is willing to put others first than his/herself. Thus, humans should be willing to sacrifice his/herself to love and prioritize others first in living a positive relationship, though it is not easy to do. God never forces us to do it perfectly with our sinful nature, He just wants us to work on it persevering by using our strengths, then God will enable us (Calvin, 2000). Besides that, Graham also mentioned that God is a master teacher who does not misuse His authority, He is willing to suffer, serve, and meet other's needs untiringly. He is also willing to build a personal relationship with His disciples, where He knows their needs and is flexible in choosing the right interaction style to approach them. By knowing how God in being a master teacher, then all Christian teachers must make Him a perfect role model. The teachers should no longer misuse their authority over students in creating distance between the teacher and the student, but they will be willing to have a personal relationship with the students and know how to approach them based on their needs.

Lastly, the goal of Christian education is for guiding and bringing students to be God's children who are responsible for everything that they do (Purba & Chrismastianto, 2021). Doing this not only requires teaching skills but also requires social qualification to connect with the students and show them Christian love (Knight, 2006). Teaching with love does not mean that the teacher cannot be firm in scolding students who misbehaved. It is still needed, but being firm also requires

openness, warmth, and caring that can help students to know their faults without feeling anxious, scared, or depressed and they know how to change (Van Brummelen, 2015). In doing this, Christian teachers should build love in themselves first to be able to teach them enthusiastically by appreciating their different characters, needs, and abilities (Purba & Chrismastianto, 2021). In brief, being connected with the students will increase the teacher-student relationship where this would be easier for the teacher to reach them out to be God's likeness. Then, both teacher and students will know what they should do according to God's words, and this also will reconcile the God-human broken relationship.

All in all, both teachers and students should recognize the importance of positive relationships since we are social beings who should spread God's love by accepting, belonging, and loving others as God already does first. This relationship will be one of growing support systems that can help both the teacher and student to know what God wants them to do by imitating God's character. As time goes by, the learning process that happen in the class will not only fulfill the goals of education but also the Christian education aims. Therefore, maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship does matter in Christian education.

Possible Ways to Build a Positive Teacher-Student Relationship

As teachers also can make mistakes, the teachers should also learn from their past which might help them to recognize their limitations. According to Vitto (2003), there are five relationship barriers that should be avoided by the teacher that might cause the relationship between teacher and students will not go well. Firstly, assuming, some teachers tend to assume that students cannot change or how they will respond by sticking to students' past experiences. This assumption will affect the way students behave in the class, they will be discouraged, frustrated, or even lack of motivation to do something that in fact, they know and want to do. Secondly, rescuing or explaining, indeed the teacher has a skill in explaining something, but being too quick to rescue students in difficulties will make students stuck in their comfort zone. For instance, the teacher explains what, why, and how something happened without involving students in thinking. This will make students lack exploration since they will just keep accepting and

listening to their teacher. Third, in directing, some teachers tend to boss the students on what to do and how they should do it. It looks like controlling students too much and it can make them resentful and more rebellious. Fourthly, expecting, some teachers tend to ignore students' success and only focus on students' mistakes. Teachers should not give compliments to the students by following the word "but" at the end to emphasize students' weaknesses. The teacher should not set high expectations as a standard to appreciate students' work. Lastly, in adultism, some teachers tend to ask students to behave, think, and feel like adults do. The students will limit their exploration and even feel frustrated to be the adults' shadows.

Besides relationship barriers, Vitto also mentioned 4 relationship builders that should be maintained by a Christian teacher. Firstly, checking students' understanding, needs, or feelings by asking a checking builder question such as "What do we need when...?", "Have you brought...?", "How's your feeling when...?". This will be counted as a teacher's ability to choose and use good words that can be understood and able to affect students' emotions (Rusilowati & Wahyudi, 2020). Secondly, exploring, lets the students explore and find what, how, and why something happened to increase their problem-solving skills. As Hoekema (1986) said man is not a robot who only does things determined by other people. They should be able also to choose and decide things to do like exploring and solving problems with the teacher's guidance. Thirdly, encouraging/inviting, the students will be more excited to cooperate during the class when they are invited to contribute than asked to contribute. Lastly, respecting, instead of asking students to do things like adults do, it is better to respect their own exploration and continue to discuss with them what different things between their ways and the adults' ways are, then they will feel more respected and engaged to explore and learn.

Besides relationship barriers and builders that can reward and help the teacher in establishing positive teacher-student relationship, Jones & Jones (2007) also mentioned some practical and tangible ways to establish positive teacher-student relationships which are:

1. Getting to know students, teachers can ask several questions which can be a way for teachers to know more about factors that influence students' lives.

2. Arranging individual conferences with students, the teacher may set time to meet with students individually during lunch time, preparation period, and after or before school to discuss student's interests rather than student's behavior or school homework.
3. Demonstrating interest in students' activities, the teacher may provide time to attend some students' activities to make them feel appreciated and impressed.
4. Arranging interviews, the teacher may set a time to permit students to interview you so they will know more about the real you besides in the class setting.
5. Sending letters and notes for the students, teachers may send notes or letters to let them know how happy you are to have them as your students, a letter for student achievement, a birthday, or a get-well card.
6. Joining in school and community events, teachers will have a good time with students by enjoying the events.
7. Being aware of issues related to sexual harassment, teachers must be careful to set boundaries and avoid physical contact in uncomfortable parts.
8. Communicating high expectations will affect students' learning and behavior.
9. Giving specific, descriptive feedback.
10. Listening to the students will make students feel accepted and respected in sharing their concern, need, or want.

Those are possible ways that can be implemented in Christian education, and the teacher should be able to be flexible in selecting which ways suit each student with their different character, learning style, and needs. In using these several ways, a Christian teacher must always link it to God, then the teacher will not only build a teacher-student relationship but also help to reconcile the broken God-human relationship.

Conclusion

Being harmonious in the teaching and learning process is one of the keys to success in building a positive teacher-student relationship since it can minimize the distance between them. This relationship must be maintained since it matters in Christian education for 3 reasons. Firstly, God created us as social beings who must build relationships with God and other people with love as God already does it first to us in our sinful nature. Secondly, God is a master teacher who has a perfect character to be followed by human beings. Thirdly, this can be a good path to approach students in reaching the goals of Christian education. Hence, the teacher should make these 3 reasons as a foundation for building a positive teacher-student relationship.

A Christian teacher must be able to select ways to approach students. Teachers should stop assuming, rescuing without involving the students, directing, expecting too high, and adultism to avoid relationship barriers. Besides that, the teacher should also check students' needs, emotions, or feelings, let the students explore many things, encourage, and respect the students to maintain the relationship. Specifically, the teacher can implement these ten practical ways to build a positive relationship which are, getting to know each other, having individual conferences, demonstrating interest in students' activities, arranging interview, sending letters or notes, getting involved in school events, being aware of sexual harassment issue, communicating expectation to the students, giving specific and descriptive feedback, and listening to student's story.

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