

Supporting Teachers In Relational Pedagogy And Social Emotional Education: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT This study examines the crucial significance of teacher-student relationships and students' social-emotional competencies in facilitating a conducive learning environment and improving academic achievement. The study seeks to identify the enablers, constraints, and forms of support that influence teachers' capacity to implement relational pedagogy and social-emotional education (SEE) in the classroom. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores teachers' experiences and perspectives on the support they receive and value as essential to the effectiveness of SEE implementation. Data collection will be conducted through a systematic evaluation of relevant academic literature, with a focus on qualitative studies that specifically address teacher support in adopting relational pedagogy and SEE. The search process will involve a variety of scholarly databases and educational publications, using a set of predetermined keywords.

Keywords: Relational Pedagogy, Social-Emotional Education, Teacher Support

89 Introduction

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) emphasizes the development of students' social-emotional knowledge and skills. However, SEL's often student-only focus has led to a lack of preparation for educators in this important area (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Waajid, Garner, & Owen, 2013). Research shows that strong SEL significantly improves academic performance by enabling students to effectively manage stress and engage in successful collaboration (Khongsankham et al., 2024). Despite its recognized importance, the field of SEL faces several substantial challenges, as noted by various scholars. Pham (2024) suggests that SEL is critical for fostering emotion regulation, which in turn reduces anxiety and increases resilience among students. Conversely, failure to develop SEL can lead to significant problems in both personal and academic contexts, highlighting the need for effective SEL interventions (Purna & Nurmina, 2018).

Given the urgency of developing students' social and emotional skills through PSE, the quality of interactions between teachers and students is increasingly recognized as a key factor for successful implementation. It is in this context that relational pedagogy becomes essential—a pedagogical approach that prioritizes teacher connectivity, empathy, and emotional presence as fundamental elements in the teaching and learning process. Dimairo (2023) asserts that relational pedagogy significantly impacts student learning, enhancing engagement and the overall educational experience. Gravett (2022) further emphasizes that strong relationships

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between teachers and students are essential to fostering equitable educational opportunities, as they contribute to students' emotional well-being and cognitive development.

However, relational pedagogy is not without its challenges. Barriers such as the potential for ignoring individual differences and the difficulty in building genuine and lasting relationships—especially in large, diverse classrooms—present significant hurdles (Reibel, 2022). Additionally, cultural and socioeconomic differences between teachers and students can make it difficult to build trust and shared understanding, potentially leading to relational dissonance (Hinsdale & Ljungblad, 2023).

90 Literature Review

Several challenges to relational pedagogy have been identified by scholars. While relational education offers benefits, there are significant barriers such as the potential for overlooking individual differences and the difficulty in building genuine and lasting relationships, especially in large, diverse classrooms. The approach can also be time-consuming and may not be appropriate for all learning environments or student needs (Reibel, 2022). Cultural and socioeconomic differences between teachers and students in increasingly diverse classrooms also present substantial barriers to the practice of relational pedagogy.

This misalignment can hinder teachers' ability to build trust and shared understanding, potentially leading to relational dissonance. Research shows that educators, especially those teaching in culturally diverse contexts, often face complex educational environments marked by historical and systemic inequities in class, race, ethnicity, gender, and ability (Hinsdale & Ljungblad, 2023). Professional standards for teachers often overlook the affective and relational dimensions of teaching, reducing the complexity of pedagogy to measurable skills alone. This leaves teachers feeling trapped in a narrow framework that fails to build meaningful relationships with students (Hickey, Riddle, et al., 2021).

Table 6: Reviewed studies and their alignment with research questions

No	Steps in Relational Pedagogy and Social-Emotional Education Practice	Positive Pedagogies: Co-creation Partnerships to Support Social and Emotional Learning in Higher Education
1	Building Relationships	Enhanced Engagement
2	Understanding SEL Principles	Improved Relationships
3	Reflective Practices	Skill Development
4	Professional Development	
5	Cultural Context Awareness	
6	Feedback and Adaptation	

91 Research Methods

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach utilizing a systematic literature review. This methodology was chosen to gather and synthesize relevant articles pertaining to the topic under investigation. This systematic journal review aims to explore the data about relational pedagogy and social emotional education.

92 Result and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that teachers understand and implement relational pedagogy and social-emotional education in their practice through six key steps: building relationships, understanding SEE principles, reflective practice, professional development, awareness of cultural context, and feedback and adaptation. Furthermore, the growing recognition of SEE in higher education underscores the need for innovative pedagogical approaches, with co-creative partnerships—involving collaboration between educators and students—identified as a method for creating environments that support SEE. This “Positive Pedagogy: Co-Creative Partnerships to Support SEE in Higher Education” approach resulted in increased engagement, improved relationships, and skill development.

The establishment of strong, trusting teacher-student relationships is prioritized as a foundation for students’ emotional growth and academic success (Moore & Gregory, 2024). Educators actively implement relational pedagogy through strategies such as community-building activities and emotional support. Reflective practice is also utilized by teachers to analyze and improve their relationship-building skills, with research consistently highlighting the crucial role of trust and connection in effective learning. Furthermore, an understanding of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) involves developing competencies in recognizing and managing emotions, setting goals, taking the perspective of others, building relationships, and making responsible decisions, thereby holistically meeting students’ academic, social, and emotional needs (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). Continuous professional development is essential for educators to enhance their skills and knowledge. Culturally responsive teaching, which values the integration of students’ cultural references into all aspects of learning (Gay, 2010), is a key pedagogical consideration. Finally, assessment and feedback mechanisms, as emphasized by Aditomo (2021), offer valuable insights into the quality of education and facilitate needed improvements at the school level.

Positive Pedagogy, as an approach that emphasizes student empowerment and co-construction of knowledge, is particularly relevant in the context of higher education. Research shows that the integration of co-creation processes into education, which is an integral part of Positive Pedagogy, yields several important benefits. First, student involvement in the co-creation of learning materials and methods significantly increases engagement and motivation, as students feel more valued, have greater ownership over their learning, and actively contribute to the collaborative learning environment (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Kuh, 2009; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). Second, these collaborative interactions also foster stronger social bonds, leading to improved relationships, increased feelings of connection and support within the academic community, and the creation of a more inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable sharing ideas (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017; Rowler, 2010). Third, co-creation contributes to the development of students’ skills, including core competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Moore & Gregory, 2024). Specifically, the development of skills such as social awareness and relationship skills requires an inclusive and collaborative process, while the incorporation of a growth mindset further strengthens resilience and self-management skills (Dweck, 2006; Jagers et al., 2019; McGovern et al., 2023). Thus, Positive Pedagogy creates more relevant, meaningful, and transformative learning experiences for students.

93 Conclusion

This study shows that strong relationships between teachers and students are essential elements in creating a positive learning environment, which directly supports students’ emotional

and academic development. It was found that the effective implementation of relational pedagogy and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) requires adequate support for teachers, including professional training, a deep understanding of students' cultural contexts, and opportunities for reflection. Despite challenges such as limited resources and resistance to change, collaborative and co-creative approaches have been shown to increase student engagement, improve interpersonal relationships, and develop crucial social-emotional skills. Overall, this study underscores that in order to achieve comprehensive educational goals, it is critical for educators to focus efforts on developing students' social-emotional skills through relational and inclusive pedagogical practices.

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