A qualitative study among students aged 13-15 on the Relational aspect of teaching in a dynamic Maltese senior school context

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Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.00015488

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A qualitative study among students aged 13-15 on the Relational aspect of teaching in a dynamic Maltese senior school context.

Dissertation
Submitted as part of Module E822
Masters Multi-disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth

Denise Attard Degiorgio

Tutor:
Dr. K. Rix

2nd September 2022
Acknowledgements

Words cannot express my gratitude towards my tutor Dr. K. Rix who continually convincingly motivated me during this journey. Without her guidance and expertise this dissertation would not have been possible.

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my colleagues Kathleen Baldacchino, Charmaine Farrugia and Stephen Micallef, who helped me in many ways during this investigation. I would also like to thank my Open University friends, my support system throughout this journey (Vanessa, Katherine, Franca and Nicola) and the research participants without whom this study could not have been completed.

I would be remiss in not mentioning my family, especially my parents. Their belief in me has kept my spirits high during this process. Their constant support made this research project possible. Lastly, I would like to thank my daughter Elodie who was the inspiration behind this journey.
Abstract (100 words)

This phenomenological study explores relational pedagogies in one Maltese school, from the perspective of eight mixed-ability students aged thirteen to fifteen. Through a multimethodological approach, comprising of narratives and guided questionnaires, the study aims to promote students’ well-being. Evidence illustrated that teachers’ characteristics related to communion have positive long-term effects on students’ wellbeing, while negative characteristics have short-term negative effects. Relational pedagogies were identified as direct contributors to their socio-emotional development, which in turn leads to increased academic attainment. These interactions are not only dependent on teachers and students, but also on challenges, such as, challenging behaviour and teachers’ workloads.
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Chapter 1: The Introduction (869 words)

This chapter describes the scope and the terms of the study, while exploring the circumstances leading to this investigation. It discusses the shift in meaning of ‘Education’ across time, emphasising the current understanding of the term. Readers are also introduced to the challenges brought about by these changes, in terms of the role of teachers and the effect on students’ educational outcomes.

1.1. Education across Europe and in Malta

Contemporary educational literature refers to students’ well-being as the holistic development of learners. Twenty-first century reforms in education across Europe, shifted schooling from exclusively knowledge-oriented, to inclusive dimensions. Schooling became an institution that aims to develop and safeguard students’ wellbeing holistically. Apart from aiming at knowledge acquisition, education takes into consideration confidence building, positive emotions, relationships, meaning and accomplishments (OECD, 2008; Seligman, 2011). Teachers’ programmes started to value more the attitudinal aspect, besides the intellectual and behavioural (Evans, 2011). Locally, this shift featured prominently in the National Curriculum (MEEF, 2012), which considers and promotes the social and emotional dimensions in education as crucial components of the students’ holistic wellbeing. Similarly, the introduction of the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) in Maltese schools, aimed to remove knowledge-centric syllabi and gave schools the autonomy to develop programmes that fulfil the framework of knowledge, attitudes, and skills-based outcomes.

1.2. Socio-emotional development vs Exam scores

This change shifted the teachers’ job description. Besides measuring attainment through exams, educators are expected to create respectful relationships with their students based on trust, promote diversity and act with honesty and integrity, while keeping up to date with their professional knowledge (Johnson and Ruggiero, 2014; The Council of the Teaching Profession, 2012). With the introduction of the LOF, Maltese teachers will be expected to prepare students for a summative assessment,
made up of formal, informal, and non-formal assessment. Besides identifying academic abilities (currently easily quantified through exams), educators will need to assess personal competences which cannot be identified without knowing the students. To abide by this new comprehensive child-centred reform, teachers must also be emotionally and relationally proficient (Zargova et al., 2021).

Although it is widely acknowledged, that reducing education to knowledge acquisition, negatively impacts students' holistic wellbeing (Evans, 2011), schools' effectiveness is still generally calculated in relation to academic success (Grosskopf et al., 2014). Teachers are being asked to conform with national guidelines that require a deeper knowledge of the students, whilst ensuring students’ academic achievement and managing the increasing demands of inclusive classrooms (Clayton, 2007). This leaves no alternative for teachers, but to focus primarily on exams, to the detriment of fostering relationships and environments conducive to student holistic development. In most cases, teachers act autonomously to suit students’ individual needs, but they are forced to do so within political and organisational constraints (Dyer, 2018; Shen et al., 2015). This becomes increasingly difficult when working with students aged thirteen to fifteen, who are going through complex developmental phases while preparing themselves for SEC examinations (Burke et al., 2010; Abdi Zarrin et al., 2020).

1.3. The teaching approach and students’ holistic well-being

The emphasis on assessments leaves no time and strength for teachers to focus on the holistic development of students and affects the students’ comprehensive performances (Buccelli, 2017). Katia and Jean (2004) found that adolescents who feel supported by their teachers are less likely to experience depressive symptoms or low self-esteem. Teachers are considered temporary attachment figures that offer security to adolescents (Cadima et al., 2015). In turn, as a result of acquired ‘Academic Psychological Capital’ their academic performance improves (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019). Maltese secondary school teachers are among the most stressed educators in Europe, an issue that results from the challenge to conform to reforms enacted, and from shortage of staff (Eurydice report, 2018). Besides reducing teachers’ initiatives,
such stress inevitably dissipates amongst students, in turn decreasing students’ holistic well-being (Klusmann et al., 2016; Arens & Morin, 2016).

1.4. The scope behind this study and the research questions

As a guidance teacher in a Maltese secondary school, a role fulfilled for the last fourteen years, the author attests both to the challenges and to the importance of healthy student-teacher relationships. Based on this rationale, the proposed phenomenological study, aims to generate new insight on the effects of relational pedagogies on educational outcomes of students aged thirteen to fifteen, of a Maltese senior school. This investigation will also identify challenges that impede relationship building in classrooms, with the intention of potentially improving practice. Considering the vastness of the topic and lack of similar studies, the focus will be exclusively on students’ perspectives. To reach these aims, three research questions emerge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To study the effects of relational pedagogies in a Maltese Senior School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To produce new insight about relational pedagogies to Maltese Educators.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>From the perspective of students aged thirteen to fifteen, how does the relationship between teachers and pupils affect students’ academic outcomes in one Maltese senior school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do early teenagers think that their relationship with their teachers can be beneficial or detrimental to their holistic educational well-being?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the challenges that influence relationship building between teachers and students, according to the thirteen to fifteen-year-old students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Aims and Research Questions

1.5. Conclusion

Education has shifted towards a more inclusive socio-emotional dimension. Whilst this shift directs teachers to child-centred teaching approaches, educational outcomes are
still dependent on homogeneous externally quantifiable exam scores which still seem to be the major concern of educational stakeholders. To change this mentality, acknowledging the impact of relational pedagogies and identifying challenges becomes imperative. To reach these aims the researcher will explore existing literature and previous studies related to relational pedagogies. Methods used to conduct this research will be analysed and rationalised. Results will be discussed, with the aim of improving current practices.
Chapter 2: Literature Review (2811 words)

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews existing studies relevant to the research questions, set to answer whether the relational aspect of teaching affects thirteen to fifteen-year-old Maltese students’ educational outcomes. This review identifies gaps in literature, lays the foundation for this study, and consequentially informs the methodology.

Keywords and phrases related to the research questions were inserted in the Open University Library and Google scholar search engine. Only peer reviewed literature from the last thirty years were taken into consideration. A total of more than forty-five articles were chosen. The initial search was based on the keywords ‘educational outcomes’. The search was refined to include the UK, Malta, and Europe. The last fundamental key phrase searched was ‘the relationship between students aged thirteen to fifteen and teachers in Malta’. General trends in results were examined and it was evident that the relational aspect of teaching was much less researched in Malta, than in the UK and Europe. Emergent themes that were recurrent and that will be discussed in this review because of their influence on students’ holistic development, relate to the teaching approach, teachers’ characteristics, students’ and teachers’ interactions, the context, and the impact of Covid-19. It was also noted that relational studies between teachers and students are more commonly conducted amongst children aged thirteen and under and are mostly done in collaboration with teachers. This gave rise to another major discussion which concerns the importance of listening to children when embarking in educational research concerning their well-being.

2.2. The Objectives of Education in Malta, the UK and across Europe

A cross national comparison of literature on the objectives of education leads us to the understanding that education is more than knowledge acquisition or transmission. UK national policies imply that education must include both academic and socio-emotional dimensions in practice (UK Education Act, 2002). This perspective was also shared by the Maltese Ministry for Education (2012) and on a European level (Cefai et al., 2021). As a result of such changes, teachers’ training programmes started to focus
more on the importance of behavioural, attitudinal, and intellectual components, because of their impact on students' learning outcomes (Evans, 2011). These policies and reports based on National or European guidelines, however, follow the positivists’ assumption that the application of theoretical findings related to education, can be addressed homogeneously, independently from their specific context. They often neglect to instil contextual ownership and make the process of implementation in practice harder (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Moreover, such policies tend to prioritise politics rather than stakeholders and are mostly based on theoretical frameworks that do not always work in practice (Broekkamp and Van Hout Walters, 2007). Consequently, these produce contrasting goals, sometimes increasing resistance from teachers. According to Watts et al. (1997, cited in Shaharaban and Yarden 2019) teachers are however less resistant towards students’ perceptions and opinions, as they help them rethink their practice. Based on these findings, students can be considered as ‘the More Knowledgeable Others’ (Vygotsky, 1978), because they experience first hand the affects of education, and with some guidance are able to help educators reach the Zone of Proximal Development and improve practice. This leads the researcher to believe that constructivism or the belief that knowledge is constructed interpersonally, is the right approach for this study. This philosophical paradigm aims to refine practice and takes into consideration subjective perspectives. It observes a rights-based methodology that has the potential to address the gaps in literature caused by the disparity between theory and practice (Clark, 2010).

2.3. The Teaching Approach and Relationality

In the twenty-first century, the approach towards teaching transitioned towards care and relationality. Cefai et al. (2021) argue that the impartation of academic knowledge is not enough to ensure holistic development. Schools need to find the right approach to encourage students to build positive relationships with others. Dyer (2018), through teacher’s narratives agree that the emotional and social wellbeing of Children and Young People (CYP) affect their learning outcomes. According to Cefai et al. (2021) the responsability of the students’ acquisition of social and emotional competences lies on all school staff and on their collective ability to create positive relationships with students. Although it may be assumed that theoretically a whole-school approach is
ideal, evidence-based research puts the responsibility on teachers, as the direct and most impactful agents of students’ wellbeing (Dyer, 2018; Ben Arieh, 2014; Holzer et al., 2021). Although Dyer (2018) and Cefai et al. (2021) do not agree on how to reach a utopian state of socio-emotional wellbeing in schools, they both conclude that knowledge-based approaches do not fully provide for students’ wellbeing. Alternatively, students-centred teaching methodologies are considered to be more effective, because they reduce the power differentials between teachers and students by focusing on the student and not on the transfer of knowledge. Teachers that practice child-centred techniques are seen as facilitators of learning (Ansarian and Teoh, 2018) and supporters of positive and caring relationships (Amerstorfer et al., 2021). The Listening project (The Open University, 2020) confirms this by proposing a listening technique that requires an attuned disposition towards children. Listening with one’s whole being creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and allows for more collaborative engagements. Dyer (2018) through his large-scale qualitative study, gives a clear picture of successful relational experiences over time, however, in his study participants were chosen because of their good qualities (reflective, self-aware), therefore the sampling is not necessarily compatible with the diversity of teachers’ personal qualities in everyday practice. Comparitavely, neither Dyer (2018) nor the McMillan Listening Project (The Open University, 2020) fill in the gap in literature related to research on the relational aspect of teaching with early teens, because they both focus on the early years’ context. In contrast to Dyre (2018), however, The Listening Project (The Open University, 2020), through a constructivist child-centred approach that listens and consults with children as ‘experts in their own lives’, introduces educators to a teaching strategy that can be easily adapted to adolescents in practice.

2.4. The Teachers’ Characteristics, their relational predisposition and their affect on students’ holistic educational well-being

A large body of studies examines the relational aspect of teaching and students’ holistic achievements. Lupascu et al. (2014) in their quantitative study, discover that teenagers feel educationally fulfilled when teachers are calm, tolerant, friendly, well prepared, and humorous. On the other hand, characteristics such as excessive
authority, apathy, irony, and lack of discipline affect them negatively. Kim et al. (2019), in their meta-analysis, based on the Big Five Approach, also find a link between teachers’ qualities and students’ outcomes. They indicate that the predisposition of teachers to be sociable in a conscientious manner reflects students’ educational experiences positively. Brunetti and Marston (2018) take the study of personal qualities to a deeper level, through qualitative research, where teachers reflect on the importance of having good relationships with students to enhance holistic development. As opposed to Kim et al. (2019) and Lupascu et al. (2014), the methodology used in this study reveals a deeper understanding of experiences and context, but it is specifically designed for teachers of children aged five to thirteen whose needs vary from those of children aged thirteen to fifteen. Moreover, despite the fact that this study is subjective in nature and takes into consideration that different participants give different meanings to the same words, paradoxically, it is conducted, exclusively with teachers. Teachers’ based research does not necessarily reflect children’s perspectives of ‘how’ and ‘if’ students are benefitting from these personal qualities and relationships. Kim et al.’s (2019) and Lupascu et al. (2014), on the other hand, take into consideration children’s views, but they neglect to consider that participants’ perceptions and understanding are subjective and dynamic. Using the Big Five Approach may compromise results because no consideration is taken of the participants’ understanding of these five behaviours, and this approach attributes a common language to describing human characteristics (John et al., 2008). Secondly, using quantitative measures can lead one to overlook broader themes and relationships. Such methods contribute mostly to theory development because they prioritise the moment and not the participants, reducing their applicability in real practice.
2.5. The Role of the teachers, the students and their context, in Education.

Many researchers agree that affective education can be transferred by teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours (Good et al., 2009) and has the potential to impact students’ educational acquisition (Palardy and Rumberger, 2008). As much as teachers are said to be influential in education, success cannot be acquired without their interaction with students (Ljugblad, 2016). Davis et al. (2006) adds that the teachers’ interactions are influenced by their community of practice, and processed within a particular context (Freedman and Applement, 2008; Seabi, 2012). Therefore, relationships are not simple procedures which can be homogeneously explained irrespective of subjects and context. Explaining, implementing, or applying research in educational settings cannot be done without taking into consideration the culture of the teaching community in question (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Ansell et al. (2018) state that peoples of different cultures give different meanings to the world around them, therefore educational research should take into consideration the actors and dynamics within and across context. The context can be referred to as the sum of all influential factors in teaching and learning, such as school location, students’ demographics, and staff (Fernandez-Rio, 2016). These factors together affect educational outcomes, therefore the successful implementation of research in practice is subjectively dependent on the interactions between teachers, students, and their context of study (Vygotsky, 1978). The topic of relationality in teaching is discussed in a myriad of international research, regrettably not the same can be said of research on the same topic in relation to the Maltese context. This lack of contextual study highlights another essential gap in literature, because implementing research which is culturally irrelevant, contextually diverse or not specific to a setting, decreases its chances of transferability.

2.6. COVID-19 and the relational aspect of teaching

Despite the interesting conclusions of pre-pandemic studies about the effect of the relational aspect of teaching on students’ wellbeing, one cannot underestimate the importance of their timeline. As a result of the pandemic, the relevance of the socio-
emotional dimension in students’ wellbeing has become increasingly evident. Studies on the relational aspect of teaching are affected by the context and the actors involved in the process. The impact of Covid-19 had an effect both on the context and on the actors involved in the educational process. Studies undertaken during the pandemic show that adolescents’ well-being has been compromised due to increased anxiety and depression (Duan et al., 2020). These consequences were also reported on teachers, especially with the reopening of schools and the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). The perception of the actors on the school context and the actual context also changed as a result of Covid, with schools being perceived as insecure places for the transmission of the disease. The changes in the context and the actors of education clearly underline the need to focus on the social and emotional dimension of education to improve CYP’s holistic development (OECD, 2020). These considerations make us question whether research done on the relational aspect of teaching before the pandemic can still be applied to teachers’ practices in the future, since the exact consequences of the changes brought about by Covid-19 have yet to be discovered (Hermann et al., 2021).

Online learning has provided the possibility for schools to resume academics remotely (Akinbadewa and Sofowora, 2020), neglecting other aspects, such as socialisation and interactions (Hebebci et al., 2020). Consequently, teachers and students became more aware and more appreciative of their personal-professional relationship and its impact on students’ wellbeing (Reupert et al., 2009; De Bruin, 2021). In contrast to De Bruin’s (2021), Reupert et al.’s (2009) study was undertaken with many students, therefore can be considered more inclusive, however, it incorporates only distance learning university students, whose age and motivation do not represent that of underage senior school students. Additionally, Reupert et al.’s (2009) quantitative approach, just gives the overall picture of the variables before the pandemic and does not explore the subjects in a deeper manner, at a given time (Fidalgo et al., 2014). Hebebci et al. (2020) on the other hand, with their qualitative approach during the outbreak, apart from confirming the need of a positive professional presence in online learning, reveal that students specifically require their teachers to be engaging, approachable, understanding, patient and professional in times of hardship. Although it enlists important characteristics, this study was done with both high school and
secondary school students and its results do not distinguish between the relational needs of students according to age. The changes in the socio-emotional wellbeing of teachers and students, brought about by the pandemic, had an impact on the relational aspect of teaching, resulting in students’ and teachers’ increased eagerness for deeper experiences of relationality in the classroom. The socio-emotional wellbeing of students mainly falls under the teachers’ responsibility (Selman, 2003). According to Daniel (2020), following the outbreak, teachers changed their relational predisposition, by increasing support and reassurance. These changes in relational requirements produced a gap in literature which reaffirms the importance of re-investigating the relational aspect of teaching in post-pandemic times, through a qualitative and age representative approach.

2.7. Listening to children’s voices in educational research.

For many years, educational research was conducted on children, rather than with children, even though they are more likely to provide a realistic picture of classroom interactions (Osborne and Collins, 2000). Not including children in research comes from the belief that children are unable to be active participants in their own life (Eriksson and Pringle, 2019). In 1989, the UNCRC produced a set of rights solely intended to start taking children’s voices seriously, leading to a conceptual view that children are active agents in their own lives (UNICEF, 1989). Students are the direct service users of the educational process. Therefore, one cannot overlook their perceptions and opinions on how teachers’ personal traits affect their learning experience. One must also factor in the difference in perception of teachers and students. Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) in a twenty-five year crosscultural study with secondary school children imply, that teachers’ perception of their relational abilities is relatively more positive than that of students. The disparity in perceptions of practitioners and adolescents is also portrayed in Ellis (2016), among children in secure estate. She notes that the views of children aged thirteen to sixteen are rarely consistent with that of different professionals. It is important to take into consideration what students consider as being of value to their lives, to improve on, and investigate practices that are directly linked to their wellbeing. As opposed to Wubbels and Brekelmans’s (2005) cross-cultural study, Ellis’ data is collected only among teen girls.
in particular institutions, however, it is based on observations and interviews rather than questionnaires, definitely eliciting deeper insight of actors and context. Ellis gives a clearer indication of the contrasting views among children’s and practitioners’ interpretation of the same information. Both studies imply that perceptions of practitioners and adolescents differ, therefore one should not solely engage with teachers, to evaluate educational approaches or interventions (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). From a constructivist viewpoint, perceptions on relationships also differ among adolescents themselves. Based on Bourdieu’s (2001, cited in Martin 2019) concept of the Habitus, overlapping economic, cultural, social and symbolic fields of power in our life, make up our identity, which in turn affect how we experience and understand things and concepts around us. This means that understanding the effect of the relational aspect of teaching is subjective and cannot be based solely on quantitative data, because it can produce multiple realities. Young people’s participation is also crucial to determine the authentic representation of their views in research. Researchers need to be more committed to responsibly implement children’s voices in all educational strategies if they intend to strengthen students’ educational opportunities (Lansdown et al., 2014).

2.8. Conclusion

As discussed, a vast body of research addresses the social aspects of education and encourages relationship building in classrooms (Taylor et al., 2017). Despite this emphasis, the application and transfer of literature to the research questions of this study was difficult, owing to gaps in research. Some of the papers analysed cannot be contextualised, and those referring to the Maltese context were based on theoretical frameworks. Further studies focused on younger children, with different relational needs. The timeline of this research was also deemed critical because of the changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Another recurring gap in educational literature relates to the tendency to fail to include children’s voices in research. As the direct recipients of the effect of the relational aspect of teaching, omitting their perspectives compromises research. The research design adopted in this study was informed and influenced by all this literature, in order to reflect current local educational challenges and improve practice.
Chapter 3: Research Design (3121 words)

3.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the decisions made in relation to the research design and the conceptual framework that supports the methodology and the methods chosen for this study. The structure of this framework was influenced by the research onion model (Saunders et al., 2019) and will describe the influence of the research philosophy on the approach, the strategy undertaken, and other important decisions adopted in this research.

3.2. Research Philosophy

The theoretical framework chosen for this investigation has been based on Vygotsky’s (1978) belief that human development occurs in dynamic, socially, and culturally shaped contexts. This means that people’s identities are formed by what they experience in their social environment. Relationships in the classroom require a degree of collaboration from teachers and students, both in terms of their social identities and in terms of their continually dynamic social interactions (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Allen (2011) agrees and states that experiences depend on one’s sociocultural standpoint and hierarchical positioning, and that they are also affected by the specific context in which they happen. In a school context, culture, ethos, government policies and national guidelines, and how everyone perceives such factors, also contribute to the formation of experiences (Calbi et al., 2017). Based on this paradigmatic position, the study was held in one specific senior school and focused on students’ perspectives, since they are the direct recipients of the effect of the relational aspect of teaching. These choices required a more subjective approach which aimed to obtain a deep and clear vision, while taking into consideration the dynamicity of the subjects and the context. Since these variables are not easily quantified, a phenomenological approach grounded in the experiences of individuals was regarded as the most appropriate strategy to address, not only whether teacher-students relationships affect students’ holistic development, but also the ways in which it affects them. Inspired by constructivism, this research takes into consideration
diversity, the participants’ own generation of meaning, and the combination of meaning making produced by the interaction between participants, researchers, and their context (Gubrium, 2008 cited in Esin et al., 2014). Every individual belongs to his personal social construct; therefore, relationships need to be interpreted qualitatively and multiple realities should be expected.

3.3. Research Approach

The research questions in this study aim to identify whether and in what ways, teacher-students’ relationships affect students’ educational outcomes. Qualitative research addresses questions beyond ‘what works’, it takes into consideration what works for whom, where and how (Christ, 2014). It studies its subjects in their natural setting and seeks to deeply understand the participants, rather than to predict outcomes (Denzil and Lincoln, 2011). Research based on constructivism picks up on the knowledge created as people try to make sense of their experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This type of methodology aims to obtain rich and detailed data of human behaviour, experiences, and events (Donmoyer, 2012; Ahmad et al., 2019). Critics of qualitative data, on the other hand, point out the paradox brought about by this research approach, in that although it aims to study its subjects in depth, it seems to be limited in terms of generalisability of research findings, due to its small sample size (Harry & Lipsky, 2014). Darlington and Scott (2003) disagree, they state that the prolonged engagement with participants, makes the sample larger than how it initially appears and validates the study. Korstjens and Moser (2018) add that this validity is increased by persistent observation, by using multiple data sources in time, by engaging participants of different types and levels, and by using multiple methods of data collection. In qualitative research the aim is for the study to be idiographic, and its trustworthiness comes from its ability to be meaningful to an outsider.

3.4. Research strategy

Considering the diversity of the students and the vastness of the topic, the researcher generated the knowledge through narrative inquiry, for more inclusivity and subjectivity. A narrative approach gives students the opportunity to express
themselves according to their abilities. It observes experiences and focuses on the meaning that the person attributes to these experiences (Esin et al., 2014). It distinguishes between theoretical explanations of events and social realities (Herman and Vervaeck, 2019). This methodology helps to answer the research questions while supporting the constructivist idea that one cannot produce a single reality when trying to make sense of the complexity of relationships. Since in Vygotsky’s (1978) terms, students are the ‘More Knowledgeable Others’, as direct stakeholders of relational pedagogies, a collaborative inquiry focusing on research ‘with’, rather than ‘on’ participants emphasises their full involvement in research (Heron, 1996). This approach balances the power differentials between the participants and the researcher and keeps the study as subjective as possible, with the intent to transform action (Kemis, 2010 cited in Walton 2011). Through collaborative narrative inquiry, participants act as co-researchers and assume an experience of time rather than just referring to past experience (Bruner, 1990). Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI) takes into consideration values, beliefs, feelings, and perspectives, through the recounting and interpretation of lived experiences. It guides the students to practice self-reflectivity and produces realistic data outcomes with minimal adult interference, while taking into consideration diversity (Gibbs et al., 2016 cited in Cohen et al., 2017). This strategy links research to practice, and it overcomes common problems that arise when studies based on research only, are implemented in different educational settings in a ‘one size fits all’ manner (Cohen et al., 2017).

A narrative approach also helps to minimise the risk of assumptions. Including young participants in research, increases its validity and the probability of finding solutions to improve practice (Morrison, 1998 cited in Cohen et al. 2017). According to Vygotsky (1978), validation is also based on whether the research is analysed in its place of development. The immediate and contextual meanings of actions, as experienced by the participants, are crucial to gather deeper meanings of subjective realities (Erickson, 1986).
3.5. Techniques and Procedures

3.5.1. Choice of Participants – Sampling

Transferability is not always possible in qualitative studies, however, having mixed ability participants in research increases the chance of applicability to outsiders. Therefore, purposive sampling was meticulously devised to ensure an inclusive but fair selection. A request calling for voluntary participants was posted in the school notice board to avoid pressuring students’ participation. The participants were then situated into different categories, firstly based on gender and year groups and secondly on their academic abilities, easily identifiable by a system of subject tracks. In Maltese schools, these tracks are determined by students’ academic abilities and needs, with Track 3 being the highest level of attainment and CCP programs specifically tailored for students that require special teaching methods and adapted syllabi. Including CCP students challenges the mainstream focused research and promotes inclusion (Feldman et al., 2013 cited in Wickenden and Kembhavi-Tam 2014). Besides academic achievement, the researcher emphasised on gender inclusion, since boys and girls experience subjects differently and their relational expectations in the classroom differ (Santi and Gorghiu, 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Track 3/2</th>
<th>Track 1/CCP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>1 Male / 1 Female</td>
<td>1 Male / 1 Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13-14 years old)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>1 Male / 1 Female</td>
<td>1 Male / 1 Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14-15 years old)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Data Sampling*

Voluntary participants currently being taught by the researcher were removed from the list to avoid power differentials. A total of eight participants were selected and approached for research.
3.5.2. Data Collection

This research study adopted a multi-method approach that consisted of a journal, an exploratory guided questionnaire and a group session. All participants took part in all three methods.

3.5.2a Journal

Participants were asked to write a journal describing their live experiences in the classroom. The researcher produced guidelines to facilitate the process (Appendix 1 & 2) as suggested by Kim (2016) and Wickenden and Kembhavi-Tam (2014). These guidelines aimed to give a clear picture of their experiences and their effect on the learning process. No direct reference was made to the research questions. This was intentionally done, to get authentic representations of whether relationships with their teachers really affect them. The journal was presented both in English and Maltese. It consisted of ticking options and visual aids that aimed to facilitate participants’ understanding of what was expected of them. They were designed to help them express themselves without any adult interference and to stimulate them with the help of questions that they could answer in point form. This had to be filled in daily during free periods, for five consecutive days, by every participant. They were also given the option to audio record their experiences. The journal supported a constructivists’ philosophy because it guided and encouraged participants to develop their own living theory by thinking critically about their experiences, and by focusing on the effects that these had on their wellbeing (Walton, 2011). The information that emerged from the journal was used as a reminder of their experiences and were merged to the answers of the guided questionnaire which were later discussed during the group session.

3.5.2b Exploratory Guided Questionnaires

One of the limitations of constructivism and narrative inquiry is the possible discrepancy between the story being told and how it is understood. To minimise this repercussion, a second data collection method was introduced, to explain, reaffirm, or elucidate the information gathered from the journal, directing it towards answering the research questions (Appendix 3 & 4). The questionnaire needed to be answered in the
presence of the researcher. Participants had the option to audio record the questionnaire’s answers, to fill in the questionnaire with the researcher’s help or to dictate the answers for the researcher. The researcher asked for clarity or further information when needed, but did not change or add personal comments, thoughts, or assumptions, so as not to take over their thoughts and perceptions (Wickenden, 2011 cited in Wickenden and Kembhavi-Tam 2014). The choice to use questionnaires instead of interviews served to make the data analysis easier for children as co-researchers, because they facilitate the coding process. Questionnaires also have the potential to guide and support the participants, while still leaving them in control of the process, free from adult interference and empowered with individualism and individuality. This strategy reduced to a large extent the influence of the researcher’s professional role in the school or her ‘preunderstanding’ of the topic (Capurro, 2000). Questionnaires allow participants to express their views on issues that they are not comfortable discussing (Boulton, 1994). This multi-methodology adopted a constructivist philosophy that promoted children’s participation and took into consideration mixed ability participants and the possibility of multiple realities. These methods were designed according to participants’ needs, in terms of length, layout, readability, language use and content, to obtain the highest levels of output validity (UNICEF, 2017). Time allowance was not only dependent on the age of the participants but also on their individual needs (Danby et al., 2011).

3.5.2c Group Session

Finally, participants were requested to attend a group session to assist in the thematic analysis. In participatory research and interpretative phenomenological analysis, it is said to be epistemologically advantageous to ‘triangulate’, by involving participants in the interpretative stage, to maximise the research validity and credibility (Smith et al., 1995). Although the process of joint analysis can be complex (Cahill, 2009), Meyer and Meier Zu Verl (2013) argue that meaning finding in qualitative research should be a cooperative practice that is reflexively subjective.
3.5.3 Data Analysis

To accurately represent students' perspectives without modifications, the researcher chose to analyse the data using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis relies on the researcher’s judgement and can lead to misinterpretation if done incorrectly. To avoid this type of transference which was predicted before the commencement of the study, multi data collection tools were utilised. These tools aimed to fill in any possible gaps in information and to evade the probability of influencing the study with assumptions. To validate the study further, children were included in the initial stages of the data analysis, during a group session. During the session, participants thoroughly reviewed the information from the questionnaires. Emergent meaningful excerpts were then coded to produce final themes. Finally, the researcher compared the themes with the data collected using an inductive approach, to minimise any preconceptions, and subsequently compared the themes to existing literature. The process of data analysis will be described further in Chapter four.

3.5.4 Pilot study

Two participants were asked to explore the research methods before the initiation of the actual study. They were asked to identify any unclear instructions and proceeded to fill in the daily journal, before consequently answering the questionnaire. These participants were chosen because of convenience, based on their disponibility and their closeness to the researcher. After the pilot study the selection procedures were changed to reflect students’ diversity in school. Alternatively, a purposive sampling technique was chosen in order for the study to be more inclusive. Another change was based on power differentials between the researcher-teacher and the participants. The researcher felt that participants were oversharing and giving accommodating answers. This was pinned to the fact that participants were current students of the researcher, therefore it was decided that students in direct contact with the researcher were not to be considered. After the pilot study the guidelines of the journal were also changed because they were directing students’ answers towards mentioning teachers names. The open ended questionnaire was not changed. After the data collection, the researcher combined the two methods of data collection and picked out the main
themes that emerged from the participants’ data. However, from the logbook it was noted that the researcher was undecided on whether the same themes would have been chosen if it were for participants to decide. Consequently, another research method was introduced. Participants were asked to meet and discuss, together with the researcher, the themes that they deemed more dominant.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

To address this research study ethically, the researcher followed the steps on the OU ethical appraisal form (Appendix 13) and created an ethical grid for further reflection (Appendix 16). In Malta, research in state schools requires an approval from the Ministry of Education. This led to the restructuring of the planned research schedule (Appendix 5) because the initiation of the process had to be postponed, it resumed as soon as all the documentation involved in the study was reviewed. The request was approved without any changes (Appendix 12).

3.6.1 Children’s voices and participation

The literature review identified a gap in literature resulting from researchers’ common praxis to do research ‘on’ children rather than ‘with’ them. Including CYP in research is often avoided, due to increased legal and ethical considerations, underestimation of children’s competence to participate, and fear of harming the participants. These challenges call for a more thorough approach during all stages of the research and can be time consuming (Clark, 2015). Article 12 (UNCRC, 1989) states that practitioners cannot underestimate the capabilities of children. In contrast to teachers, students have a more observational role when reporting teachers’ relational characteristics. Teenagers offer valid perspectives because they experience different teachers continuously (Scherzinger and Wettstein, 2019). Therefore, taking into consideration the voices of children aged thirteen to fifteen, and including them in all stages of research and its implementation (from the pilot study to the data analysis) is crucial (Humphery, 2009; Shier, 2001).
3.6.2 The Researcher’s positionality

The research philosophy behind this study implies that knowledge acquisition occurs through social interactions. Therefore, in research it is important to also take into consideration the researchers’ social identity, their research position, and their social interaction with the participants (Einstein, 2012). Embarking on a study in a familiar context helps to produce deep subjective realities (Danby et al., 2011) because it makes it easier for participants to trust and disclose information (Sanghera and Bjokert, 2008). However, familiarity may also lead to assumptions and to the substitution of participants’ interpretaions with the researcher’s (Warr et al., 2011). It may also lead to over-disclosure (Byrne et al., 2015) and to resistance brought about by power differentials (Malacrida, 2007). All these challenges bring about ethical concerns that one can overcome by being self-reflexive. Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the critical self-evaluation of the researcher’s dynamic positionality and the awareness that this may affect the outcomes of the study (Bradbury-Jones, 2007). It secures credibility, trust, and ethics because it enables the researcher to become aware of his values, beliefs, preconceived ideas, and prejudices (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). To benefit from the advantages of being an insider-researcher while still taking into consideration the challenges, the researcher needs to constantly ask questions and engage in reflection. These reflections help the researcher to become more sensitive to the various perspectives that can hinder or support the process (Lietz et al., 2006). For this reason, the researcher decided to keep a logbook, to balance between her experience and the participants’.

3.6.3. Consent and Data Collection

Alderson & Morrow (2020) state that involving children in research can potentially empower or harm them (UNICEF, 2017). Although researchers agree that adolescents can make informed choices with support (UNICEF, 2017), asking for the parents’ permission is ethical considering students’ ages. Hence, the researcher distributed an information letter and a consent form to parents (Appendix 6 & 7). These forms simply and clearly explained the process and actions involved, and subsequently ensured genuine collection of consent from parents, regardless of their intellectual and
educational backgrounds. The participants were also provided with an information letter and an assent form which was simple, in point form and supported by visual aids, to ensure that mixed ability participants were adequately informed before giving assent (Appendix 8 & 9). Participation was voluntary and the participants were free to opt out of the study anytime without any consequences. They were also informed that the study conformed with Maltese and EU laws governing data collection, particularly those related to data storage and confidentiality (BERA 2018; GDPR 2018) (Appendix 11). The researcher made sure to ask for ongoing consent and watched for signs that may have indicated that the children no longer wanted to participate. Apart from the safety of the participants, the researcher made sure that other people that were indirectly involved in the research were safeguarded. The guidelines and questions in the data collection methods were meticulously designed to ensure the anonymity of participants’ and their teachers.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter set a detailed framework for the methodological decisions of this research. These decisions were based on a constructivist philosophical stance which led to a qualitative research approach. The strategy that was found to be complimentary to the nature of the study and the researcher’s epistemological and ontological position, consisted of a PNI based on students’ personal experiences. It set the procedures for the collection of the data, through journals and exploratory questionnaires, and for the analysis of data, which was initiated by the themes brought up by the participants in a closure group session. Finally, ethical considerations were pointed out to safeguard all participants and to produce genuine results.
Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis (3896 words)

4.1. Introduction

This chapter explains the data analysis strategy employed in this study. This process was supported by a thematic approach conducted by the researcher in collaboration with the participants. The investigation aimed to identify the most and least important teachers’ character traits, the effect of these qualities on students’ holistic attainment and the challenges that prevent the implementation of relational pedagogies in the classroom. The data presentation was followed by discussions that aimed to explore the research questions and the specific emergent themes. Results were then linked to corresponding existing literature findings. Following this, limitations to the research were identified and a general summary of the results was presented.

4.2. The Data Analysis process

The philosophical foundation of this research project implies that participants’ subjective realities are valid and depend on their experiences. Therefore, the researcher’s intentions in this study were to translate children’s experiences and truths in the most authentic manner. Lester et al. (2020) state that good qualitative research depends upon the researcher’s ability to conduct rigorous analysis. However, because children’s experiences differ from those of adults, their interpretation of data may diverge (Luchtemberg et al., 2020). To strengthen research outcomes, researchers have the responsibility to include children’s marginalised positions in relation to adults during all stages of the research process (Christensen and James, 2000). On the other hand, young people are new to data analysis and including them in research may compromise its validity. An alternative was suggested by Clark et al. (2001) who included CYP in the interpretative stage to varying degrees, depending on the type of research. In view of this, to capture and analyse subjective experiences, while letting children participate in the analysis process to an extent, the researcher chose to use a thematic approach. This approach is flexible enough to examine the perspectives of different participants and to generate insight through comparisons. It is also useful in this case because this type of analysis does not require the detailed theoretical
knowledge of other approaches, so it is more compliant with children’s needs (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The inclusion of children in the data analysis process of this study was also inspired by the outcomes of the pilot project. During the experimental trial, the researcher was faced with the challenge to preserve and represent each participant’s form of expression while deriving broader themes (Falmange, 2006). Consequently, the researcher decided to guide the participants to analyse the data themselves and noticed that the discussion points that emerged from the coding done by the adult researcher, did not match with the discussion points brought up by participants. On this account, the researcher decided to use a predominately inductive strategy and to include the eight participants in the data analysis process during a group session, using a coding reliability approach (Joffe, 2012). This approach seeks the consensus of multiple coders (Braun and Clark, 2013) and has the potential to enable the researchers to hypothesise themes while rigorously exploring the data collected (Terry et al., 2017). Thus, the first stage of this collaborative process consisted of the familiarisation of data from the guided questionnaire, which was kept anonymous by means of participants’ coding. The researcher’s role in the second stage of the analysis was to introduce open coding, by encouraging participants to find meanings and patterns in the data, which were subsequently colour coded according to their similarities. Due to the researchers’ constructivist philosophy, the focus in this stage was not only on recurrent ideas, but on their significance. Finally, all the excerpts were brought together and conceptualised, they were listed under the related code title to lead to the final themes. The researcher suggested several theme titles from the results of the coding. Some suggestions were altered by the participants and a clear representation of what the emergent themes were, from the participants’ perspective, was produced. After a thorough discussion about the main ideas, the themes were tabulated, presented, and discussed by the researcher (see Appendix 10).

4.3. The Teachers’ positive and negative character traits from students’ perspectives.

In the guided questionnaire, participants were requested to choose two of the most important and least appealing teachers’ characteristics, from a list pre-compiled by the
researcher. One of the options was labelled ‘others’ and gave participants the opportunity to include any trait which might not have been listed. The charts below represent the results.

**Figure 3. Teachers' Positive Characteristics**

![Bar chart showing positive characteristics of teachers](image)

**Figure 4. Teachers' Negative Characteristics**

![Bar chart showing negative characteristics of teachers](image)

The three most important characteristics for participants were friendliness, open-mindedness, and sense of humour, with friendliness being mentioned by almost all the participants. On the other hand, the participants expressed negative feelings towards angry, disrespectful, and unmotivated teachers with an old-fashioned mentality. This representation, however, was incongruent to what they expressed in the answers to the other open-ended questions. It was observed that the character traits that were
chosen from the researchers’ list, did not represent what the participants really wanted to portray. Methods that attribute a common language to describing human characteristics tend to be inaccurate in portraying subjective realities (John et al., 2008). Lindquist et al. (2015) explain this by referring to the constructivist approach of how people use their knowledge of words to make meaning of emotions. Humans categorise other people’s behaviour based on the present context, on their past and present experiences of the knowledge in context or to other situations that they perceive as similar. Therefore, people can give different meanings to the same word. On this account, a second discussion point was generated to describe what the participants really meant when referring to the most and least important teachers’ character traits, after being given time to elaborate on the meaning that they associate with the words in the researchers’ list.

4.4. The discrepancy between the use of the researcher’s language and the respondents’ subjective realities.

4.4.1 Positive teachers’ character traits

‘Friendly’ was the most repeated positive trait. Two respondents related friendliness to teachers who are understanding. Others described friendliness as encouraging, calm, nice, relaxed, and kindhearted. Friendly teachers, according to students, believe in them, and are loving and helpful. The second most important teachers’ characteristic for the participants was listed as ‘funny.’ For the participants having an entertaining teacher whose humane and humorous is important. ‘Open-mindedness’ was also positively perceived by the students. Being communicative and knowledgeable in their subject was related by students to ‘open-mindedness.’ Respondent 6 also attributed the word to the teachers’ acceptance of diversity. Among the words chosen by one participant only were; ‘Intelligence’ which was not only associated with subject knowledge, but also with open-mindedness and the ability to be flexible; ‘Respect’ in terms of patience and repetitiveness in explanations; ‘Thoughtfulness’ which was also linked to respect and understanding and; ‘Easy explanation’ which was associated with patience and repetitiveness during lessons.
4.4.2 Negative teachers’ character traits

‘Anger’ was listed as the most despised characteristic from the list produced by the researcher. An angry teacher according to participants, ‘complains’, ‘hates students’, ‘is scary’ and ‘too strict’. Four negative characteristics were considered as the second most disliked by participants. Demoralising and showing no interest in the students were the definitions that two of the respondents associated with being ‘Disrespectful’. Respondents 8 and 4 chose ‘Does not listen’, relating it to the fact that teachers are ‘too strict’, that they often focus only on academics and fail to realise that sometimes
students face personal challenges. This definition was also linked by Respondent 4 to teachers with ‘no empathy’. The lack of technological knowledge was attributed by Respondent 1 and 2 to an ‘old fashioned mentality’. Teachers who are ‘unmotivated,’ that show no enthusiasm and who are apathetic were also considered less positively. ‘Nervous’ and ‘Impatient’ were used interchangeable by Respondents 3 and 7 to describe teachers who ‘are always in a hurry to finish what they have planned’. Finally, one participant associated ‘negativity’ with moodiness or ‘never knowing what to expect from teachers’. The actual words of the participants could not be quoted directly from the participants’ responses because the questionnaires were answered in Maltese. Their translation can however be reviewed in Appendix 10.

![Diagram showing students' understanding of negative traits](image-url)

*Figure 6. Students’ understanding of negative traits*
The presentation and analysis of these results introduce us to the first emergent theme in this investigation which is represented by the diagram below.

4.4.3 Theme 1: Agency vs Communion

From the participants’ responses, it is evident that students focus more on the socio-emotional traits of their teachers, rather than their teaching strategies. According to Wubbles et al. (2012), high levels of ‘agency’ and ‘communion’ from teachers are usually associated with better educational outcomes, whereas low levels of ‘agency’ and ‘communion’ affect the educational outcomes negatively. Bakan (1966) refers to ‘agency’ as an individual’s ability to manage his environment, to assert the self, and to experience power. On the other hand, ‘communion’ is associated with the individual’s desire to closely relate to and cooperate with others. In this study, communion was considered far more important than agency for the respondents. The participants emphasised on the importance of characteristics related to ‘communion’, such as ‘friendliness’, ‘fun’, ‘anger’ and ‘disrespect’. In fact, these characteristics were
mentioned twenty-six times by participants during the questionnaire. Qualities related to ‘agency’, on the otherhand, were only mentioned ten times and were mostly linked to negative character traits. These attributes were related mostly to subject knowledge, to teaching methodologies and to teaching styles. The results produced by the participants are in line with Mainhard et al. (2018), who indicated that students believe that ‘communion’ is much more affective for students’ well-being than ‘agency’. Consequently, from the emphasis of the participants on the importance of characteristics related to the emotional connection between teachers and students, one can conclude that, from students’ perspectives, relational pedagogies in student-centred teaching approaches, have a great impact on students’ holistic well-being (Dyer, 2018; Cefai et al., 2021).

4.5 The effect of the teachers’ characteristics and their teaching approach on students’ academic and socio-emotional development.

All participants agreed that teachers’ characteristics influence student-teachers’ relationships. In response to the research questions in this study, participants state that positive relationships with teachers influence both their academic, and their personal development positively. The positive outcomes of the relational aspect of teaching were also noticed by various researchers across time (De Bruin, 2021; Hebebci et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Brunetti and Martson; 2018; Dyer, 2018; Classens et al., 2016; Lupascu, 2014, Fidalgo et al., 2014). Human relationships are considered essential in deeper learning processes (Fullan and Langworthey, 2014). A consensus was also found on the fact that negative relationships have the opposing effect on the students' holistic development. As Pearson (2013) states “Kids do not learn from people they don’t like”.

4.5.1 Theme 2: The Indirect effect of Relational Pedagogies on Academic Outcomes

Seven participants linked the effects of relational pedagogies to their exam scores. Research suggests that affective teacher-students’ relationships contribute to students’ academic outcomes. Although the participants implied that positive and negative academic outcomes derive from the relationship that they build with their
teachers, the actual outcomes of the relational aspect of teaching mentioned by participants, contributed mainly to their personal development. The most recurrent positive outcomes were, self-realisation, self-worth, increased motivation, more concentration, and serenity, which in turn led to the potential to pass on to a higher track. The same respondents mentioned the opposing outcomes to explain the negative consequences of bad relationships with teachers. Most participants implied that negative teacher-students’ relationships affected their mental state (anxiety, loss of concentration, depression, self-depreciation), leading to decreased academic performance. Only one participant stated that relationships between teachers and students do no affect one’s exam scores. These findings imply that relational pedagogies do not necessarily have a direct effect on students’ academic outcomes.

![Figure 8. Relational pedagogies and academic outcomes](image)

This is in line with the constructivists’ standpoint which implies that having a good relationship with teachers enables students to acquire certain personal strengths that have the potential for academic growth. Teachers can provide their students with ‘Academic Psychological Capital’ which is considered fundamental for affective learning (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019). As opposed to Thorndike’s theory of connectionism (1905), learning is not the direct result of the connection between ‘stimuli’ and ‘response’ and it does not happen through “obuchenie” or instructions, but it happens through a collaborative engagement that enables students to co-construct higher psychological structures that generate learning (Vygotsky, 1978). These findings are also in line with the Listening Project at the Mc Millan nursery (Open University, 2020), which shows that the connection between ‘stimuli’ and ‘response’
can be defeated through an attuned predisposition towards the listener. The strength of listening with one’s whole being creates an atmosphere of care, love, mutual respect, and dignity, and makes the listener more open to new knowledge.

4.5.2 Theme 3: The long-term effects of positive Relational pedagogies on the Socio-emotional dimension

Among the most mentioned personal strengths acquired by positive interactions with teachers, participants mentioned increased motivation and self-esteem. They also implied feeling happy, loved, understood, respected and more confident. Almost all participants also reported increased perseverance in response to encouraging teachers. These short-term positive effects of relational pedagogies align with current research that emphasises the value of strong teacher-student relationships for immediate personal development (Konishi and Park, 2017; Quin, 2017; Scott-Croff and Palacio, 2019). However, along with the short-term effects of positive relational pedagogies, participants in this study also reported gaining long lasting skills. Two of the respondents stated that good relationships with teachers helped them become more open to different opportunities in life, because they ‘felt less scared’. Four participants predicted that positive relational experiences with teachers could potentially help them in future encounters, such as in becoming better friends. The long-term outcomes of relational pedagogies are supported by Moen et al. (2020) who state that caring relationships may lead to social inclusion and social justice. These are also justified by additional researchers’ findings that link the interactions between students and teachers with self-knowledge acquisition and long-term social, emotional, and academic progression (Wentzel, 2009; Hosan and Hoglund, 2017; Ladd et al., 2017). Teachers who can create positive bonds with students manage to guide their followers in Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, which enables students to use newly learned skills, acquired through social interactions, to become better people in the present and future.
4.5.3 Theme 4: The short-term effect of negative Relational pedagogies on students’ holistic well-being

The respondents reported that negative teacher-students’ relationships make them vulnerable to certain weaknesses. Most participants expressed feeling devalued, uncomfortable, and unmotivated during conflicting interactions with their teachers. Other recurrent negative outcomes of such encounters were dissatisfaction and lack of self-realisation. One participant specifically mentioned feeling anxious and depressed, to the point of school-refusal, around the time of these experiences. School alienation as a result of bad teacher-students’ relationships has also been predicted by Skinner et al. (2014). Havik et al. (2014) state that school refusal is associated with long-term anxiety and depression, and one of the causes of school refusal is a negative experience with teachers. Conversely, most participants in this investigation linked the effects of negative relationships to short-term consequences. None of the participants implied that these negative outcomes lingered to date. Respondents 3, 6 and 7 implied that negative teachers’ characteristics are transferable from teachers to students and affect their immediate well-being (‘when the teacher is nervous, I become nervous’, ‘when she is angry, I feel angry’, ‘when the teachers is unmotivated, I tend to sleep’). Herrando and Constantinides (2021) argue that emotional contagion in human interactions can happen as a reaction to facial expressions or verbal, behavioural and psychological interactions. Additionally, Fredrickson (2001) whilst agreeing that negative emotions produce an immediate negative reaction, states that they do not necessarily have long-term effects. On the other hand, positive emotions tend to produce more gradual but long-term outcomes.

4.5.4 Theme 5: Shared responsibility in the Relational aspect of teaching

From the perspective of most participants, the responsibility to build a good relationship depends on the teachers’ and students’ predisposition. In contrast to Cefai et al. (2021) who advocate a whole-school approach for holistic wellbeing, the participants did not mention any members of the staff other than teachers, as grantors of their educational attainment. This implies that teachers are the most impactful agents of the students’ holistic wellbeing, other than themselves (Dyer, 2018; Ben
Arieh, 2014; Holzer et al., 2021). Only one participant believed that good teacher-students’ relationships should be solely ascribed to teachers’ motivation. He stated that teachers tend to focus only on academics and are unwilling to put students’ needs first. In contrast, Ljugblad (2016), whilst acknowledging the influential role of teachers, states that success cannot be acquired without interactions with students. Respondents 2 and 6 concurred, they stated that successful interactions are not only dependant on the teacher’s character but also on the character of the students. They argued that the failure to create good relationships depends on how anxious and open teachers and students are during their encounters. Another participant added that relationships cannot be created if teacher’s and student’s characters are incompatible. Respondent 5, whilst agreeing that teachers have a responsibility in this process of interactions, said that students have the final say in question. ‘Students decide whether to let their teachers build good relationships, depending on how much respect they are being offered’. Humans tend to reciprocate in social interactions (Sanfey, 2007). Therefore, from these results, in compliance with the working alliance theory, we can deduce that the emotional bond between two stakeholders is detrimental to achieving shared goals (Toste et al., 2015). This is also a reflection of Vygotsky’s (1978) idea, that learning takes place through teacher-students’ interactions. Knowledge is not only dependent on the teachers and the students individually, but it is generated by relational pedagogies that have the power to affect students’ holistic well-being.

Moreover, on the contrary to Seabi (2012) respondents in this study did not mention the context as a contributing factor to their educational attainment. This may have been dependent on the fact that the questions were mainly directed towards teachers and students and may have unintentionally led the students to focus only on this one specific relationship. The context may also not have been specifically mentioned by the participants because of its intrinsic nature.
4.6. The challenges pertaining to the successful implementation of appropriate relationships between teachers and students in the classroom.

Maintaining adequate teacher-student relationships may prove to be challenging at times because of restrictions that do not only depend on the teachers’ and the student’s predisposition. In response to the third and last research question, that aims to identify the challenges preventing relational pedagogies, four participants mentioned time constraints dependent on the demanding national curriculum. In line with Dyer (2018) and Shen et al. (2015), one participant claimed that teachers do not have the time to get to know the students personally, ‘not because they do not want to’, but because of time constraints related to the curriculum and their workload. According to Kiel and Weis (2015), these limitations are not the only reasons why secondary school teachers tend to be less responsive to students. They state that teachers expect young people to become more autonomous and self-sufficient as they grow older.

Another challenge, mentioned by Respondent 5 is associated with the behaviour of other students in the classroom. Challenging behaviour affects relationship building because of the tension it creates. Researchers agree and state that too many behavioural issues in the classroom leave no time and strength for the teacher to focus on their relationship with students. Challenging behaviour affects the teachers’ self perception and leads to social exhaustion (Dicke et al., 2014). Impaired teachers, consequentially lower students’ achievements (Klunsmann, 2016). Although challenging behaviour is considered by the participants as a ‘cause’ that prevents relationship building, some might argue that challenging behaviour may also be the ‘effect’ of the lack of the relational aspect in teaching. Yassine et al. (2020) indicate that teacher-student relationships impact students’ behaviour, and affect academic success. Whether challenging behaviour is the ‘cause or ‘effect’ impacting the relational aspect of teaching, building positive relationships with students and praising them, have the potential to minimise and prevent issues related to misbehaviour (Lynne et al., 2017).
4.7. Limitations

Even though every stage of this study was thoroughly reflected upon, some limitations were still noticed. Qualitative studies focus on validity rather than reliability, they seek to gain deeper understanding rather than to produce generalisations (Denzil and Lincoln, 2011). On this account, qualitative research is often criticised for being too subjective, which makes it less credible to policy-makers, who tend to rely on quantitative research to inform policies (Sallee and Flood, 2012). Moreover, the quest to explore deeper subjective realities together with time constraints, force the researcher to work with a small sample size. Although this study emphasised inclusion by involving mixed ability students, it was still limited to 8 participants which raises issue of generalisability to the whole population of the research (Harry & Lipsky, 2014).

Additionally, while students’ perspectives are detrimental in educational research, since this study concluded that the outcomes of students’ holistic education depend on the interaction between both teachers and students, another limitation related to the lack of inclusion of teachers’ perspectives emerged.

Other limitations were noticed during the interpretative stage of this study. Although data analysis was initiated by participants, the results were discussed by the researcher, which means that they may have been subjected to bias, and cannot be considered completely value free (Delamont, 2018). Moreover, to accommodate the school’s and researcher’s work schedule, only a short period of time was available for this research. Time restrictions limited the process of relationship building with the participants which might otherwise have led to more honesty and openness in the discussions. Factually, the researcher noticed a lack of peer interaction during the group session (collaborative data-analysis stage) which inhibited lower-track participants from participating. This reservation could also have been related to them not understanding or not keeping up with the other participants’ line of thought, and could have been avoided if learning support assistants were to be present during the discussion, to help with coherence. Alternatively, the group session could have been held twice, one for the high track participants and another for the lower track participants, to give equal opportunities to everyone. All participants’ feedback was
important for the research, therefore the lack of involvement from any of the participants could have minimised the validity of the results.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, distinct aspects of the relational aspects of teaching were identified by the participants through a process of thematic analysis. In summary, this narrative inquiry indicated ‘communion’ as the most important aspect of the relational aspect of teaching. Teachers’ character traits that were considered as facilitators of emotional attainment between teachers and students, led to long-term positive effects on students’ holistic well-being, whereas the lack of such qualities demonstrated negative short-term consequences. It was also shown that relational pedagogies do not directly impact academic attainment but they play an important role in the students’ socio-emotional development, which leads to better academic performance. Among the challenges that prevent positive relationship building between teachers and students, participants mentioned; the teachers’ and students’ predisposition, excessive syllabi, time constraints and the presence of challenging behaviour in the classroom. Addressing these challenges has the potential to encourage positive relationship building and improve students’ educational outcomes.
Chapter 5: The Conclusion (769 words)

The final chapter exhibits a summary of the research findings. It explores the potential contributions of this study on the school under investigation and on the educational system at large. Some advice aimed at improving practice and policy, together with recommendations for future research are also presented.

5.1. Research Aims

This research aimed to identify the connection between the teachers' predisposition towards the relational aspect of teaching and its effect on students' educational attainment. Based on a qualitative analysis of students' narratives and perspectives, it can be concluded that teachers' characteristics that lead to positive emotional interactions between teachers and students highly impact the students' long-term personal development. The effects of these traits can also be associated with immediate positive influential consequences. On the other hand, teachers whose character traits do not facilitate relational pedagogies tend to have a short-term negative effect on students' holistic attainment. The results also indicate that the responsibility to create positive relationships in the classroom is not only dependent on the teachers, but also on the predisposition of the students and on other challenges mainly related to the teachers' work load and to students' challenging behaviours.

5.2. Contributions and Recommendations

This study shows that there is a significant need to give prominence to relational pedagogies to improve students' holistic development. One of the primary findings shows that teachers' characteristics that can be associated with 'communion' and that can facilitate the relational aspect of teaching, have a major impact on students' well-being.

As illustrated subsequently, the following influential positive and negative characteristics emerged:
According to students, ‘communion’ in teachers-students’ relationships affects the students’ holistic well-being much more than ‘agency’. It was also reported that teachers’ characteristics can have short-term or/and long-term consequences on students’ wellbeing. The following illustration provides a list of the identified outcomes.

Although teachers’ training programmes and Maltese national policies emphasise the importance of relational pedagogies, teachers are faced with many challenges that deviate their relational predisposition towards subject oriented teaching methodologies.
The following challenges were identified:

![Challenges to relational pedagogies](image.png)

To overcome these challenges, this research can be disseminated via a presentation during Continuous Professional Development sessions, where the School Management Team, College Principals and representatives of the Ministry of Education are present. Consequentially, it may serve as a foundation for the researcher and other teachers to reflect in and on practice. Reflecting ‘in’ and ‘on’ action, generates new knowledge and improves practice (Schon, 1987 cited in Walton 2011). This strategy may also lead to the fruitful endeavour of introducing discussions about the relational aspect of teaching in every school. At a school level this can be done through the yearly School development programmes’ work groups in collaboration with children, through self-reflective analysis. Including CYP in educational issues, can contribute significantly and meaningfully to new knowledge and can potentially enhance services that are provided to them (Humphrey, 2009; Shier, 2001).
On a larger scale, this research can be considered a starting point for future investigations about the complex relationship between relational pedagogies and the students’ wellbeing after Covid-19. To gain a deeper understanding on the subject, however, future research could comprise of longitudinal studies, that take both students’ and teachers’ perspectives in context, with the aim of discovering the actual longterm outcomes of the relational aspect of teaching. This can ultimately enlighten policy makers, because it gives evidence-based suggestions about the importance of relationship building between teachers and students, and it identifies and potentially eradicates the challenges that impede the application of relational pedagogies in practice.

5.3. Concluding remarks

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand the effects of relational pedagogies on students’ educational outcomes. By drawing from the perspectives of students, this research identifies the most and least impactful teachers’ character traits. In compliance with other studies, mostly based on the teachers’ perspective, students divulged experiencing higher degrees of personal and academic wellbeing in the presence of teachers with high communion traits (Wubbels and Brekelmans, 2005, Roorda et al., 2017). Existing research implies, however, that to optimise the positive outcomes of relational pedagogies, these traits must be followed by moderate levels of agency. In contrast to this, the students as co-researchers in this study, rarely mentioned agency as a positive impactful contributor to their educational outcomes. This interesting conclusion may depend on the different research approach undertaken in this study, but it may also be a result of a change in contextual circumstances in schools, brought about by Covid-19 pandemic. This confirms the importance of this study and reaffirms the need of continuous discussions and further research on relational pedagogies.
Post Narrative Critical Reflection (540 words)

Authoring this dissertation was not only impactful on my profession, but also on my personal life. During my eighteen years of teaching, I was always fascinated by how students’ academic and personal attainments were affected by the teachers’ social identities. The interest on this topic came from my personal experience as a student. I always felt that my exam scores and my personal development did not only depend on my personality, on my intelligence, or the lack of it, but also on how my teachers made me feel.

During E822 and following my tutor’s feedback to reflect on my philosophical stance in research (see Appendix 14), I realised that during my educational journey and consequently, during my professional development, I was being exposed to positivists and scientific paradigms of which answers on the topic did not agree with the picture I was seeing in actual practice. This instigated an investigative approach towards the belief that holistic educational development is not only intrinsically constructed but also dependent on social interactions (Vygostky, 1978), something which I would have never done without being prompted by my tutor. This encouraged me to become more self-aware, to inquire about different research paradigms and to ultimately become more confident in my writing. On this account, I insisted on conducting a qualitative small scale investigation based on children’s perspectives, using a constructivist approach, to get a clearer picture of the affect of the relational aspect of teaching on students’ holistic education. My personal experience, together with the knowledge acquired about myself helped me to build a strong research foundation to the benefit of this investigation.

After deciding on the topic and after getting a general idea of the approach, I needed to start working on the project. As a Maltese student, reading scholarly articles and academic writing in English were a challenge. With the help of my tutor’s feedback which directed me to be self reflexive (see Appendix 14), I learned to better structure my ideas and to check my writing meticulously. This meant having to repeatedly read existing literature, and drafting and redrafting my work while consciously reflecting on technical and critical vocabulary. This process refined my ability to analyse my writing.
and the work of others. Being introduced to reflexivity was a turning point for my professional and personal encounters. It enabled me to question my own ideas and to be more coherent and organised in my work. Reflexivity has not only influenced my academic writing but it also became the foundation of my actions during teaching and in many other personal situations. It made me more confident in my decisions because it developed my critical thinking skills, my self-awareness and my awareness of others. It made this accomplishment possible.

The large number of module and independently sourced material that I have been exposed to, the constructive feedback, together with the ability to be reflexive and confident, helped me to reach this goal (Appendix 15). It brought me closer to the answers that I was searching for and it changed me as a person. This research study may not answer someone else’s questions, but I hope it can be considered as a starting point for other people’s reflexivity in educational practice.

12 006 words
References


Herman, L. & Vervaeck, B. (2019) *Handbook of narrative analysis*, University of Nebraska Press, US.


UNICEF (2017) ‘*Inclusion with protection: Obtaining informed consent when conducting research with adolescents*, Innocenti Research Brief, Columbia University,
Available at: Inclusion with Protection: Obtaining informed consent when conducting research with adolescents (unicef-irc.org) (Accessed 7th May 2022).


Appendices

Appendix 1. The Journal English Version

Date: ________________________

1. How did you feel at school today? Circle the emojis that describe how you feel

2. Can you explain why you felt like this today?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

3. Was there anything that happened today that made your learning process more difficult?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

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4. Was there anything that happened today that made your learning process easier?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

5. How do you feel about the subjects you studied today? Why?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

6. Did anything else happen that may have effected your scholastic day?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix 2. The Journal Maltese Version

Data: ______________________

1. **Kif ħassejtek l-iskola illum?** Agħmel ċirku madwar l-emojis li jiddiskrivu kif ħassejtek

   🕶️ 😐 😮 😌 😜 😛 😘 💔 😓 😏 😘 😃 😍 😥 😆 😂 😯 😢 😭 😱 😳 😝 😛 😤 😞 😕 😟 😠 😡 😤 😮 😞 😜 😁 😆 😆 😂

2. **Tista’ tispjega għalfjejn ħassejtek hekk illum**

   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

3. **X’ġara illum li wassal biex l-esperienza ta’ tagħlim tiegħek tkun aktar diffiċli?**

   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
4. Ġara xi ħaġa li għenet biex l-esperjenza ta’ tagħlim tiegħek tkun aktar faċli?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

5. Kif thossok dwar is-sugżetti li studjajt illum? Għalfen?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

6. Ġara xi ħaġa oħra li setgħat effettwatlek il-ġurnata skolastika tiegħek?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix 3. The Guided Questionnaire English Version

1. Thinking about your school days, with reference to your journal, do you think that the relationships formed with teachers are important for your learning and academic outcomes?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

2. Tick the two most important characteristics that you look for in a teacher.
   o Friendly (kind and pleasant)
   o Open minded (considers new ideas, unprejudiced)
   o Trustworthy (able to rely on, honest)
   o Emphatic (puts himself in your shoes)
   o Strict (focuses on rules)
   o Optimistic (hopeful, positive)
   o Thoughtful (shows consideration)
   o Intelligent (expert in his subject)
   o Calm (patient, rarely gets angry)
   o Humorous (jokes and makes you laugh)
   o Nervous (impatient)
   o Listens
   o Does not listen
   o Helpful
   o Disrespectful
   o Unkind
   o Angry
   o Pessimistic
   o Other __________________________

3. Do the chosen characteristics impact your learning outcomes? In what ways?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
4. Tick the two character traits that you least appreciate in teachers.
   o Friendly (kind and pleasant)
   o Open minded (considers new ideas, unprejudiced)
   o Trustworthy (able to rely on, honest)
   o Emphatic (puts himself in your shoes)
   o Strict (focuses on rules)
   o Optimistic (hopeful, positive)
   o Thoughtful (shows consideration)
   o Intelligent (expert in his subject)
   o Calm (patient, rarely gets angry)
   o Humorous (jokes and makes you laugh)
   o Nervous (impatient)
   o Listens
   o Does not listen
   o Helpful
   o Disrespectful
   o Unkind
   o Angry
   o Pessimistic (negative)
   o Other ____________________________

5. Do the chosen character traits impact your learning outcomes? In what ways?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Tick the correct option and explain

☐ Yes  ☐ No  From your past experience, do you think that the relationships with your teachers effected your academic results? Why?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
From your past experience, do you think that having good relationships with your teachers helps you to learn more and more easily? Explain.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

From your past experience, do you believe that having bad relationships with your teachers decreases your chances of learning and makes the process of learning more difficult? Why?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Do you think that it is always possible to build a good relationship with your teacher. Why do you think that relationships differ from one another?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

6. What are the advantages of having a good relationship with the teachers?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Appendix 4. The Guided Questionnaire Maltese Version

1. Jekk taħseb dwar il-ġranet tal-iskola, b’referenza għad-djarju, temmen li r-relazzjonijiet li tifforma mal-ghaliema huma importanti għal riżultat akkademiku u ta’ tagħlim aħjar

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

2. Immmarka l-aktar żewġ karatteristiċi importanti li tfittex f’ghalliem
   - Friendly (qalb tajba u pjaċevoli)
   - Moħħu miftuħ (jagħti kas ideat godda, bla preġudizzju)
   - Ta min jaf dah (onest)
   - Empatiku (jitfa’ ruħu fil-pożizzjoni ta’ haddieħor)
   - Strict (iżomm ħafna mar-regoli)
   - Ottimist (jagħti tama, pożittiv)
   - Thoughtful (jagħti kas ta’ kulhadd)
   - Intelligent (espert fis-suġġett)
   - Kalm (paċenzjuż, rari jirrabja)
   - Ĉajtier (idahhqek)
   - Nervuż (bla paċenzja)
   - Jisma’ lil kulħadd
   - Ma jismax dak li għandek x’tghid
   - Jghin
   - Jiddisrispetta
   - Mhux qalbu tajba
   - Irrabbjat
   - Pessimist (negattiv)
   - Ohrajn

3. Taħseb li dawn il-karatteristiċi jeffetwaw ir-riżultat ta’ tagħlim? B’liema mod?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

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   o Friendly (qalb tajba u pjaċevoli)
   o Moħħu miftuħ (jaghti kas ideat ġodda, bla preġudizzju)
   o Ta min jafdah (onest)
   o Empatiku (jitfa’ ruħu fil-pożizzjoni ta’ ħaddieħor)
   o Strict (iżomm ħafna mar-regoli)
   o Ottimist (jaghti tama, pożittiv)
   o Thoughtful (jaghti kas ta’ kulħadd)
   o Intelligenti (espert fis-sugġett)
   o Kalm (paċenzjuż, rari jirrabja)
   o Ĉajtier (idaħhqek)
   o Nervuż (bla paċenzja)
   o Jisma’ lil kulħadd
   o Ma jismax dak li għandek x’tghid
   o Jghin
   o Jiddisrispetta
   o Mhux qalbu tajba
   o Irrabjat
   o Pessimist (negattiv)
   o Ohrajn __________________________________________

5. Taħseb li dawn il-karatteristiċi jeffetwaw ir-riżultat ta’ tagħlim? B’liema mod?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Immarka Iva jew Le u spjega

Mill-esperjenzi tal-passat, taħseb li r-relazzjonijiet li kellek mal-ghalliema effettwaw l-marki tal-eżami?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Mill-esperjenzi tal-passat, taħseb li meta jkollok relazzjoni tajba mal-ġħalliem tigħallem aktar u b’mod aktar sempliċi. Spjega?

___________________________________________________________________________

Mill-esperjenzi tal-passat, temmen li meta jkollok relazzjonijiet ħżiena mal-ğhalliema il-proċess ta’ tagħlim isir aktar diffiċli u titghallem inqas. Għalfejn?

___________________________________________________________________________

Taħseb li huwa dejjem possibbli li tibni relazzjoni tajba mal-ğhalliema? Għalfejn taħseb li mhux kull relazzjoni tkun l-istess?

___________________________________________________________________________

6. Għalfejn huwa importanti li jkollok relazzjoni tajba mal-ğhalliema?

___________________________________________________________________________
## Appendix 5. Research Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Planned time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Request permission to conduct the research in my state school from</td>
<td>14th – 20th March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Research Unit of the Malta Research Ethics Committee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of parents’ consent forms and participants’ assent</td>
<td>21st March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadline for consent/assent forms.</td>
<td>25th March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of journals and explanation of task.</td>
<td>28th – 30th March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation time for students – Journal writing.</td>
<td>28th March - 8th April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution and completion of unstructured questionnaires (in the</td>
<td>11th – 22nd April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>researcher’s presence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping the findings and ensuring anonymity – preparation for</td>
<td>25th April – 6th May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group session.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing the findings with the children; group session.</td>
<td>9th – 13th May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full write up of research project</td>
<td>13th May – 27th July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of the dissertation</td>
<td>August 2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 6. Parents’ Information Letter and Consent Form  
(English Version)

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Denise Attard Degiorgio and I am doing a research dissertation as part of a Masters degree in Childhood and Youth studies with the Open University, UK. I am inviting your daughter/son who attends ***** senior school to participate in my research.

What is the research about?

The aim of this project is to study the impact of the relationship between teachers and students in our school and its effect on the student’s educational well-being.

Participants and participation

The study will include mixed ability and mixed gender participants of different year groups. All participants together with their guardians will be asked to fill in a consent form if they agree to participate. Participation is voluntary and participants who consent can still opt out of the study throughout all the stages of the research project without any consequences. Data of students who opt out of the study shall be destroyed upon request.

Type of Research Intervention / Procedure / Duration

This study will be based on the participants’ experiences, which will be documented in a personal journal. The participants will be asked to fill in the journal describing their daily scholastic experiences with and the effect of these experiences on their well-being. This will be done in a period of approximately one week and will not take time away from their daily lesson schedule. In cases where students do not appreciate writing they will be audio recorded.
They will be then given a guided questionnaire which will be filled with the help of the researcher. The questionnaire will be filled in by the researcher in cases where students do not appreciate writing. Students who still don’t feel comfortable with this option, will be recorded. All the information will be kept anonymous and private throughout all the research, as stated by the BERA (2018) regulations. The questionnaire will not be completed during the participants’ lessons, and it will take approximately 1 hour.

Students will then be asked to meet with other participants and discuss the data generated from the journals and questionnaires together. This will take approximately 30 minutes and will be done online after school hours. During the group discussion, the data collected will be kept anonymous.

**Risks and Benefits**

The researcher does not predict any risks in this research.

The researcher will emphasize on the positive contribution of the participants towards the well-being of the school, and they will be given a merit card for their involvement in school development. The study is voluntary, so whoever does not agree to participate will not be affected in anyway.

**Confidentiality**

The researcher will maintain confidentiality of data with respect to the participant and the information shared. Names and other personal identifiable information shall only be available to the researcher. The data of the journal and the guided questionnaires shall only be accessed by the researcher, and it will be kept till September 2022. The research participants will be informed about their rights, under the Data Protection Act Chapter 586 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018), to access, rectify or erase the data concerning them. In cases where research is sensitive or involves participants who are vulnerable, extra precautions will be taken to ensure safety and anonymity. In case of participants’ disclosure of sensitive
information, that may lead to harm to self or others, as per Maltese law about child protection, the participants will be made aware that the Head of School will be notified, and the necessary actions will be taken to safeguard them.

**Sharing the Results**

The researcher will be sharing the findings with the participants, the Head of School and among the school community.

**Who to Contact?**

You can contact me by email: or the head of school

Mr. C. Higgans by email:

I am grateful for your time in reading this letter and I look forward to working with your son/daughter on this study. These experiences will help me as an educator and most importantly, they will help all educators to understand the importance of the relationship between teachers and students and its effect on the students’ well-being.

Best Wishes

Denise Attard Degiorgio
Declaration of Consent

Please tick the following boxes if you agree with the corresponding statement.

☑ I hereby declare to have read the above information about the nature of the study, my son/daughter’s involvement, and data management.
☑ I have been given all the information requested about the purpose of the study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my questions have been satisfactorily answered.
☑ I understand that I am free to contact the researcher or the researcher’s supervisor to seek further clarification and information.
☑ I have understood that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop the participation at any time without giving a reason and without any consequence. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. If I choose to withdraw from the study before the 6th of May, any data collected from the researcher will not be used and shall be erased.
☑ I understand that all data is confidential and that there will not be any connection between the personal information provided and the data.
☑ I understand that there are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study.
☑ I consent to my son/daughter being audio recorded in the case that he/she is uncomfortable with written communication or in the case that the study has to be done online.
☑ I understand that the identity of my son/daughter will remain anonymous in any form of dissemination, written or otherwise.
☐ I understand that all data collected will be erased on completion of this study and following the publication of results.

☐ I understand that under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for data concerning my daughter/son.

☐ I understand that should I have any further queries, I can contact Denise Attard Degiorgio (researcher) or Mr. C. Higgans (head of school)

____________________________________  ______________________________________
Guardian’s Name and surname           Guardian’s signature

____________________________________  ______________________________________
Guardian’s Name and surname           Guardian’s signature

____________________________________
Date
Appendix 7. Parents’ information letter and Consent Form
(Maltese Version)

Għeżież ġenituri/kustodji,


Fiex tikkonsisti din ir-ričerka?

L-Iskop ta’ dan il-progettu huwa li nistudja l-impatt tar-relazzjonijiet bejn l-istudenti u l-ġhalliema fl-iskola tagħna u l-effetti li dawn ir-relazzjonijiet għandhom fuq il-ġid tat-tfal b’mod sħiħ.

Partecipanti u partecipazzjoni

Dan l-istudju se jikkonsisti minn partecipanti b’abbiltajiet imħalltin u b’tahlit tal-ġeneru, minn snin skolastiċi differenti. Il-partecipanti flimkien mal-kustodji se jiġu mitluba jimlew formola ta’ Approvazzjoni jekk jaqblu mal-partecipazzjoni. Il-partecipazzjoni hija volontarja u dawk il-partecipanti li jidħlu f’dan l-istudju, jistgħu jitiqlu minnu f’ kull stadju ta’ dan il-progettu mingħajr ma jkollhom l-ebda konsegwenza. L-informazzjoni tal-istudenti li jiddeċiedu li ma jkomplux dan l-istudju se tkun mħassra.

Tip ta’ proċedura/Ħin


**Riskji u Benefiċċji**

Ir-ricerca mhux qed jinstenna li jkun hemm xi riskji relatati ma’ din ir-ricerca.

Ir-ricerca ser jenfasizza fuq il-kontribut pożittiv tal-partecipanti favur il-ġid tal-iskola u l-istudenti ser jirċievu ‘merit card’ tal-involviment tagħhom fl-izvilupp tal-iskola. L-involviment f’dan l-istudju huwa volontarju, ghalhekk min jiddieciedi li ma jipparteċipax mhux ser jiġi effettwat bl-ebda mod.

**Kunfidenzjalita’**

Ir-ricerca se jżomm lill-partecipanti anonimi u se jżomm il-kunfidenzjalita’ anka fl-informazzjoni li se jaqsmu l-partecipanti. Ismijiet u mezz irħa ta’ identifikazzjoni personali se jkunu magħrufa biss mar-ricerca. Id-dettagli tal-ġurnal u tal-kwestjonarju ggwidat se jkunu jistgħu jinqraw biss mir-ricerca, u se jinżammu biss sa Settembru 2022. Il-partecipanti se jkunu infurmati bid-drittijiet tagħhom, skont l-Att tal-Protezzjoni tad-Data, Kapitlu 586 u l-GDPR (GDPR, 2018), li jaċċessaw, ibiddlu jew iħassru kull tip ta’ informazzjoni li għandha x’taqsam magħhom. F’każi fejn ir-

Tqassim tar-Riżultati
Ir-ričerkatur se jkun qed iqassam ir-riżultati mal-partecipanti, mal-Kap tal-Iskola u fost il-komunita’ skolastika.

Lil min nista’ nikkuntattja?
Tista’ tikkuntatja lilli fuq l-imejl:

jew lill-kap ta’ l-iskola Mr. C. Higgans fuq l-imejl:


Tisljijiet

Denise Attard Degiorgio
Dikjarazzjoni ta’ Kunsens

Immarka l-kaxxi jekk taqbel mas-sentenza.

- Jien niddikjara li qrajt l-informazzjoni t’hawn fuq dwar in-natura ta’ dan l-istudju, dwar l-involviment tat-tifel/tifla fl-istudju u dwar kif ser tiği mhaddma l-informazzjoni.
- Jiena nifhem li nista’ nikkuntattja r-rċerkatur jew is-supervajżer biex nistaqsi aktar dwar dan l-istudju.
- Jien nifhem li kull informazzjoni se tkun kunfidenzjali u mhux ha jkun hemm rabta bejn l-informazzjoni personali li se tiği miġbura u d-data.
- Jien nifhem li m’hemm riskji assoċċjati mal-partecipazzjoni f’dan l-istudju.
- Naċċetta li t-tifel/tifla tieghi tiği rrekordjata f’każ li ma tkunx komda li timla l-informazzjoni bil-miktub jew f’każ li l-istudju jkollu jsir onlajn.
- Nifhem li l-identita’ tat-tifel/tifla se tibqa’ anonima f’kull forma ta’ tqassim tad-data, kemm dik miktuba u kif ukoll b’mezzi oħrajn.
Nifhem li kull informazzjoni miġbura se tkun imħassra mat-tlestija tal-istudju, u wara li din ir-riċerka tiġi ppubblikata.

Nifhem li skont il ir-Regolamenti tal-Protezzjoni tad-Data Ġenerali (GPDR) u skont il-leġiżlazzjoni nazzjonali, jien għandi dritt nara, inbiddel u fejn hu applikabbli nistaqsi dwar informazzjoni li tikkonċerna lil ibni/binti.

Nifhem li jekk ikolli aktar mistqosijiet nista’ nikkuntattja lil Denise Attard Degiorgio (ir-ričerkatur)

jew lill-kap ta’ l-iskola Mr. C. Higgans fuq l-imejl:

________________________________            ____________________________
Isem u kunjom tal-ġenitur/kustodju                     Firma tal-ġenitur/kustodju

________________________________
Isem u kunjom tal-ġenitur/kustodju

________________________________
Isem u kunjom tal-ġenitur/kustodju                     Firma tal-ġenitur/kustodju

________________________________
Data
Appendix 8. Participants’ Information Letter and Assent Forms
(English Version)

Dear Student,

- My name is Denise Attard Degiorgio.
- I am doing a research dissertation as part of a Masters degree in childhood and Youth studies with the Open University, UK.
- I am carrying out a research study as part of my course.

What is the research about?

I want to get to know how different scholastic experiences affect the students’ scholastic well-being.

Participants and participation

✓ Anyone can participate in this study.
✓ You will be asked to fill in an assent form if you agree to participate.
✓ You are free to participate or not in this study.
✓ You can choose to stop participating in any stage of the study.
✓ If you choose to stop participating, there will be no consequences and any information shall be erased.

Type of Research Intervention / Procedure / Duration

1. You will be asked to fill in a small journal describing your daily experiences at school. This will be done during a period of one week.
2. You will then be asked to fill in a guided questionnaire with the researcher. This will take approximately 1 hour.
3. Finally, you will be asked to meet the other participants online to discuss the results of the study. The information will be kept anonymous.

**Risks and Benefits**

The research is not risky.

You will be given a merit card that shows your ambition and dedication towards education. Students who choose not to participate, will not be affected in anyway.

**Confidentiality**

No names shall be visible to anyone other than the researcher.

The data collected will be deleted after the publication of the study.

You can ask to see, change and delete any data concerning you.

In case of disclosure of sensitive information that involves harm to self or others, the researcher will inform the participants that the Head of School will need to be notified, to ensure their safety.

**Sharing the Results**

The results will be shared with the participants, the Head of School and among the school community to improve the teaching and learning process.
Who to Contact

You can contact me by email:

or the head of school Mr. C. Higgans by email:

Thanks for reading this letter and I look forward to work with you on this study. Together we can improve the students’ well-being in the future.

Best Wishes

Denise Attard Degiorgio
Assent Form

Please tick the following boxes if you agree with the corresponding statement.

- The above information has been explained and read to me and I understand what it involves.
- All the questions I had related to this study have been clearly answered.
- I understand that I am free to contact the researcher if I want to ask further questions.
- I am free to accept or to refuse to participate without the need to explain my reasons with no consequences.
- I can leave the study any time and all my information shall be destroyed.
- I understand that my name and any reference to my identity will not be visible anywhere in this research study.
- I understand that there are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study.
- I consent to be audio recorded in the case that I feel uncomfortable with written communication.
- I understand that all data collected will be erased on when the study is finished.
- I understand that I have the right to see, change and ask for any information concerning my involvement in this research.
- I understand that should I have any problems with this research study, I can contact Denise Attard Degiorgio (researcher) or the head of school by email:

_________________________________________  ______________________________________
Participant’s name and surname  Signature of Participant

__________________________
Date
Appendix 9. Participants’ Information Letter and Assent Form  
(Maltese Version)

Għeżież studenti,

- Jien jsimni Denise Attard Degiorgio.
- Qiedgha naghmel ricerka bhala parti minn Masters dwar it-tfal u ż-żogħżija mal-Open University, fir-Renju Unit.
- Qiedgha naghmel din ir-ricerka bhala parti mill-kors tieghi.

Fuq xiex titratta din ir-ricerka?

Nixtieq niskopri kif u liema esperjenzi skolastiċi differenti jeffetwaw lill-istudent.

Participanti u Partecipazzjoni

- Kulħadd jista’ jieħu sehem f’dan l-istudju.
- Se tkun qed tiġi mistoqsi biex timla formula tal-Approvazzjoni jekk taqbal li tieħu sehem f’dan l-istudju.
  - Tista’ tagħżel li tieħu jew ma tihux sehem f’dan l-istudju.
  - Tista’ tiddeċiedi li tieqaf tieħu sehem f’kull stadju ta’ dan l-istudju.
  - Jekk tieqaf tippar-teċipa, ma jkun hemm l-ebda konsegwenza u kull informazzjoni li tkun għaddejt tiġi mhassra.

Tip ta’ ricerka/Proċeduri/Dewmien

3. Fl-ahħar, ser tiġi mitlub tattendi laqgħa mal-partecipanti, onlajn, biex niddiskutu r-riżultat tal-istudju. L-informazzjoni kollha se tibqa’ anonima.
Riskji u benefiċċji

Din ir-ričerka ma tinkludi l-ebda riskju.

Se jitqassmu karti sofor biex tiġi apprezzata l-ambizzjoni u d-dedikazzjoni lejn l-edukazzjoni. L-istudenti li jagħżlu li ma jieħdux sehem m’hu se jiġu effettwati bl-ebda mod.

Kunfidenzjalita’

L-ebda isem mhu ħa jidher jekk mhux mir-ričerkatur.

L-informazzjoni miġbura se tiġi mħassra wara li l-istudju jiġi pppubblikat.

Tista’ tistaqsi biex tara, tibdel jew thassar kull informazzjoni li għandha x’taqsam miegħek.

F’każ li l-partecipanti jittkellmu dwar informazzjoni sensittiva li tinvolvi ħsara lilhom infushom jew lil oħrajn, ir-ričerkatur se jinformahom li se javża lill-kap tal-iskola, biex jiżgura li jkunu siguri.

Tqassim tar-Riżultati

Ir-riżultati se jiġu mqassma mal-partecipanti, mal-Kap tal-iskola u mal-komunita’ skolastika biex jitjieb il-proċess ta’ tagħlim.
Lil min nista’ nikkuntattja

Tista’ tikkuntattja lili permezz ta’ imejl fuq:

jew lill-kap ta’ l-iskola Mr. C. Higgans fuq l-imejl:

Nirringrazzjakom talli ġhoġobkom taqraw din l-ittra u nħossni ħerqana biex naħdem magħkom fuq dan l-istudju. Flimkien nistgħu ntejbu l-qagħda tal-istudenti fil-futur.

Tislijiet

Denise Attard Degiorgio
Formula ta’ Approvazzjoni.

Jekk jogħġbok imla l-kaxxi jekk taqbel mas-sentenza partikulari.

- Qrajt u spjegawli l-informazzjoni t’hawn fuq u nifhem x’tinvolvi.
- Kull mistoqsija li kelli dwar dan l-istudju ġiet inmwiegba b’mod ċar.
- Nifhem li nista’ nikkuntattja lir-riċerkatur jekk ikolli aktar mistoqsijiet.
- Jien libera li naċċetta jew nIRRifjuta li nipparteċiepe minghajr il-bżonn li nispjega u minghajr l-ebda konsegwenza.
- Nista’ nieqaf nieħu sehem kull ħin u l-informazzjoni tiegħi tiġi mħassra.
- Nifhem li ismi u kull referenza ghall-identita’ tiegħi mhux se jidhru mkien f’dan l-istudju.
- Nifhem li kull informazzjoni mġbura se tiġi mħassra meta jispiċċa dan l-istudju.
- Nifhem li għandi dritt nara, nibdel u nistaqs ġhal kull informazzjoni li għandha x’taqsam mal-involvejment tiegħi f’din ir-riċerka.
- Nifhem li jekk ikolli xi problemi relatati ma’ dan l-istudju, nista’ nikkuntattja lil Denise Attard Degiorgio (riċerkatur) jew lill-kap ta’ l-iskola fuq l-imejl:

_____________________________                    ________________________
Isem u Kunjom tal-Parteċipant                     Firma tal-Parteċipant

_____________________________
Data
## Appendix 10. Coding and Themes Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Characteristics</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness</td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>believes in the students</td>
<td>encouraging</td>
<td>I understand more, I feel encouraged, that someone believes in me, believes that I will pass, I feel capable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>calm and nice</td>
<td>plays sports with us</td>
<td>I feel calm, I have more time to understand more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>loving</td>
<td>I feel encouraged, I learn more and I feel I should respect him and listen to him</td>
<td>I can disclose personal stuff, I feel worthy, I feel comfortable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 3: The long-term effects of positive Relational pedagogies on the Socio-emotional dimension
<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>understanding</td>
<td>I feel relaxed and I learn more</td>
<td>My mental state is good, and I feel safe. I learn how to be a better friend, I learn that everyone has their own struggles, I feel comfortable, and I learn more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>kind-hearted</td>
<td>I learn more</td>
<td>I persevere, I try more, and you learn not to give up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>More focused</td>
<td>I learn more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funny</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>Entertaining</td>
<td></td>
<td>I understand more, I feel encouraged, that someone believes in me, believes that I will pass, I feel capable.</td>
<td>Improved my communication skills, more focus, lesson more entertaining, motivated, boosts my self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>Humane</td>
<td>sense of humour</td>
<td>I understand more</td>
<td>More enthusiasm, I have fun learning, more motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>good mood</td>
<td></td>
<td>I feel more motivated and interested and I learn more</td>
<td>You can talk about personal problems; you feel less shy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>R5</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>knows what to say</td>
<td>I feel relaxed and I learn more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>accepts diversity - considers everyone</td>
<td>I feel more motivated and interested and I learn more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>R3</td>
<td>gives time to understand</td>
<td></td>
<td>I feel calm, I have more time to understand more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>open-minded</td>
<td>I understand more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>R7</td>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>repeats explanation</td>
<td>I learn more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>R4</td>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>understanding</td>
<td>I feel encouraged, I learn more and I feel I should respect him and listen to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy explanation</td>
<td>R8</td>
<td>explains slowly</td>
<td></td>
<td>More focused</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Characteristics</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Theme 4: The short-term effect of negative relational pedagogies on the students’ holistic well-being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>R3</td>
<td>complaints always</td>
<td>I feel nervous and I don't learn</td>
<td>Feel bad and worthless, they break you down and you don't pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R5</td>
<td>Scary</td>
<td>It affects my mental status, I feel uncomfortable, it does not affect my learning</td>
<td>I am afraid to ask, and I feel uncomfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R7</td>
<td>hates students</td>
<td>I feel nervous and I don't understand the explanation</td>
<td>Less focused during the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R8</td>
<td>too strict</td>
<td>Not focused, demoralised</td>
<td>I don't understand the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespectful</td>
<td>R5</td>
<td>Demoralising</td>
<td>It affects my mental status, I feel uncomfortable, it does not affect my learning.</td>
<td>I am afraid to ask, and I feel uncomfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does not listen</strong></td>
<td>R6</td>
<td>no interest in students</td>
<td>My mood is bad, my mood changes with the mood of the teacher</td>
<td>I did not pass my exam, no motivation to go to school, the day seems longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R4</td>
<td>no interest in genuine excuses because of missed HW's</td>
<td>No time or motivation to understand</td>
<td>They ruin my day, they make me nervous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Old Fashioned Mentality</strong></td>
<td>R8</td>
<td>too strict</td>
<td>Not focused, demoralised</td>
<td>I don't understand the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>no use of technology</td>
<td>I learn anyway but I focus less, and I pay less attention, at times I sleep</td>
<td>Hates the subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unmotivated</strong></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>no use of technology</td>
<td>I learn anyway but my motivation decreases</td>
<td>Make the process of learning more difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>no enthusiasm</td>
<td>I learn anyway but I focus less, and I pay less attention, at times I sleep</td>
<td>Hates the subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>Apathetic</td>
<td>I learn anyway but my motivation decreases</td>
<td>Make the process of learning more difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not emphatic</strong></td>
<td>R4</td>
<td>no time to listen to personal problems</td>
<td>always in a hurry</td>
<td>No time or motivation to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>R3</td>
<td>rushes through the syllabus</td>
<td>I feel nervous and I don't learn</td>
<td>Feel bad and worthless, they break you down and you don't pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impatient</td>
<td>R7</td>
<td>not patient</td>
<td>I feel nervous and I don't understand the explanation</td>
<td>Less focused during the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>R6</td>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>My mood is bad, my mood changes with the mood of the teacher</td>
<td>I did not pass my exam, no motivation to go to school, the day seems longer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 11. Secure Data Storage Procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Resources</th>
<th>Type of Data</th>
<th>Where is the data stored?</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consent Forms</td>
<td>Hardcopies</td>
<td>Kept at home in a locked cabinet and will be handled only by the researcher.</td>
<td>Consent forms do not need to be accessed anytime the researcher needs to work on the project. Consent forms will be shredded after publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>Hardcopies or audio recordings</td>
<td>Kept by the students until the questionnaire is done. Then they will be scanned and downloaded on the researcher’s personal cloud service, in a folder named ‘Masters Dissertation’ and a subfolder named ‘Journals’. All devices used to access the cloud</td>
<td>After being scanned, journals will be always accessible, and the hard copies will be shredded. The scanned copies will be permanently deleted after publication. The audio recordings will be deleted permanently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Questionnaires</td>
<td>Hardcopies or audio recordings</td>
<td>Hardcopies will be scanned and uploaded on the researcher's personal cloud service in a folder named 'Masters Dissertation' and a subfolder named 'Guided Questionnaires'. All devices used to access the cloud service will be password protected. Audio recordings are going to be kept in mp3 form on the same drive. They will also be password protected, with a ‘lock out’ system after 10 minutes. Audio recordings are going to be kept in mp3 form on the same drive. They will also be password protected and backed up on a personal external hard disk drive after being encrypted. The external hard disk drive will be stored in a locked cabinet at home.</td>
<td>Saving the data on a cloud service gives the researcher the opportunity to view or listen to the guided questionnaires whenever needed. The hard copies of the questionnaires will be shredded after being scanned and the soft copies will be deleted after publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>password protected and backed up on a personal external hard disk drive after being encrypted. The external hard disk drive will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at home.</td>
<td>The audio recordings will be permanently deleted after publication.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the data collected from students who decide to opt out of the study will be permanently erased or shredded. The data integrity of all the stored files will be checked regularly.
Appendix 12. Permission to Conduct Research Study

GOVERNMENT OF MALTA

MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND SPORT

DIRECTORATE FOR RESEARCH, LIFELONG LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY

Tel: 25982743

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

Date: 25th March 2022

Ref: R03-2022 1071

To: Head of School

From: Director

Title of Research Study: A qualitative study among students ages 13-15 on the Relational aspect of teaching in a dynamic Maltese senior school context.

The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability would like to inform that approval is granted to Denise Attard Degiorgio to conduct the research in State Schools according to the official rules and regulations, subject to approval from the Ethics Committee of the respective Higher Educational Institution. The researcher is committed to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and will ensure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research. The researcher will be sending letters with clear information about the research, as well as consent forms to all data subjects and their parents/guardians when minors are involved. Consent forms should be signed in all cases particularly for the participation of minors in research. For further details about our policy for research in schools, kindly visit www.research.gov.mt.

Thank you for your attention and cooperation.

MA Ed (Op cn)
Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability

f/

Director of Research Lifelong Learning and Employability, Ministry of Education and Sports, Great Siege Road, Floriana.

www.education.gov.mt
Appendix 13: Ethical Appraisal Form

E822 Ethical Appraisal Form
Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth

NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking ‘in-person’ data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols which should include seeking Gatekeeper permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhering to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.

Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, a completed version of this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation (SSI) and as part of the EMA submission for those completing an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal (EP) form of the Dissertation.

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research. For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all “no” you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor.supervisor can assess the proposed research.

**Section 1: Project details**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a.</strong> Student name</td>
<td>Denise Attard Degiorgio</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>b.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>c.</strong> Project title</td>
<td>A Qualitative study on the relational aspect of teaching in a dynamic Maltese senior school context</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>d.</strong> Supervisor/tutor</td>
<td>Dr. K. Rix</td>
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### Section 2: Ethics Assessment

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a ‘gatekeeper’ (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a ‘police check’ or appropriate level of ‘disclosure’ before carrying out your research?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.</td>
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1. You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure (‘police check’) can obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

2. This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children...
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in nonpublic places)? If so, have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures?</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through?</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so have you indicated how you will protect participants’ anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?</td>
<td>诿</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants’ confidentiality?</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a ‘risk analysis’ and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

(individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

3 Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Deception or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

4 Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.
If you answered ‘yes’ to questions 12, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/).
Appendix 15. Reflection Evidence Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Feedback received and areas of development</th>
<th>How did this shape my dissertation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and understanding: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to knowledge of current debate and issues in your specific area of focus; drawing out concepts and themes; choosing a focus area for your dissertation; identifying and overcoming ethical issues.</td>
<td>After TMA02 my tutor pointed out that I neglected to mention enough theory to align with my overall conceptual framework.</td>
<td>This feedback made me focus more on the link between my overall conceptual framework and pre-existing ones. This led me to search for alternative research models and theories produced by other researchers and helped me to build a strong research foundation, based on my genuine personal philosophical stance. From this point on I had a clear idea of the type of researcher I am and was subsequently able to build a strong research design which aligns with my paradigmatic position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical analysis and evaluation: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to justifying or challenging your personal perspective; interpreting and critically analysing evidence and methodologies from your own and others' research; analysing and evaluating themes and issues; sourcing and critically reviewing a wide range of publications; creating an academic argument using synthesis; comparing and connecting practice and theory.</td>
<td>Before my EMA, I set myself two PDP targets: (1) To articulate my own assumptions and not let them influence my research (2) To listen to children’s voices genuinely</td>
<td>Apart from regularly using my research journal to write down what I was planning, I also made sure to keep a logbook to predict any possible implications related to my own personal assumptions, values, or preconceived ideas. Through my research methods I made sure that children were able to disclose without any influence from anyone. This made this research project as authentic to the representation of the participants as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to professional practice: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to designing and/or applying research methods; developing ideas from previous research and frameworks; reflecting and making adaptations during the research and writing process; addressing problems in research design;</td>
<td>Feedback from TMA02 implied the need for more attention to detail with regards to planning my research design. I underestimated the importance of a pilot project, and I was also neglecting ethical considerations related to people who were not directly involved in this study, but who nevertheless could have been affected by it.</td>
<td>Following this feedback, I decided to properly plan a pilot study. The pilot project led me to re evaluate my research design, in terms of participants sampling and data collection methods. The sampling was changed from one of convenience to a purposive one, for more inclusivity and authenticity. After the pilot study I also decided to include the participants in the data analysis process to give them</td>
</tr>
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</table>
identifying implications for practice and professional debate; challenging your own assumptions; managing workload and personal motivation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure, communication, and presentation:</th>
<th>Problems with structuring my ideas emerged from the feedback gained after my EMA draft submissions.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Targets, reflections or feedback relating to using academic style and referencing; presenting, managing, and sharing information in different modes; communicating concepts, findings, and ideas for different audiences.</td>
<td>My tutor suggested using a funnel approach which was a turning point for the structure of my dissertation. This allowed me to organise my ideas by gradually introducing key concepts coherently. Another important suggestion was to support my ideas with diagrams before starting to write, and to include the diagrams in my actual writing where applicable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my first two years of this degree, I have been advised to focus on appropriate academic writing and on coherence.</td>
<td>After twenty years from my last dissertation and being Maltese, this was expected. However, I did not expect that this would change so much in just three years. My tutors urged me to find methods, such as the PEEL method to structure my ideas. This constructive criticism led me to read more and more articles and analyse everything that I write. By the time I was in the third year, my writing became clearer and more coherent to the reader.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 16. Ethical Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Question to consider</th>
<th>Your thoughts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External/ecological</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural sensitivity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>What are the values, norms and roles in the environment in which I am working and are they likely to be challenged by this research?</td>
<td>• I must be extra cautious about values, norms, and rules in my environment because the Maltese school context is very different from the UK’s. In Malta, generally, CYP are viewed as vulnerable beings that need protection, therefore research is usually resisted to avoid harming or giving extra work to the participants. Resources, such as consent forms and research methods must be easy and not time consuming, and ethical considerations must be meticulously thought of and explained for reassurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of all parts of the institution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>What is the relationship between the group/individual I am working with and the institution as a whole? How does it affect the participant(s)?</td>
<td>• Research participants and other people that may be mentioned during this study can be easily identifiable, because the study will be undertaken in one Maltese senior school. To avoid any tension between participants and other members of the staff, and to safeguard the participants, the researcher needs to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. This is also the case with other people or institutions that might be mentioned or criticised in the process. Participants must be advised not to mention institutions or other people’s names during the process and the research methods must support this. • The researcher must keep in mind that this study is not the participants’ priority. Therefore, they should not be forced to participate in any way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive communication – awareness of the wishes of others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>How might my work be viewed/interpreted by others in the institution?</td>
<td>• The language used should be clear to people of different ages and different educational backgrounds to reduce power differentials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities to sponsors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>What are my responsibilities to the people paying for or supporting this research (local authority, my school, external bodies)?</td>
<td>• Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes of practice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Have I worked within the British Educational Research Association guidelines? Are there other relevant codes which might also be applicable? Am I aware of my rights and responsibilities through to publication?</td>
<td>• The BERA guidelines were followed together with GDPR regulations. • A request for research in Maltese state schools will be sent to the Maltese Research Ethics Committee to ascertain that all the resources and methods used in the study conform with Maltese Ethical requirements. • All the decisions taken will be based on the information gained during the ‘Becoming an Ethical Researcher’ course sustained in August 2020.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency/use of resources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Have I made efficient use of the resources available to me, including people’s time?</td>
<td>• Notwithstanding the lack of experience and time constraints, the researcher aims to make the most of the resources available. • The participants will be mostly called during their free periods not to disrupt their normal school schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of evidence on which conclusions are based</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Have I got enough evidence to back up my conclusions and recommendations?</td>
<td>• Multiple methods of data sources help to produce authentic evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The law</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>What legal requirements relating to working with children do I need to comply with? Am I aware of my data protection responsibilities? Am I aware of the need for disclosure of criminal activity? Do I need written permissions?</td>
<td>• Copies of the resources (methods, consent) planned and the rationale behind them were produced and will be sent to the gatekeeper, the Open University (via TMA) and the Maltese Research Ethics board for approval. • The participants (13-15 years) and their parents will be given an information letter with a consent/assent form.</td>
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### Risk

| 9 | Are there any risks to anyone as a result of this research? | No risks are predicted. |

### Consequential/utilitarian

#### Benefits for individuals

| 10 | What are the benefits of my doing this research to the participants? Would an alternative methodology bring greater individual benefits? | This research could potentially improve practice by encouraging teachers to be reflexive ‘in’ and ‘on’ practice, thus improving the students’ wellbeing. Future research could be based on longitudinal studies and could also include the teachers’ perspectives on the topic. This could lead to the verification of the actual long-term effects of relationships in the classroom, from both the stakeholders’ points of view and could also potentially inform policy makers. |

#### Benefits for groups/organisations

| 11 | What are the benefits of my doing this research to the school/department? Could these be increased in any way? How will I ensure that they know about my findings? Is my work relevant to the school development plan? Can I justify my choice of methods to my sponsors? | This study could be presented during the school development plan session. This could be followed by occasional discussions between teachers and students on the effects of relational pedagogies on the students’ wellbeing, with the intent to improve practice. This could also encourage reflexivity from the teachers and students leading to changes in behaviours. |

#### Most benefits for society

| 12 | Is this a worthwhile area to research? Am I contributing to the ‘greater good’? Is it high quality and open to scrutiny? | The inclusion of CYP in this study may serve as a means of introducing the concept of child participation in Maltese schools and to fill in the gaps in literature related to the involvement of CYP in research concerning their wellbeing. |

#### Avoidance of harm

| 13 | Are there any sensitive issues likely to be discussed or aspects of the study | Although the researcher will be cautious when planning this project, some teachers may feel |
| Benefits for the researcher | 14 | Am I going to be able to get enough data to write a good thesis or paper? Am I aware of my publication rights? What might I learn from this project? Will it help in my long-term life goals? | • This research study might help me become a better teacher by reflecting in and on practice.  
• It will also give me a clear picture of what the students’ needs in terms of personal and academic development. |
| --- | --- | --- | |
| Deontological | 15 | Have I been open and honest in advance with everyone who might be affected by this research? Are they aware that they can withdraw, in full or in part, if they wish? | • The researcher needs to be as clear as possible with the participants involved. The participants will be informed, before (Assent form and Information letter) and during the project, that they can withdraw from the study anytime until the initiation of the writing stage. |
| Avoidance of wrong – honesty and candour | 16 | Have I treated all participants fairly? Am I using incentives fairly? Will I acknowledge everyone involved fairly? Can I treat all participants equally? | • All the participants will be given a merit/appreciation card to thank them for their help in improving practice.  
• To cater for mixed abilities, participants will be given various options to choose from during the data collection stage depending on their preference and/or needs. |
| Fairness | 17 | Have I explained all the implications and expectations to the participants? Have I negotiated mutually beneficial arrangements? Have I made myself available when those involved might wish me to be? Are the participants clear about roles, including my own, as they relate to expectations? | • The implications and expectations will be explained in the information letter and assent form. Where possible participants should be involved in all stages of the project, from the data collection till the data analysis stage.  
• The researcher will be available to all participants in school and via electronic mail. |
<p>| Reciprocity | 18 | If there is any need for covert research, how will I deal with this? What will I do if I find out something | • Any unpopular findings will be reported in a respectful manner constructively. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keep promises</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>Have I clarified access to the raw data and how I will share findings including at publication? How will I ensure confidentiality?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Information about the secure storage of data (Appendix 11) and publication will be specified in the information letter and explained further verbally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• During the data collection and analysis, the participants’ names will be coded (R1-R8) to ensure anonymity.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do the most positive good</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>Is there any other way I could carry out this research that would bring more benefits to those involved?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A longitudinal study would avoid predicting possible future outcomes; however it is undoable due to time constraints.</td>
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</table>

### Relational/individual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genuine collaboration/trust established</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>Who are the key people involved? How can I build a constructive relationship with them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The participants are students at the researcher’s workplace. Students with direct teaching contact with the researcher were excluded from the study to avoid any form of pre-established relational consequences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Since participation is voluntary, participants who enrol are likely to be interested in the topic. The mutual common interest between the researcher and the participants is a good foundation for constructive relationship building. Subsequently the researcher will continue to establish a relationship by attuning with the participants.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Avoid imposition/respect autonomy</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>Am I making unreasonable or sensitive demands on any individuals? Do they appreciate that participation is voluntary?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A call for participation will be uploaded on the school notice board to ensure voluntary participation. Participants will be free to write their names if interested.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Participants will be reminded, that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study any time till the initial writeup, in the information letter and during the whole process.</td>
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### Confirmation of findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>What steps will I take in my methodology to ensure the validity and reliability of my findings? Can I involve participants in validation? Will I report in an accessible way to those involved?</td>
<td>The researcher will be flexible to the participants’ needs during all stages of the project, in terms of timings and places of meetings. The trustworthiness of the study depends on the researchers’ ability to account for personal bias which may influence the study. A logbook including detailed personal biases will be kept ensuring self-reflexivity. These biases will be kept in mind in the sampling process, during data collection and analysis. Mixed ability participants will be chosen to take part in the study to ensure different perspectives are represented. The participants’ accounts will be free of any adult interference in most of the stages of the research. To reduce researchers’ bias, the participants were involved in the data analysis process. Data triangulation will be obtained through multiple methods of data collection ensuring a more comprehensive set of findings. In participatory research and interpretative phenomenological analysis, it is said to be epistemologically advantageous to ‘triangulate’, by involving participants in the interpretative stage, to maximise the research validity and credibility (Smith et al., 1995).</td>
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### Respect persons equally

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>How will I demonstrate my respect for all participants? Have I treated pupils in the same way as teachers?</td>
<td>The participants were treated with utmost respect, they were given enough flexibility and agency to act as co-researchers in the study.</td>
</tr>
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</table>