
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL, RELATIONAL, AND DIGITAL DIMENSIONS OF TEACHING AS FUNDAMENTAL 21-ST CENTURY EDUCATIONAL SKILLS: A PERSPECTIVE ARTICLE

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Abstract

Teachers are among the primary players in educational settings as they provide student-centered services and improve students' adjustment. While students might be skilled in different areas, they require the teachers' guidance to reach excellent results. Therefore, investing in teacher training and preparation is essential to sustain students' future development. Literature shows that learner achievements primarily rely on teacher motivation, sensitivity, and competence. Teachers with these skills are more likely to get better performance and academic goals and, consequently, foster the educational sector of their country. Research demonstrates that teachers' psychological and relational competencies are among the main and fundamental aspects that need to be considered when determining the successful implementation of education. In addition to this, initial teacher training should also foster teachers' digital competencies as opportunities not only to improve students' educational outcomes but also for sustained, learning-oriented interactions between teachers and students. The main aim of this perspective article is to explore the most recent literature that shed light on these fundamental 21st-century teaching skills, highlighting them as protective factors not only for students learning processes but also for their emotional wellbeing.

Keywords:

Teacher-student relationship; student psychological dimensions; pedagogical relational teacherships; teacher digital competencies.

Introduction

Although teachers are recognized for their capability to convey knowledge and skills to students, it is essential to realize that they must undergo a learning process to acquire the skills that will make them efficient in their educational work. Teacher education can be defined as a research, training, and education program that refers to how individuals are taught fundamental skills to become effective teachers. Today, teacher education encompasses three critical factors: teaching skills, professional skills, and sound pedagogical theory. Teaching skills are the different skills that teachers must possess to ensure the learning process is functioning correctly (Zhao, 2022). To help teachers acquire teaching skills, training provides them with various practical techniques to foster their planning and organizing abilities. Better teaching skills provide the necessary reinforcement to students, lead to an effective assessment, better classroom management, and a better understanding of the needs of different learners. They also enhance communication skills between teachers and their students, improving how information is disseminated. Appropriate instructional materials are also crucial while providing the required teaching skills. Sound pedagogical theory refers to the psychological, sociological, and philosophical aspects teachers must understand and consider when dealing with students. It promotes a clear understanding in teachers of how practicing the teaching skills promotes the educational development of students and how it relies on their specific needs and preferences related to the learning process. Finally, professional skills could be defined as approaches, techniques, and strategies that would ensure teachers grow as professionals and provide their appropriate influence skills and knowledge to the learners. Professional skills dictate the conduct of different teachers and the approaches they must take in different situations (Worrell, 2014). They include computer, digital, interpersonal, soft, counselling, management, knowledge, and, most importantly, lifelong learning skills. The merging of teaching skills, sound pedagogical theories, and professional skills would ensure an effective influence of teachers' appropriate knowledge and skills on students. While learning these skills, educators become more aware of their roles and responsibilities in guiding learners to be responsible and productive future citizens. While on the one hand, effective educational training should also allow teachers to develop relational skills and to be empathic, reflective, and mindful of students' thoughts and behaviors because the psychological understanding of learners is the first step in providing a practical learning experience to students and discovering new ideas and ways of managing learning

processes; on the other hand, initial teacher training should also foster teachers' digital competencies as opportunities not only to improve students' educational outcomes but also for sustained, learning-oriented interactions between teachers and students (Jin & Harron, 2022). The main aim of this perspective article is to explore the most recent literature that shed light on teachers' psychological, relational and digital skills, three fundamental 21st-century teaching skills, highlighting them as protective factors not only for students learning processes but also for their emotional wellbeing.

The psychological dimension of teaching

Understanding students' psychological dimensions is fundamental to know the best educational and relational approaches that can be implemented to guide them. According to the literature, highly skilled teachers can analyse and sensitively comprehend students' psychological dimensions and characteristics (Stamp, 2019), the management of classroom dynamics, students' self-determination, motivation, and peer relationship and collaboration. Therefore, psychology can assist teachers in refining instructional methods and creating learning environments that are rich and engaging. The central role of psychology in educational contexts is to give teachers a better understanding of their students' learning history, social and environmental contexts in which they live, motivation, and their strengths and weaknesses. Educational psychology informs teachers' strategies in the classroom, making the learning process easier and more interactive among students (Narciss & Zumbach, 2022). Thus, through educational psychology, teachers can better understand the vital principles of human behaviour that positively impact students' learning process. Moreover, they can acquire the ability to use assessments and measurements appropriately to align with students' different needs and preferences and, consequently, determine where students are in their learning, fostering the achievement of high academic outcomes. The American Psychological Association (APA) provided a report in 2015 that showed the most important principles of psychology in the teaching environment. The report revealed that students' perceptions of intelligence and abilities significantly impacted their cognitive functioning and learning (Stamp, 2019). The students' perceptions strongly affected their learning and performance: those who believed they were not good enough in the class had poor grades than those who showed higher motivation levels. Moreover, those that believed they were good enough had better grades and found the learning experience more fruitful than those who had negative perceptions of education (Stamp, 2019). The APA report also stated that the basis of fruitful learning was what students already knew. Before entering any classroom, students have already acquired knowledge from their interactions inside their proximal and distal developmental contexts. Thus, teachers must understand a student's learning history to adapt their educational strategies to the present (Stamp, 2019), determining what is more suitable or applicable in the learning environment before beginning the educational process. Another essential aspect that educational psychology underlines is that the general stage of development of students does not always correspond to their cognitive level. It is important to realize that the different life stages do not always determine a student's capability to grasp certain concepts (Stamp, 2019). When teachers understand this, they become more aware of what students are effectively capable of achieving and can support them in generalizing what they have learned. One of the most critical functions of educational psychology, indeed, is supporting teachers in fostering the generalization of learning processes in students; teachers must help students not only in acquiring new knowledge and skills but also in understanding how to use them in different contexts of their daily life (Narciss & Zumbach, 2022). The generalization of the learning processes happens only when supported by a high-skilled teacher who can guide and scaffold students in this. Another important aspect of learning is a clear, timely, and explanatory response to students from the teacher. Teachers' characteristics and beliefs can also impact students' performance. For example, teachers with positive expectations about their students are more likely to promote better performance than teachers with negative expectations (Çetin & Eren, 2022). Finally, it is of great importance to realize that the emotional well-being of students affects their learning outcomes. Students that face emotional challenges in their social and family lives might not perform as expected. Often, teachers are unaware of these difficulties, making it easy to think that a particular student has not studied and acquired the cognitive skills to perform well. Challenges and various emotional problems shape the learning process. Training should also help teachers to recognize the signs of a student undergoing emotional problems to formulate better ways of supporting them.

The relational dimension of teaching

Educational relations between teachers and students seem to be a major concern in the 21st century, mainly due to the changing times and trends in teaching. The relational perspective in teaching acknowledges that students are different from one another, and educational activities should be adjusted according to their capabilities. Thus, teacher training should inform future educators that learners are unique and possess different capabilities that might

affect their academic performance (Ljungblad, 2021). Traditionally, educational knowledge and perspectives have mainly focused on a single individual or a collective group of people, but the relational teaching perspective offers a third alternative that seems to be more effective and fruitful: it shifts the spotlight from people, groups, and practices onto the different relationships that might help build the educational sector. Furthermore, this relational perspective could be seen as an integral part of the wider theoretical framework of inclusive education. Inclusive education recognizes the potentiality of differences among learners. Barriers like race, ethnicity, gender, and other cultural differences can negatively influence learning. By fostering a good relationship with their students, teachers can understand their varying needs and preferences and consequently, provide a student-centered approach to learning that can ensure these differences do not hinder a successful learning process (Bell, 2022). In this kind of teaching, educators ensure they focus on the unique attributes of different individuals to enable them to speak their own voices and emerge as unique persons. The relationships among individuals are fundamental to their lives. Scholars argue that the relationship between teachers and students is what determines academic success for most learners. Teacher-student relationships that are well balanced and monitored are likely to lead to greater academic performance (Ansari et al., 2020). Understanding the relationships between teachers and students is therefore critical for developing a fruitful learning experience. Teachers are required to undergo an extensive learning process before they can understand how to deal with different students. Once teachers better know their students, they can design instructions and change them according to students' interests and characteristics. For example, teachers can adopt a mix of group work, independent or pair-work to accomplish students' needs, they can use technology to enhance motivation further, or incorporate art. Students that are actively engaged by their teachers are likely to perform better. Teachers can also motivate by giving students ownership of their environment, involving them in developing the guiding principles of the classroom community, and in setting goals. From a developmental perspective, having teachers who are actively involved in students' academic work and their social lives leads to better performance and interactions in schools (Ljungblad, 2021). As students engage more with their teachers, they develop confidence and trust in them, which improves the learning process. It is also crucial to realize that teacher-student relationships should not only focus on academic success. Other aspects need to be well considered, like students' social lives and their interactions with other people. For example, it is critical to understand how students interact with other people. The relationships with others, including peers, are necessary for promoting high academic performance. The other effective way teachers can help develop students is by allowing them to explore, fostering their curiosity by choosing some of the things they prefer to work with. While teachers are meant to be guides, sometimes it is necessary to understand what students think or what they might prefer exploring as this would ultimately improve the relationship between teachers and the students, and in turn, the learning processes and outcomes. Therefore, the relational perspective of teaching is a wide area that is concerned with inclusivity. It recognizes that individuals have unique features that should be carefully observed to provide students with the best learning environment or conditions (Ljungblad, 2021).

References – Heading 1

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