Building Factors for the Trustful Relationship Among Medical Teachers and Students

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ABSTRACT

Our study aimed to explore the factors affecting the trustful relationship between teachers and students in a medical school, which is a subject that has attracted very little attention in literature. This study, conducted at the University College of Medicine and Dentistry in Pakistan, identified ways to increase the trustful relationship between teachers and students. Through a qualitative research design utilising an exploratory study method, one-to-one interviews were carried out with 10 medical students and 10 medical teachers. Data were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and codes and themes were applied using ATLAS.ti. Students revealed that a trustful relationship can be improved by enhancing teachers' professionalism, accessibility, mentorship, empathy, and dedication, whereas students should possess emotional intelligence and conformist, fairness, affiliative, and achiever qualities to build trust with teachers. This study found that by working on these qualities, a trustful relationship can be improved between teachers and students.

Keywords: *Trust, Trustful relationship, Student-teacher relationship, Student-teacher relationship in medical education*

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INTRODUCTION

Trust, which allows "intra-personal" or "inter-personal" relationships to form between two groups of people, is the backbone of any kind of relationship (1). Trust is critical in employer-employee, teacher-student, and teacher-parent relationships, for example (2–3). In the context of the teacher-student relationship, trust plays a motivational role for those students failing to cope with their studies (4), although their schools, preferences, and classroom ethics differ according to their background and culture (5).

The teacher-student trust relationship has a significant impact on students' academic performance and achievements (6). Students may face issues regarding their studies if they come across behavioural challenges related to study engagement, school adjustment, anxiety, tension, and academic performance. These issues can be managed through trustful relationships between teachers and their students (7). A college's reputation and financial security can also be affected by a lack of trust in teacher-student relationships (8). Student motivation, professional development, and academic scores can be improved with enhanced teacher-student trust, care, and respect (9). Although trust is important in classrooms, in order to develop a constructive environment, teachers use many management models and strategies to effectively control them. Student and alumni responses in a previous study revealed that a reduction in a college's reputation and financial insecurity could be traced to trust issues among students (9). Vygosky's socio-cultural constructivist theory was used to explore the relationship between teachers and students.

Less attention has been paid to trustful relationships between teachers and students in medical schools, although previous studies have explored the factors leading to trustful relationships in primary and high schools (10). Therefore, we explore the factors that build trustful relationships between teachers and students in a medical school setting to identify ways to increase trust in such relationships.

METHODS

In 2014, the University College of Medicine and Dentistry (UCMD) at the University of Lahore implemented an integrated modular curriculum. This medical institute is recognised by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) as well as the Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC) and operates privately under the umbrella of the University of Lahore. In the UCMD, MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) and BDS (Bachelor of Dental Surgery) degrees are run side by side for five years, with four years of study followed by one year of house job.

A qualitative research design utilising an exploratory study method was used, and one-to-one interviews were carried out with 10 students and 10 teachers across all five years of MBBS study. Purposive sampling was applied with predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Two students (one male and one female) from each class were selected, and one expert teacher (with the designation of assistant professor or above) was purposively selected from each subject. Teachers who had at least two years of experience teaching in this institute were preferred. Faculty members with a junior designation were excluded. Two students—one high scorer and one low scorer—were selected from each class. Students of allied health sciences were excluded from this study.

Interviews were conducted with six pre-validated, open-ended questions that were validated by four expert medical educationists. All participants were provided with the interview guide and consent form. Later, pilot testing was conducted with one student and one teacher before final interviews were held. To ensure

confidentiality, one-to-one interviews were held in a convenient setting for the participants at their workplace. Consent was obtained from each participant after a brief explanation of the study's purpose. Consent to video record was also obtained from the participants. After developing rapport with the participants, interviews lasting from 15 to 20 minutes were conducted and later transcribed verbatim in an MS Word file. Data were analysed using ATLAS.ti version 8, which is a qualitative data analysis tool. A thematic analysis technique was used for the data analysis.

Coding was done in three cycles, and a final version of 23 selective codes from the student data and 21 selective codes from the teacher data were obtained. During the first cycle of coding, 287 preliminary codes were generated from transcribed student data which were reduced to 60 codes during the second cycle of coding. Similarly, the 300 preliminary codes generated from the teacher data were reduced to 100 codes during the second cycle of coding. Finally, five themes from each data set were produced by categorising the selective codes. No sub-themes were generated with these data. Data were peer-reviewed and validated by two expert medical educationists to ensure the credibility of the study.

RESULTS

A total of 10 themes from transcribed data were identified after a qualitative analysis, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows that, according to student perceptions, the teacher-student trustful relationship can be enhanced by enhancing teachers' professionalism, accessibility, mentorship, empathy, and dedication.

While Table 2 showed teacher's perspectives about factors that should be present among students which enhances trustful relationship between teachers and students. According to the teacher, student should possess qualities of emotionally intelligent, conformist, fairness, affiliative and achiever in order to boost trust between them.

Table 1: Summary of themes, selective codes with related quotes from qualitative analysis (student perspectives)

Themes	Selective codes	Representative student quotes
Professionalism	Unbiased behaviour	"If teachers play favourites, students don't trust them."
	Being honest	"She/he should be honest about the profession he/she indulged in. When he is honest, he is passionate about his work then he will be passionate to the students."
	Good communication	"Student will be able to convey any information and knowledge to teacher easily and comfortably."
	Maintain professional relation	"Nobody should cross professional relation between students and teachers. Especially while interacting with opposite gender, student teacher relation should be more professional."
	Well-behaviour	"It's all about how students can communicate, how easily students can communicate with their teachers. It also depends upon the behaviour of the teacher."
	Maintain confidentiality	"You have such good understanding with your teacher that you can tell them anything that is bothering you regarding your studies or whatever is going on with you."

Table 1: (*Continued*)

Themes	Selective codes	Representative student quotes
Accessible	Approachable	"Student should feel comfortable. If the student is there, the teacher should give attention to him. If student comes to the office, then teacher should not be busy."
	Comfortability	"Student should not feel uncomfortable, and teacher should not let him feel that he doesn't even care about student."
	Welcoming nature	"Teacher should be more open; he should be more welcoming."
Mentor	Be respectable	"There should be level of respect on both sides."
	Provide guidance	"In context of teacher student relationship trust is basically that I feel free to go to the teacher regarding the subject I am insecure about."
	Positive attitude	"If the teacher's attitude is very nice towards the student and they are polite, and if they have a loving nature, then it's very easy for the students to trust the teacher and the student-teacher bond will be stronger."
	Providing feedback	"Teacher's feedback and opinion regarding student matter in building trust relationship."
	Sharing abilities	"I think I can trust my teachers by sharing me academic issues and to some extent with my personal issues too."
Empathetic	Attentiveness	"So, the teacher needs to be attentive, need to be caring because it's not easy for the students to go to the teachers and talk about their problems."
	Good listener	"Teacher should not be really strict in listening to the student's ideas."
	Helping relation	"Whenever I go to that teacher, he listens to me and help me out of many situations."
	Humble and patience	"Teacher should be polite and humble. Teacher should not shout; teacher should not be short-tempered."
	Understandable	"If the teacher understands the feeling of a students and give good ideas of the situation to that student, then student will go to him again and again."
Dedicated	Being responsible	"If I am trusting my teacher with my ideas, I expect that he gives me good suggestion, known by suggestions and those which will be our personal not exposed publicly or even with the teacher's family."
	Good performer	"If teacher's method is not good then trust will not be maintained." "Way of teaching is really good."
	Putting effort	"They completely devote their time, their efforts towards making you a better individual."

Table 2: Summary of themes, selective codes with related quotes from qualitative analysis (teacher's perspectives)

Theme	Codes	Representative quotes of teachers
Emotionally intelligent	Being honest	"Basically, I would expect the students to be honest to their own studies."
	Knowledgeable	"Student whom I trust blindly who have good academics in tests and viva, teacher know well about the caliber of student."
	Understandable	"If a student is mature enough to understand that if he is wasting time in the class."
	Being responsible	"Trusting the student to me is like the student should be responsible and accountable for the work he is assigned."
Conformist	Obedient	"Beside their academic performance, obedient student gains more trust of teachers."
	Good listener	"Student should listen to my advice, they should take notice of their weakness, they should improve themselves in academics and behaviour."
	Should follow guidance	"Student should trust a teacher that teacher will not misguide."
	Compliance	"In term of learning, especially student do follow me and respond me well."
	Helping	"I can get help from them for workshop. I used to trust them whom I got get interactions."
Fairness	Avoid manipulation	"If try to manipulate and try to bring fake things, there the relationship between the student and teacher gets disturbed."
	Avoid fake facts	"Most important thing in the medical profession that he will not give any fake facts and will not twist any fact."
	Avoid cheating	"For me, I have experienced as myself, there were students who thought it was their right to cheat and those were the students I don't respect at all."
Affiliative	Interactive	"I used to trust them whom I got interactions."
	Approachable	"The students involved in the co-curricular activities, in the task, they can be trusted more."
	Respectable	"In a teacher and student relation, the respect element is very important."
	Good attitude	"So, according to me, their attitude, discipline and truthfulness are the things that matter."
Achievers	Strong academic performance	"I think student's academic performance has an effect on building trust."
	Motivated	"The person who at least tried to achieve something and you can feel that he is struggling then you can help them."
	Hard worker	"Putting in an effort would be main thing. Either he is a good student or a bad student. Maybe he is not able to perform due to some circumstances, but he is putting in an effort. It is the most important."

Students Related Themes

Professionalism

All the students believed teachers should have the qualities of professionalism in them in order to build trust relationship with students. Teacher should be professional enough with students as they should not be biased, they should be honest with their job and with students, they should maintain good communication level with students, they should behave well with their students and also with their colleagues that gives good impression of being good and professional teacher.

Accessible

Almost all students said that teachers should be approachable enough, so that students feel easily and comfortable while discussing any issue with their teachers. Students should not feel scared of a teacher that hinders their communication and students will not be able to convey any information and knowledge or any idea to teacher comfortably. Students should feel free to discuss their ideas. According to the students, those teachers who have a welcoming nature and have politeness and patience in their nature build more trust than rude teachers.

Mentor

Students believed that the student-teacher relationship is more likely mentor-mentee relationship. Trust is important for maintaining this relationship. A respectable personality, providing guidance, positive attitude towards students, giving honest feedback, sharing abilities and ability to build strong relationship are the qualities of good teacher and mentor. As the student said, trust is there when there is respect on both sides i.e., teachers should respect students and students should respect their teachers. Teacher should be the one providing honest feedback and should guide students well.

Empathetic

According to students, empathy is one of the main factors that a teacher should possess. Empathetic theme includes that teacher should be humble and patient, maintain confidentiality, listen to students attentively and understand their problem and try to help them accordingly. In medical college, students rely more on their teachers for study, they go through many stresses like financial, personal, and educational but empathetic contribution of teachers towards student's relief their stresses.

Dedicated

Teachers should be dedicated towards the responsibility they were given regarding student's growth. They should perform up to the mark, teachers should be good in their way of teaching is good, and teachers should put effort towards students.

Teachers Related Themes

Emotionally intelligent

Teachers have a believe that students should have self-oriented qualities. One teacher said that students should be emotionally intelligent, which includes self-management, social-management, self-awareness and the social-awareness. According to the interview taken by teacher, students who are honest, strong communicator, knowledgeable, responsible, and understanding nature are the one who can easily grasp trust of their teachers. Teachers have a perspective that those students who can communicate well and are honest towards their studies can easily develop trustful relationship with them.

Conformist

Teachers had an opinion that students should be obedient, show compliance, listen to teacher's advice, follow the guidance and have helping nature. Main objective of students to be in medical college is to

study hard and become a good doctor, and students can only achieve their goal if they follow their teachers. It is also the responsibility of teachers to guide them for the right path, they should never mislead and misguide their students.

Fairness

From a teacher's perspective, those students who are loyal to their studies and loyal towards the profession they are going to adopt are more trustworthy. Success of the student and institute constitutes the fairness of students. Without any personal interest, students should be fair enough with the institute. According to teachers, who use unfair means during examination are not trustworthy.

Affiliative

Affiliation is related to the number of interactions students have with their teachers. Those students who used to interact more with teachers and approach them, either for academics or non-academic activities can easily grasp trust of their teachers. The teacher feels affiliated with those students who have a good attitude.

Achievers

Students who are good in their academics and have ability to perform good always liked by their teachers. According to the teacher's perspective, those students who have scored well academically and non-academically are trustworthy. As some teachers believed that getting good marks is not necessary but putting effort in studies and trying to get good marks are enough for trusting a student.

DISCUSSION

Student's and teacher's interviews provided insight about the factors that enhance trust of students for their teachers. During the extensive process of data analysis, it was understood that students and teachers both were fully familiar with the concept of "trustful relationship" due to well-established mentoring programme at UCMD. Student interview provides results which reinforce teachers' qualities that are important for building trust while teacher's interview give an insight of factors that result in trust enhancement.

A student's interview through thematic analysis revealed five themes which depict the factors that increases trust of students for their teachers in medical education culture. To develop a sound environment of any medical college, trust between teachers and students should be there to facilitate students in regard of financial, social, psychological and emotional satisfaction. In medical colleges there is high anxiety that needs to be managed (11). In addition, students also demand competency of teachers regarding safety in their institute (12).

According to study performed by Cruess and Richard in 2006, professionalism is essential component for teachers but no influence was made for the training of professionalism among teacher (13). Our study suggested that professionalism is also an essential component for the development of trust among teachers and students. As, it was stated "professionalism are the characteristics that a professional person should carry" (14).

Teachers presence have high impact on building trust (15) while students was of opinion that teacher should be accessible enough with welcoming nature is necessary which provide comfortable environment. Similarly, students had an opinion that teachers should be like a mentor, and mentors have quality of being a guide for without any personal or professional benefits. Whereas, trustful and guided environment have positive influence on student's learning (16). Students also need counselor throughout their career (17).

Emotional intelligence is term that is defined by Salovey and Mayer as "a quality of person that observe their own thoughts and thinking, and used to get advantage of this thinking to guide other's act" (18). In our study, teachers had an opinion that students should possess qualities of emotional intelligence that is supported by previous study as "relation between students-teacher effects emotional intelligence in positive manner" (19).

Literature revealed that disobedient students had difficulty in school adjustment whereas our current study suggested that obedience is a key to trust (20). Students being selected by teachers is directly proportional to the behaviour of students observed by teachers (21). Academic dishonesty is directly related to students fairness in exam and dishonesty will lead to distrustful relation between teachers and students (22). Our study suggested that if a student is obedient, then it would be easy for them to adjust in class and would be able to get teacher's attention. Whereas another factor of being affiliative is a powerful factor for enhancing trustful relationship. By applying these factors to students and teachers, trust can be enhanced.

The limitation of this study is that we only included students and teachers and did not get perceptions of other stakeholders such as parents, and administrations, etc. Moreover, future studies can explore the effect of trustful relationships on academic performance and achievement. Further, the effect of mentorship programme and how it influences trust also needs to be explored.

CONCLUSION

Trust is an important yet not thoroughly explored concept in the context of medical education and teacher-student relationship. This study identified factors that build trust between teachers and students. The key factors are emotional intelligence, conformism, achievers, fairness, and affiliated. Whereas factors that enhances

trust for teachers among students is professionalism, accessible, mentor, sympathetic and dedicated.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Review Committee (ERC), University College of Medicine and Dentistry (Ref. No. ERC/12/18/01).

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