Teacher Approachability in Higher Education: Determining its Characteristics and their Connection with Teacher Attachment Styles, Wellbeing and Spirituality

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Abstract

This research explored both teacher and student perceptions of teacher approachability and unapproachability in the Information Technology (IT) and Education departments at a public university in Pakistan. The theoretical framework of this thesis was a phenomenological approach.

One aim of the research was to determine the criteria students use to define teacher approachability and unapproachability. Sixteen final semester students (the entire cohort) in the undergraduate programmes of the IT and Education departments at the same university were interviewed to gather student perceptions of teacher approachability and unapproachability. Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with participants of the IT department identified four themes of characteristics for approachable teachers and three themes for unapproachable teachers. While with the Education department, three themes emerged for characteristics of approachable teachers and two for unapproachable teachers. In addition, an absence of characteristics was highlighted by students for approachable teachers. Unlike past research, this thesis highlights these absent characteristics and is a valuable contribution to the field. Similarities and differences that determine teacher approachability and unapproachability in IT and Education departments are discussed. This research concludes that teachers’ personal characteristics are given meaning by students with reference to the context in which their relationship experiences takes place. An important finding of this research is that teacher training does not guarantee teacher understanding of student needs, nor the will to act in an approachable manner.

Another aim of this research was to examine teachers’ attachment styles, level of wellbeing and spirituality as explanatory factors of teacher
approachability and unapproachability. Teacher interviews included a range of questions related to relationship style with students, wellbeing, spirituality, self-perceptions and other personal qualities of potential relevance to approachability. Teachers were also administered two questionnaires to determine relationship style and wellbeing. Originally, twelve teachers from the IT department and nine from the Education Department were interviewed for this research. However, student interviews focused on nine teachers in IT and five in Education. Hence, these fourteen teacher interviews were included in this research resulting in teacher case-studies that described characteristics that determine teacher approachability and unapproachability as identified by students, student perceptions and experiences with teachers, teachers’ self-perceptions, attachment style, wellbeing and spirituality. Findings show that a relationship exists between approachability, secure attachment style, high level of wellbeing and spirituality. This relationship has not been explored in past research and it is hoped that further research in this area may lead to the design of training courses and workshops for in-service and pre-service teachers highlighting the indicators of approachability and understanding its significance.
Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the university of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Fizza Sabir
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