

Positive Relationships: do Student Teachers have what it takes? Analysis of Germany and Tanzania

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Abstract: *Positive teacher-student relationship (TSR) is fundamental for a student's learning and development. TSR does determine a student's engagement, adaptation to change and motivation to learn. Teachers are the primary architects in determining the extent to which positive relationships are realized in classrooms and schools. This study examined student teachers' knowledge of positive TSRs and their perceptions of the role of TSRs in students' learning and development. Study compared student teachers in Germany and Tanzania. It employed the Mixed Methods Research approach and utilised both the theoretical and statistical logic in data collection, sampling and data analysis. Data analysis and presentation employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Findings have indicated that despite the positive change in relational knowledge, final year student teachers have inadequate knowledge of basic concepts and procedures of TSRs. In comparison, student-teachers in Germany demonstrate a statistically significant higher knowledge levels both in quantitative and qualitative terms than their Tanzanian counterparts. The study recommends for an introduction of a module on TSRs in the initial years of teacher education (within pedagogical courses) in order to provide knowledge and skills about positive teacher-student relationships.*

Keywords: Positive teacher-student relationships, relational virtues, teacher competencies

Introduction

Human beings are social beings. They crave for harmony in the ways they relate to each other in a given social setting (Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). Relationships are said to be positive when they are characterised by stable behavioural interdependence between persons (Jones, 2009). Teacher-student relationship refers to a connection between a teacher and student. This connection is said to be positive when their relational space is founded on the virtues of care, trust, responsibility, human worthy, mutual respect and supportive environment to mention a few (Fulford, 2015; Zygmunt, Cipollone, Tancock, Clausen, Clack & Mucherah, 2018). In order to enable teachers and schools to foster the required relationships and appreciate their pivotal role in students' learning and development, initial teacher education or pre-service teacher education is duty-bound to orient and reorient

student teachers on nature, skills and virtues for effective relationships, among other teachers' competencies. Literature shows that positive teacher-student relationships are critical in solving students' discipline and behaviour problems (Price, 2008). In this regard, teachers' ability to establish and sustain positive relationships with their students have been proven to be effective in reducing students' indiscipline and propelling pro-social and moral behaviours (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). Spaulding (2005) posits that noticeably, an escalating moral crisis in schools results from teachers' inability to own their students and win their confidence and trust. Consequently, students develop feelings of rejection as well as mistrust and resort to unguided behavioural choices (Glasser, 1998).

Further, positive TSRs are instrumental in helping students who are at risk of school failure where situations of conflicts and disconnections tend to gravitate it (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Kesner, 2000). Students in schools come from all sorts of backgrounds. They include students from both extremes of social-economic status, family-marriage status, mental and physical conditions as well as family history factors. These factors guarantee diverse nature of students' mental, psychological, and physical and conditions. Negative extremes of such factors create potential risks on students. Building positive TSRs in schools and classrooms is considered the primary panacea in fostering the sense acceptance and belonging, self-concept and school engagement whilst reducing their helplessness and susceptibility to risks (Giles, 2008; Raufelder, Sahabandu, Martinez, 2013).

The holistic view of education demands that learners are educated across cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains of their development (Pianta et al., 2012). Teaching and learning of cognitive competencies may fit well in a formal paper and pencil modality, and that the realisation of the social-moral and ethical competencies is best founded on positive TSRs environment (Berkowitz, 2011). In this context, teachers transmit values and pro-social dispositions to their students through role modelling of relational virtues (Corley & Mathur, 2014).

Social relationships, on other hand, provide an important condition for teachers and students to fully engage in lesson activities (Kesner, 2000). Without an environment of trust, respect and warmth demonstrated by teachers to their learners, the latter find it difficult to freely take part in the teaching and learning activities; particularly young learners (Sands, 2011). For this reason, absence of positive TSRs retards learners' creativity, independent thinking and dehumanizes the teaching and learning processes of their inherent human and social nature (Glasser, 1998; Drake, 2010). Shapira-Lishchinsky (2009) describes the quality to relationally adapt and connects to learners as critical and uniquely characteristic of the teaching

profession. At the same time, Cooper (2011) and Campbell (2003) view this quality as an indispensable for extending maximum academic and social help to learners.

The recognition of the primacy of positive TSRs has widely acquired policy and administrative impetus (Cooper, 2011; MoEVT, 2007; OECD, 2011). Despite variations in the nomenclatures given to positive teacher-student relationships, it is evident that positive relationships stand out as one of the key qualities for effective teaching and learning as well as teacher professionalism. In Tanzania, the Teacher Education, Development and Management Strategy (TDMS) reiterates the need for teachers to master adaptive relational skills and virtues as a precondition for their professional successes (MoEVT, 2007). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in Europe and Germany, in particular, has adopted and mainstreamed teacher-student relationships (named as the teacher-student relational index) as one of its measures of internal efficiency. It is further viewed as a crucial factor for learners' engagement in the teaching and learning processes in schools (European Commission, 2013).

Theoretical framework

This article draws on the conceptual change theory in understanding how professional competencies can develop or be developed among novice teachers. Posner et al (1982) views the onset of conceptual change to be on the restructuring process of the very concepts in an individual. Concepts here refer to innate mental pictures that aid in a categorization of the real world events and phenomenon (Rips, Smith & Medin, 2012). The restructuring takes place when the existing concepts are confronted with new experiences that present more intelligible, more plausible and more useful concepts, thus causing an abandonment of the existing concepts in light of the new ones (Hewson, 1992). In professional learning, and in the teaching profession, in particular, the change may take place threefold: (i) through an extinction of former misconceptions in light of the new concepts; (ii) through an exchange of lesser intelligible concepts by more intelligible ones; (iii) through an extension of narrow concepts by more precise concepts about teaching and the teaching profession.

Conventionally, this article buys the fact that the acquisition of professional attributes among the novice teachers is: formally speaking, initiated by the initial teacher education (Hsieh, 2016). Evidences for a positive change in the direction of teacher-student relational competencies are vital because: first, arguably, learners' prior knowledge and experiences do influence on learning of new concepts and competencies (Ausubel, 2000; Frankish & Ramsey, 2012). At the onset of their professional journey, novice teachers join teacher education with myriad experiences on how teachers should

relate with their students. They have pre-conceived sets of knowledge, attitude, beliefs about the teaching profession and the nature of teacher-student relationships. They have prior conception about the nature of teacher-student relationships, patterns of pedagogy and beliefs about learning as well as learning outcomes (Smith & Hatmaker, 2014). However, more often than not, these preconceptions do not necessarily conform to the existing theory and practices (ideals) of education. This mismatch can inhibit their relational learning.

Second, novice teachers in colleges and universities are the product of the school system which produced them. This could mean that their beliefs and experiences of teacher-student relationship is a replica of the relational realities they encountered when in school (Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008). In this context, if their current professional socialization is not geared towards a positive change, chances are that they would perpetuate their relational experiences (knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes) in their future practices as professional teachers, no matter how inappropriate such teacher-student relationships may be (Korthagen, 2004; Sexton, 2008).

Further to the outgoing argument, the conceptual change theory presupposes that any learning must be demonstrated by a change in individual's knowledge, beliefs and perceptions about a phenomenon (Sinatra & Pintrich, 2003; Posner, Strike and Gertzog, 1982). Although this theory has customarily been reflected in the teaching and learning of natural sciences' concepts, its application in explaining professional learning in teaching and how novice teachers can develop and sustain their teacher-student relationships is of great relevance. Becoming a professional in teaching is essentially a matter of change (Hsieh, 2016), brought about by new experiences (in knowledge, skills, values and perceptions), which causes restructuring of elements in the pre-existing concepts.

Characterizing teacher-student relationships

Human relationships exist in different forms, styles and networks. As such, human relationships are diverse and culturally-defined (Guerrero et al., 2011). In this section, an attempt is made to review and characterise teacher-student relationships in theoretical and empirical scrutiny. Of particular importance, this conceptual analysis tries to harmonise conflicting positions in the body of knowledge to better understand and characterise the tailor-made teacher-student relationships as one of teachers' professional competence. Five features that guide and characterise positive teacher-student relationship phenomena entail voluntarism, continuity, growth, mutuality and transcendence.

(i) *Voluntarism*

Positive teacher-student relationships are neither automatic nor accidental phenomena. Relationships are voluntary and do require proper pedagogical and didactical strategy (Cooper, 2011; Meier, 2005). For positive TSRs to exist, teachers should have knowledge, virtues and skills on how to handle such relationships. Indisputably, teachers as professionals are duty-bound to craft supportive relationships in their dealing with learners (Giles, 2012). Efforts to form or promote positive relationships by teachers must be preceded by a thorough grasp of the nature of TSRs. In addition, teachers ought to have positive perceptions of positive relationship since it is a necessity for learners' development. A further description of the nature of TSRs is presented in the next features.

(ii) *Continuity*

The term refers to the quality of teacher-student relationships that exist in a continuum of magnitude; that is to say, relationships are fed by positive behavioural interdependence (Hattie, 2012; Jones, 2009). When the interpersonal space between teachers and students is dominated by stable and predictable positive behavioural interdependence (such as positive communication), the relationships between them tends to advance from its lowest level (imagined *zero*) to the highest level called sustained teacher-student relationships (Jones, 2009; Sands, 2011).

(iii) *Growth*

Whereas continuity makes reference to a vertical advancement of relationships as propelled by sustained and predictable behavioural exchange between teachers and learners, growth is results from inward experiences, connections and bonding; that is the relational growth within the actors (Giles, 2012). Giles (2008) and Palmers (1997) trace the origins of this inter-human bond from human self which combines the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual domains of the relating parties. Palmer (1997: 3) illustrates that "*good teachers should join their self, students and subject matter in the fabric of life*"

(iv) *Mutuality*

The former qualities of voluntarism, continuity and growth can hardly produce lasting relationships if two actors (teachers and learners) do not work together to form and sustain positive teacher-student relationships (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2009). Although teachers are viewed as primary architects in sustaining positive relationships, the role of learners in reciprocating relational gestures is as well significant. Therefore, positive teacher-student relationships require reciprocity of efforts to sustain them (Fulford, 2015).

(v) *Transcendence*

The term transcendence is the quality that positive relational virtues and practices ought to be comprehensive and predominant characteristic of all that happens between teachers and learners. It includes the verbal and non-verbal patterns of their interactions when they are in a classroom and beyond (Beebe & Timothy, 2009; Campbell, 2003). Relationships, in this case, should not be equated or limited to conventional teacher-student interactions as dictated by teaching methods. Teachers are called to embrace the holistic view of relating and apply themselves wholeheartedly in expounding positive elements of relationships. Kesna (2000) and Pianta, Hamre and Allen (2012) argue for the need of supportive structures in schools in order to saturate interactions in schools with social and relational virtues. They further support the view by Palmer (1997) and Glasser (1998) that positive teacher-student relationships should not be viewed as mere means to some academic ends but the vital ends in themselves. From the conceptual analysis and the arguments for the necessity of positive teacher-student relationships, the following implications are drawn: positive teacher-student relationships and their realization in schools demand teachers who are well-versed with the knowledge, virtues, and techniques to do so.

Initial teacher education, therefore, is duty-bound to orient and reorient student teachers on positive TSRs along with other professional competencies. Arguably, student teachers' ability to handle positive relationships can be viewed to be contingent upon the quality of student teachers' recruitment, theoretical and practical experiences offered to them while at colleges or universities as well as their commitment to the professional ethics of teaching (Campbell, 2003, Weiss & Kiel, 2013). The two pertinent questions in this regard are: Can student teachers form and sustain positive relationships in schools? To what extent do student teachers bear what it takes in handling positive relationships in schools?

Problem statement

Despite the policy and administrative anticipation that teachers should be able to confidently handle relationships in schools, there is evidence of poor and unpromising relationships in schools. Studies by Raufelder, Bukowski & Mohr (2013) and Raufelder and Sahabadu & Martinez (2015) in Germany have indicated that school life and its culture are characterised by unsupportive social relationships. Teachers, in particular, maintain rigid focus on academic attainments. As a result, school relational roles are reduced to institutional roles and there is no room for advancing a human and pedagogical bond between teachers and students (Raufelder et al., 2013). The studies ascribe the relational challenges in schools to teachers' inability to flexibly craft social relationships in their day to day professional

accomplishments. In Tanzania, there is evidence of an unethical students' character and immoral acts that are indicative of sour relationships in schools. They include fight, bullying, violence, sabotage and sexual immorality (Anangisye, 2010; Masath, 2013).

In light of these research evidences, this study presumes that teachers as professionals ought to be well-equipped with knowledge, virtues and skills to form and sustain social and positive relationships as a precursor for professionalism and professional efficiency (Cooper, 2011; Campbell, 2003; Sexton, 2008). Arguably, such competencies must invariably be an integral part of the initial teacher education experience (Zygmunt et al., 2018). Thus, this study seeks to examine knowledge and beliefs of (final-year) student-teachers on positive TSRs. This examination partly answers the question: *How prepared are our student teachers in handling positive relationships in their future role as school teachers?*

Methodology

Research approach and design

The study was informed by the pragmatic philosophical position which was deemed appropriate in order to flexibility and optimally addresses both qualitative and quantitative research questions (Ary, Jacobs & Sorenson, 2010). Being driven by the notion of comparing student teachers of the two countries, two universities; the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and the University of Leipzig, in Saxony Germany were selected as *typical* cases. They both provided typical teacher education experience in terms of structure and duration (Gerring, 2007). The university of Leipzig, Faculty of education offers initial teacher education in both: traditional; state examination (*Staatexamen*) and Bachelor-Master modalities, leading to graduate teachers for special education (*Fordershule*), middle schools (*Mitterschule*) and Grammer schools (*Gymnasium*). The selection of the University of Leipzig was ideal in providing typical experiences of the two modalities of initial teacher education used by other universities. The University of Dar es Salaam offers initial teacher education leading to graduate teachers (in both natural and social sciences) fitting the centralized national secondary school curriculum. The universities permitted for a cross-case analysis of teacher education and teacher-student relationships competencies in particular (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010).

Methods

The study targeted a population of student teachers in Germany and Tanzania. Student teachers in the final-year (finalists) and beginners (fresher) were purposively included in the study. Data collection employed the use of a questionnaire with both close and open-ended items. The

open-ended questions solicited student teachers' knowledge (relational basic facts and virtues). The open-ended items were pretested for their discrimination power ($Dp = (Ru - Rl) / 0.5N$)¹⁹. In this regard, final-year student teachers were the higher group (R_u) while first years (beginners) were treated as the lower group (R_l). The items yielded a discrimination index ($Dp = .58$), which is within the excellent psychometric range of items' discrimination power (Rana & Suruchi, 2014). The description index was deemed necessary in ascertaining the items' ability to differentiate the first-years and final-year student teachers based on their knowledge of TSRs.

In Tanzania, the questionnaires were administered to 343 final-year and 96 beginner student teachers ($n=442$). The sampled student teachers included specializations in Social sciences and Natural sciences. In Germany, 205 final-year student teachers and 77 beginners ($n=282$) completed the questionnaire. They represented strata of Middle school (*Mittelschule*), Grammar school (*Gymnasium*) and Special education (*Förderschule*) specializations. In both cases, the threshold sample size per segment of the population was adopted from the Bartlett, Kotrlik & Higgins (2001, p. 48)' sample size estimation table for categorical and non-categorical data at 95% confidence level and .05 alpha level and .50 proportions of the population.

Data analysis

The data analysis employed discursive narratives, descriptive and inferential statistics in an attempt to fulfil a balanced demand of the theoretical and statistical logic of data and procedures. In the open-ended items, all student teachers' responses on the meaning and virtues of positive teacher-student relationships were meticulously read and marked against the conceptual guidance. Depending on their precision, the responses were marked as **satisfactory** (graded as 2) and **unsatisfactory** (graded as 1). We selected 120 questionnaires (60 from each case; 30 from each cluster of satisfactory and unsatisfactory responses).

Subsequently, summative content analysis was then conducted (Mayring, 2000). *Manifest* and *latent* meaning of words as used in the student teachers' responses were analysed and their frequency of usage coded for comparative purposes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Further to that, Mann-Whitney *U* test (Non-parametric test), Welsh's *T*-test; a robust test in comparing group means of unequal group sizes, as well as Cohen's *d* measure of the effect size were performed. Data are presented in textual,

¹⁹ See Rana & Suruchi (2014): *Dp* discrimination index; *N* total correct responses; *Ru* the number of student teachers in the upper 27% who responded satisfactorily; *Rl* the number of student teachers in the lower 27% who responded unsatisfactorily.

tabular and figurative formats. Student teachers' perceptions on the importance of positive TSRs to learning and development was expressed through multiple choice items which required them to select the choice that best suited their perception or beliefs of the role of positive relationships on students' learning and development.

Study findings

Findings of this study are presented in four sub-questions. What are student teachers' knowledge levels of TSRs? Is there a difference in knowledge between student teachers in Germany and Tanzania? Is there a difference in knowledge between final-year and beginner student teachers? What are student teachers' beliefs about the role of TSRs in students' learning and development?

(i) *What are the student teachers' knowledge (facts and virtues) on positive TSRs?*

Table 2: Comparative student teachers' TSRs knowledge (quantitative) results

Precision	Basic knowledge of TSRs		Knowledge of positive TSRs virtues	
	Germany	Tanzania	Germany	Tanzania
Satisfactory	133 (64.9%)	39 (11.4%)	126 (61.5%)	74 (21.6%)
Unsatisfactory	70 (34.1%)	302 (88.0%)	77 (37.6%)	264 (77.0%)
Missing	2 (1.0%)	2 (0.6%)	2 (1.0%)	5 (1.5%)
Total	205 (100%)	343 (100%)	205 (100%)	343 (100%)

Source: Field data, 2017

Table 1 presents final-year student teachers' knowledge of basic facts in teacher-student relationships and relational virtues. The two aspects of knowledge are considered critical for student teachers, especially at their final-year of initial teacher education. The results show a higher proportion of unsatisfactory knowledge of both basic facts and virtues for Tanzanian student teachers, that is, 88% and 77% respectively. On the contrary, student teachers in Germany exhibit relatively higher satisfactory knowledge scores in basic facts (64.9%) and relational virtues (61.5%), unlike their Tanzanian counterparts with only 11.4% and 21.6% satisfactory responses in basic facts and virtues knowledge respectively.

(ii) *Is the difference in knowledge levels between student teachers in Germany and Tanzania statistically significant?*

The combined score for relational facts and virtues for individual student teachers was computed, and then the Mann-Whitney *U* test was performed. This is a robust measure for non-parametric comparison (Milenovic, 2011). The Mann-Whitney *U* test results indicated that the mean-rank of total knowledge scores for German student teachers ($N=205$) were significantly higher ($Mdn=378.78$) than Tanzanian student teachers, ($N=343$) which were

($Mdn=205.27$), $Z= -13.679$, $p= .000$. Hence, $p < .05$. Based on these results, the difference in relationships knowledge between student teachers in Tanzania and Germany was confirmed to be statistically significant.

(iii) *Is there a difference in knowledge between final-year and beginner student teachers?*

The Welch's T -test was conducted for each pair of student teachers (final-year and beginners for each case). Later, descriptive statistics were subjected to the Cohen's d measure of effect size. For Tanzania, the mean knowledge score differed significantly by the year of study (Final-year & Beginners). Where, $t(181.771) = -5.945$, $p = .000$, the final-year student teachers ($N=336$) scored significantly higher $M=2.84$, $SD=0.68$ than the beginners ($N=95$) with $M=2.39$, $SD=0.56$. The 95% confidence interval is between 2.27 and 2.91 points. These results confirm an existence of a difference in TSRs knowledge between them. The results of the effect size indicated Cohen's $d^{20} = 0.72$, which is a medium effect size (Cohen, 1988).

For Germany, the mean knowledge score differed significantly by year of study according to Welch's T -test $t(137.26) = -5.699$, $p = .000$. Final-year student teachers ($N=203$) scored significantly higher, $M=3.27$, $SD=0.72$, than the beginner student teachers ($N=77$) with $M=2.73$, $SD=0.71$. The 95% confidence interval of the difference lies between 2.56 and 3.37 points. These results confirm the existence of a difference between them. The corresponding effect size results indicated Cohen's $d = 0.76$, which is a medium effect size (Cohen, 1988). Also, it can be noted that beginner student teachers in Germany demonstrate higher prior knowledge of TSRs ($M=2.73$, $SD=0.71$) than their Tanzanian counterparts ($M=2.39$, $SD=0.56$).

Qualitative responses

A total of 120 responses (of final-year student teachers for Tanzania and Germany) were subjected to a thorough summative content analysis with the view to scrutinize and analyse words used by student teachers in expressing positive TSRs. Student teachers' expressions were aggregated into four clusters of meanings while noting down their frequency and respective percentages. Figure 1 presents the themed responses of knowledge as clustered into four major categories with varying degrees of precision. From Figure 1, a higher proportion of student teachers' responses cluster around the low view of teacher-student relationships. Generally,

²⁰ Computation of the Cohen's d effect size index was aided by the University of Colorado Springs Online Statistical Portal, found at www.uccs.edu/-/faculty/lbecker/1. To compute the Cohen's d , mean scores and standard deviation for the two samples were entered and the index computed.

there is a decreasing frequency of student teachers associated with the direction towards the ideal view of positive TSRs. This indicates that majority of student teachers in both countries have the low view of positive TSRs. Majority of student teachers in Tanzania and Germany demonstrate that TSRs is an *interaction* between teacher and students. Similarly, a small proportion of student teachers hold the ideal (connection) view (knowledge) of positive TSRs.

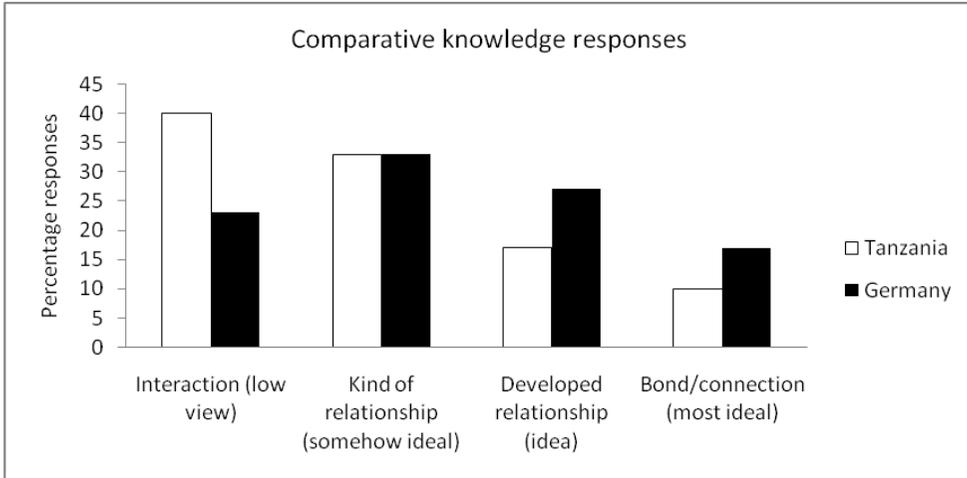


Figure 1: Comparative grouped bar graph on the distribution of themed responses of student teachers knowledge of positive TSRs.

(iv) *Student teachers' perceived role of positive teacher-student relationships on students' learning and development*

Final-year student teachers for Tanzania ($n=343$) and Germany ($n=205$) indicated their perceived effect that the teacher-student relationships have on students' development and learning. Figure 2 captures their responses in a comparative fashion between the two countries.

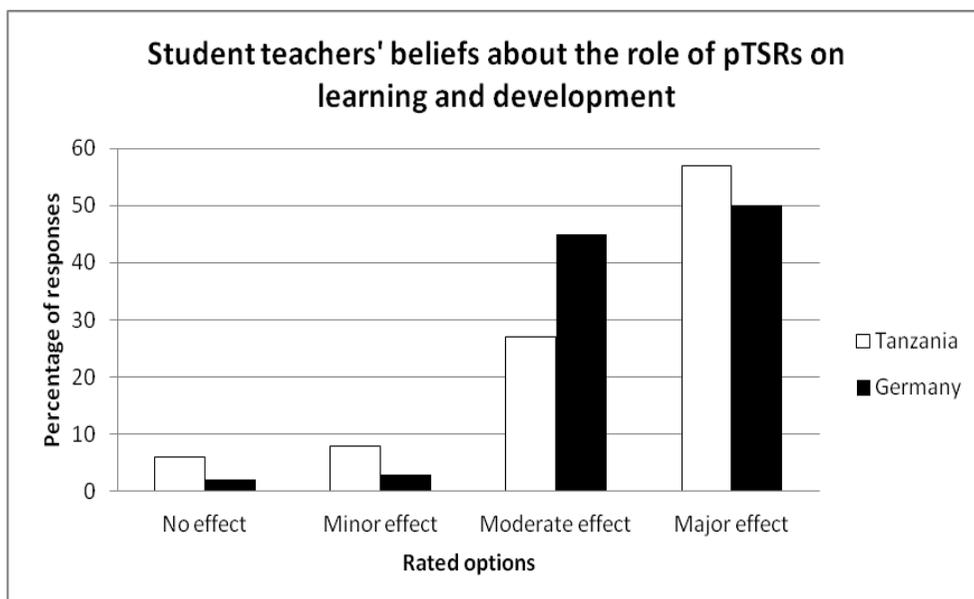


Figure 2: Student teachers' beliefs about the role of teacher-student relationships on students' learning and development

The findings indicate that at their final year of the university-based initial teacher education, over 50% of student teachers, in both countries, do perceive teacher-student relationships as a critical factor for students' learning and development. However, about the same proportion of student teachers hold the lower perceived role of positive TSRs. Apparently, student teachers in Tanzania have a better perception (57%) of the critical nature of TSRs than their German counterparts (50.7%).

Discussion of Findings

Despite the significant contribution of the initial teacher education in promoting positive relational knowledge among student teachers, at their final year, many student teachers, do not have a thorough command of relational virtues and basic TSRs facts. As presented in the conceptual framework and literature, fostering positive TSRs demand voluntarism on the side of the teachers. The qualitative findings have consistently unravelled the erroneous perception that teacher-student relationships are synonymous to teacher-student interactions.

Quite a few student teachers indicated the *connection* or *bonding* quality of the teacher-student relationships. This perception is considered narrow and flawed when paralleled with the conventional view in the literature (Giles, 2012; Sands, 2011). In this context, teacher-student relationships must transcend the interpersonal relational space that is usually dictated by the teaching methods (Giles, 2008), institutional prescribed relational patterns

(Raufelder et al., 2013), and should foster human element when relating with students within and outside the classroom environments. Jones (2009) and Glasser (1999) views sustained and predictable positive behavioural interdependence between teachers and students to be the hallmark of healthy learning relationships. Pragmatically, voluntarism starts with teachers' sound awareness of relational learning, commitment to the virtues of social relationships and crafting the skills in the teaching and learning environment (Pianta & Hamre, 2006; Sands, 2011). The demonstrated lack of awareness by teachers could derail their capability to demonstrate positive relationships in their verbal and non-verbal patterns of communication and in their attitudinal dispositions when dealing with their students (Beebe & Timothy, 2009).

Positive teacher-student relationship is inevitable in the processes of teaching and learning (Pianta et al., 2012). It follows that student teachers' beliefs about this sense of necessity is a key determinant of their efforts in sustaining such relationships (Kuzborka, 2011). Findings have indicated that on average, only 53.9%) of final-year student teachers in Germany and Tanzania, believed in the necessity of positive TSRs. Besides, an average of 46.1% of student teachers was yet to embrace this view. Demonstration of such beliefs could suggest that the initial teacher education did not comprehensively and systematically address the relational competencies entirely as a critical aspect in students' learning and development. Regardless of the knowledge imparted to them about TSRs, many (final year) student teachers are yet to comprehend the vital role of the same.

This finding augers well with the theoretical assumptions of this article that unless the initial teacher education address teacher-student relationships comprehensively and instil a sense of its urgency, intelligible and plausible to student teachers, chances are that they would accord little or no impetus on relational learning. As well, this finding resonates with the argument that professional competencies in general and ability to handle positive relationships with students in particular, can be determined by the quality of initial teacher education. That is the professional rigour in its theoretical and practical experiences. The orientation ought to transform and orientate student teachers' knowledge and beliefs, among other things (Sexton, 2008; Dall'Alba, 2009).

In Germany, particularly in the State of Saxony (*Sachsen*), student teachers join the university based initial teacher education after a successful *abitur*²¹

²¹ *Abitur* [In Germany education system] this refers to the National Examination results attained after a secondary education (mainly *gymnasium* or grammar schools) that gives students merit for any university education. Based on these results students can be selected to join different fields of study in a university.

examination (Terhart & Kotthoff, 2013). In the new structure, following the Bologna agreement, student teachers complete three years of Bachelor's degree and two years of Master's degree. After this phase, student teachers join the teacher training seminar (*Lehrerseminar*) for 1 to 2 years depending on one's specialization. This second phase, called preparatory training (*Referendariat*) ends with the second state examination (Kotthof & Terhat, 2013). The training is detached from the university and is separately managed by the Ministry of Culture of State (*Kultusministerium*).

In Tanzania, student teachers join the formal route for university-based initial teacher education after passing the Advanced Certificate Secondary Examination (ACSE). The education and training in the universities take three years after which fresh graduates are employed in secondary schools for teaching. Thus, the difference in the duration of the university-based teacher education could partly explain the revealed disparity in knowledge between the two cases. Arguably, the longer the duration provided to student teachers in Germany the longer the duration of theoretical and practical instruction which is essential for reflection and acquisition of professional qualities (Da'Alba, 2009).

Conclusions and recommendations

Student teachers in Tanzania and Germany have demonstrated some knowledge and beliefs in teacher-student relationships. It is however certain that there are profound variations in the knowledge of TSRs among student teachers which could suggest novelty and lack of efficacy in addressing principles, virtues and facts for effective teacher-student relationships in the initial teacher education.

In light of the findings, this study recommends for the introduction of a module on positive TSRs in the professional or pedagogical courses in the university-based initial teacher education. The module should, among other things, stress on the theoretical and practical translation of the relationships as one of the vital teachers' competencies. In the same vein, an emphasis should be given to enable student teachers to comprehend the inherent features of teacher-student relationships prescribed in the conceptual framework of this study, namely; voluntarism, continuity, growth, mutuality and transcendence.

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