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Exploring Teacher and Student Perceptions of Teacher-Student Rapport and its Role in Effective Pedagogical Practices at the Junior Secondary Level in the Kandy District.

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Background: The quality of the teacher-student relationship is a critical determinant of educational success, particularly at the junior secondary level. In the Sri Lankan context, challenges such as student disengagement, low motivation, and poor academic performance are often linked to communication gaps between teachers and students. This study was conducted to address the need to understand how these interpersonal dynamics specifically influence student outcomes within schools in the Kandy District.

Objective: The primary objective was to examine the impact of positive teacher-student relationships on the academic achievement, classroom participation, and behaviour of junior secondary students. A secondary objective was to identify the specific communication strategies used by teachers that foster a supportive and effective learning environment.

Methods: A mixed-method study design was employed. The study was set in five selected junior secondary schools in the Kandy District. The study sample consisted of 50 teachers and 50 students, selected through purposive sampling. Data collection tools included semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, and an analysis of student mark sheets. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Results: Thematic analysis revealed that students who perceived their relationships with teachers as positive and respectful demonstrated higher levels of classroom participation and improved motivation. Teachers identified as effective utilised strategies such as friendly communication, consistent encouragement, and active listening. Descriptive statistical analysis of mark sheets indicated that students in classrooms with strong reported teacher-student relationships had higher average academic scores compared to their peers.

Conclusion: Positive teacher-student relationships are vital for enhancing the teaching and learning process in junior secondary schools. The study concludes that the intentional use of supportive communication by teachers directly correlates with improved student outcomes. It is recommended that teachers adopt student-centred communication strategies. Furthermore, school administrations should implement professional development programs focused on improving teachers' interpersonal skills to foster more effective classroom environments.

Keywords: Academic achievement, classroom engagement, teacher-student relationship.