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## Foundation of Well-Being: A General Review of Teacher-Pupils Relationship in Early Development

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**Abstract.** This narrative review explores the vital role of teacher-pupil relationships in supporting children's mental health, presenting key theories and research evidence alongside practical methods. While conducting a narrative review, the paper underscores the urgency of developing effective educational interventions, particularly in light of recent statistics indicating that at least 20% of children globally face mental health challenges as reported by Mental Health Foundation (2020). The paper attempt to analyzes evidence-based strategies, which have proven effective in fostering positive teacher-student relationships and improving mental health outcomes across diverse educational settings. Using Narrative review, the study able to highlights various global programs that improve teacher-student relationships, social-emotional development, and mental health, such as Key2Teach, Banking Time, and the Incredible Years Teacher Program, which enhance emotional bonds and reduce behavioral issues. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs such as The Pyramid Model, CASEL, and KidsMatter promote emotional intelligence and coping skills, leading to better emotional resilience and school environments. Furthermore, anti-bullying initiatives such as KiVa focus on reducing bullying and fostering positive school climates, all contributing to stronger teacher-student connections and improved mental health. These programs enhance the teacher-student bonding and contribute to a positive school environment. The findings provide practical guidance for educators and policymakers, offering recommendations for enhancing children's mental health and creating supportive, nurturing learning environments worldwide.

**Keywords:** Teacher-Student Relationships; Mental Well-Being; Narrative Review; Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs; Mental Health Programs

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## 1. Introduction

Mental health disorders among children throughout the world maintain an alarming rise because these conditions affect between 20% of young people (Al-Zawaadi et al., 2021). Media surveys in the UK that combined results from 1999 and 2004 indicate one in 10 children below 16 years received a mental disorder diagnosis (Al-Zawaadi et al., 2021). Based on European data the range of mental disorder prevalence lies between 8 % to 23 % (Al-Zawaadi et al., 2021). Recent data from 2017 found that 15.3% of adolescents between 11 and 19 years old in England suffered from mental health disorders yet this number elevated to 17.6% in the year 2020 among children aged 11 to 16 during the COVID-19 pandemic (Al-Zawaadi et al., 2021; Salter et al., 2024). The data signals an immediate necessity to develop successful mental health support measures which benefit children attending educational institutions

Mental health disorders affecting children show different patterns between genders because boys struggle with conduct disorders yet girls tend to endure emotional difficulties that include depression and anxiety (Al-Zawaadi et al., 2021). Evidence shows that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and hyperkinetic disorders join emotional disorders in being the three most common child conditions (Al-Zawaadi et al., 2021). These developmental issues affect more than one child since they influence academic results and educational progress and impact their relationships with others and their general health. Collective mental health support remains essential because unsupported children with untreated conditions experience limited development achievement which supports the immediate need for early intervention at schools.

The main factor that shapes children's emotional growth takes place through their relationship with teachers simultaneously supporting social development and educational achievement in their first years of schooling. The 10–19 age range worldwide includes children who experience mental health problems among one seventh of their group and these illnesses drive 13% of diseases affecting this age group (World Health Organization, 2022). In the educational context, the development of negative teacher-student relationships leads children to display higher anxiety symptoms and behavioral disturbances in addition to motivational deficits for academic tasks thus revealing teachers' vital role in child mental health improvement. Research evidence shows that developing supportive emotional teacher-child bonds establishes a fundamental approach to safeguard children's mental health. According to the OECD's records, students participating in beneficial teacher-student relationships gain a 30 percent increase in emotional security and life satisfaction results.

The investigation of teacher-child relationships has become increasingly important as mental health issues among students continue to rise. Research indicates that the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences can be mitigated when students form strong, supportive connections with caring adults. Despite the growing body of research on the importance of these relationships, there remains a gap in knowledge regarding specific, evidence-based instructional strategies that teachers can use to build these connections effectively.

This review aims to fill that gap by analyzing globally recognized interventions that focus on developing teacher-child relationships and their impact on mental health. The review will compare key intervention strategies, their target groups, and the outcomes they achieve, offering practical recommendations for educators and stakeholders to improve children's mental well-being and holistic development in diverse educational settings.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Ecological and Attachment Theory Approach to Children's Mental Health**

The state of mental health for children heavily depends on their interpersonal connections and the conditions of their environment. The significant role of safe bonds emerges from Attachment Theory while the extensive influence on child wellbeing emerges from Ecological Systems Theory (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). These theories function together to demonstrate that teacher-pupil relationships provide direct emotional protection alongside maintaining systemic health factors for mental well-being (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). A support system that combines strong attachments with an enriching environment enables schools to develop resilience and emotional stability in children (Raine et al., 2025).

Through Attachment Theory children create mental plans about relationships as they experience their caretaking interactions early in life. School teachers function as supplementary attachment figures who support students but particularly benefit students from harmful home situations. Strong teacher-student relationships according to research create positive results like lower student anxiety while improving self-regularity along with building emotional security in children (Salter et al., 2024). As a result, children who receive emotional availability and responses from their teachers develop stronger resilience which lowers their chances to experience depression and behavioral problems and academic detachment (Halladay et al., 2020). According to Attachment Theory, the early caregiver interactions of children lead to their development of relational models. School teachers carry the role of secondary attachment figures who protect pupils from emotional distress while developing their resilience through interactions (Salter et al., 2024).

The Attachment Theory concentrates on one-on-one relationships yet Ecological Systems Theory extends this concept to understand how several environmental factors influence child mental health. Therefore, support from teachers together with peers and family members within the microsystem represents the most powerful immediate influence (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). As supported by Fenizia and Parrello (2025) a positive school environment that links children to caring teachers and accepting peers helps develop their emotional stability through feelings of belonging. Through effective parent-teacher communication children get continuous emotional backing from both parties which enhances their coping abilities for stress and anxiety (Gao et al., 2024).

Children's mental health develops strongly through indirect influences coming from the ecosystem although it operates outside their immediate surroundings. Learning institutions together with training initiatives for educators alongside community resources establish the level of student emotional support teachers

can deliver (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Thus, an investment in teacher mental health training by schools provides employees with essential skills for recognizing mental distress and teaches them to develop secure student-teacher relationships in their classrooms.

The macrosystem composed of cultural values and educational policies determines the complete mental health conditions which children experience. Most importantly, the development of mentally aware communities together with inclusive educational systems results in environments where children experience feeling protected alongside societal support (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). On the other hand, educational environments that focus on achievement tests at the expense of student emotional welfare generate elevated stress among students and their decreased class engagement (El Zaatari & Maalof, 2022). Hence, educational policymakers need to implement complete well-being solutions that bring emotional and psychological care in addition to academic classes into schools.

Nevertheless, children's mental health is significantly affected by time-based influences or chronosystem including life transitions and societal transformations. The chronosystem encompasses significant life occurrences like school changes and parental divorce or national emergencies that damage emotional stability (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Children who establish secure teacher relationships together with strong ecological assistance are capable of developing effective coping strategies which help them withstand long-term psychological distress (Rathakrishnan et al., 2022). Through combining Attachment Theory elements with an Ecological Systems structure, schools have the potential to build an integrated care system which supports emotional health at both individual and systemic levels for children.

## **2.2. Key Components for Lasting Teacher-Child Bonds**

Emotional closeness is a key component in building strong teacher-child relationships, forming the foundation of a supportive and safe learning environment. Positive emotional affect – such as warmth, support, and fairness – helps create an atmosphere where children feel secure, valued, and confident to engage in their learning. Teachers who exhibit nurturing behaviors, similar to those of parental caregiving roles, contribute to students' emotional security, enabling them to explore, engage, and take risks in their learning environment (Rathakrishnan et al., 2022). This security not only fosters emotional regulation but also enhances social competence, encouraging positive interactions with peers and teachers. As a result, children are more likely to perform well academically and develop healthy social skills, contributing to overall social development and academic success (Nikupeteri et al., 2022).

In addition to emotional closeness, low conflict is crucial for fostering strong teacher-child bonds. Teachers who maintain minimal discord and respond effectively to conflict help create a positive classroom climate that promotes student engagement and emotional well-being. When conflicts between students and teachers are minimized, students tend to exhibit fewer oppositional behaviors, leading to a more harmonious learning environment. Such a setting

encourages better emotional regulation and greater focus on learning (Rathakrishnan et al., 2022). Reduced conflict in teacher-child relationships correlates with stronger student engagement and better behavioral outcomes. This highlights that strong teacher-student relationships are not just about affection but also about cultivating harmony, mutual trust, and respect in the classroom, which directly impacts student success and emotional growth (Valdebenito et al., 2022).

Secure attachment also plays a critical role in forming strong teacher-child relationships. Children who form secure attachments with their teachers are more likely to exhibit higher levels of social competence and emotional regulation, and engage more confidently in academic and social activities (Fenizia & Parrello, 2025). The teacher-child bond functions as a secondary attachment, complementing the primary attachment bonds with parents, and aligns with Attachment Theory, which suggests that consistent and responsive teacher-student interactions are essential for fostering emotional security. Teachers who encourage autonomy by supporting students' individual interests and needs help further enhance engagement and reduce disobedience, leading to improved academic performance (Nikupeteri et al., 2022).

### **2.3. Challenges in Teacher-Child Relationships for Mental Health Support**

Teacher-child relationships are crucial for promoting children's mental health, yet several barriers can undermine the effectiveness of these relationships (Rathakrishnan et al., 2022). Child behavioral problems, particularly externalizing behaviors such as aggression and hyperactivity, present significant challenges. These disruptive behaviors often strain teacher-child interactions, reducing the emotional warmth and increasing conflict in the relationship. Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), for example, frequently experience higher levels of teacher-child conflict, which impedes the development of emotional connection and reduces the effectiveness of supportive interactions (Staff et al., 2022).

Moreover, teacher-related factors also play a crucial role in the success of teacher-child relationships. Feedback imbalance is a major barrier, particularly when corrective feedback dominates interactions, especially with students displaying behavioral issues. This imbalance reduces the frequency of positive interactions, thereby diminishing the quality of the teacher-child bond. Teachers may become overly focused on correcting misbehavior, missing opportunities to offer positive reinforcement, which is vital for emotional support and mental health development. Another significant barrier is the emotional labor that teachers must manage, especially when working with high-need students. The emotional strain of providing constant support can deplete teachers' emotional resources, limiting their capacity to maintain sensitive and supportive interactions. As emotional exhaustion sets in, teachers may struggle to provide the consistent and empathetic engagement required to build strong teacher-child bonds, ultimately affecting the quality of the relationship and mental health support.

In addition to individual and teacher-related challenges, systemic and contextual factors also present barriers to effective teacher-child relationships. High academic pressure within competitive education systems often prioritizes academic performance over the emotional and social needs of students (El Zaatari & Maalof, 2022). As a result, teachers feel pressured to meet academic targets may lack the time and energy needed to form strong, supportive relationships with their students, thereby neglecting their mental health needs (Dabrowski et al., 2025). Moreover, the lack of training for teachers to recognize and address mental health challenges limits their ability to provide adequate support. Many teachers are not prepared to handle the complexities of mental health issues in the classroom, which hinders their ability to intervene appropriately (Gunawardena et al., 2024).

Finally, socioeconomic disparities and the experiences of left-behind children significantly impact teacher-child relationships. Children from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds often face higher levels of mental health difficulties, which complicate interactions with teachers who may not have the resources or training to address these challenges (Foster et al., 2009). Similarly, children who experience parental migration and become “left-behind” may struggle with emotional and behavioral problems due to the absence of primary caregivers, requiring additional support and attention from teachers to bridge the emotional void caused by parental absence (Tang et al., 2024). These systemic and contextual factors require a comprehensive approach to teacher training and support to overcome the barriers in forming effective teacher-child relationships.

#### **2.4. Narrative Review in research**

A narrative review is a type of literature review that provides a broad summary and synthesis of existing research on a specific topic, often highlighting key trends, theories, developments, and gaps in the field. Unlike systematic reviews, narrative reviews do not follow a strict methodology or predefined protocol for article selection, making them more flexible and interpretive (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). The process of selecting studies is generally less formal, with details on selection criteria typically integrated into the introduction or discussion sections, rather than in a formal methodology section (Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006). These reviews primarily offer a qualitative synthesis of the literature, focusing on interpreting and contextualizing findings rather than providing a quantitative analysis (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003).

This narrative review follows a qualitative approach to synthesize existing literature on the role of teacher-pupil relationships in enhancing children's mental well-being, focusing on interventions and theoretical frameworks. This study presents the establish proven successful several establish evidence-based intervention and evidence-based program. Then the study, compares them, and maps them to develop an understanding on the focus area, key strategies target group and key outcomes.

### 3. Results

The study reveals several globally recognized intervention programs that target teacher-student relationships, social-emotional development, and mental health, demonstrating a clear link between teacher responsiveness and improved student well-being. Key programs such as Key2Teach (Netherlands), Banking Time (USA), and the Incredible Years Teacher Program (IYTP) (USA) focus on enhancing emotional bonds between teachers and students, especially for those exhibiting behavioral challenges and emotional dysregulation. These programs use strategies including video interaction coaching, behavioral analysis, and secure base training to foster stronger teacher-student connections. As a result, students experience reduced teacher-student conflict, improved emotional regulation, and stronger attachment bonds, all of which contribute to better emotional resilience.

Additionally, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, such as The Pyramid Model (USA), SEL Programs (CASEL Framework), and KidsMatter Primary (Australia), extend this focus by promoting emotional intelligence, coping skills, and emotional regulation across a broader school environment. These programs utilize multi-tiered interventions, teacher training in emotional communication, and a whole-school approach to foster inclusive, supportive learning environments. Key outcomes include increased emotional resilience, better teacher-student relationships, and improved school climates, with particular emphasis on vulnerable student populations. Furthermore, programs like SEAL (UK) and The Fourth R (Canada) focus on building empathy and relationship-building skills, aiming to reduce peer conflicts and enhance mental health coping strategies among students.

Conclusively, anti-bullying and school climate programs, including KiVa Anti-Bullying Program (Finland), emphasize the creation of positive school environments where bullying is minimized, and emotional well-being is prioritized. These programs promote teacher training in addressing bullying and foster a whole-school approach to inclusion, leading to reduced bullying incidents, greater teacher awareness of student mental health, and a stronger sense of school belonging. Together, these findings highlight the significant role of comprehensive, evidence-based intervention programs in strengthening teacher-student relationships and improving students' social-emotional development and overall mental health. Table 1 below depicts the summary of Globally Recognized Intervention Programs for Teacher-Student Relationships and Mental Health.

**Table 1: Overview of Globally Recognized Intervention Programs for Teacher-Student Relationships and Mental Health**

<b>Behavioral Support Programs</b>					
<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Key Strategies</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Key Outcomes</b>
Key2Teach	Netherlands	Improving teacher-student relationships for children with behavioral challenges	Video interaction coaching for teachers & Behavioral analysis to improve teacher responsiveness	Children with externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, hyperactivity)	Reduced teacher-student conflict Improved emotional regulation Stronger attachment bonds
Banking Time	USA	Strengthening teacher-student emotional bonds	One-on-one teacher-student sessions, Child-led interactions, emotional openness and trust	Children at risk of emotional dysregulation and anxiety	Lower cortisol (stress) levels Increased emotional security
Incredible Years Teacher Program (IYTP)	USA	Enhancing teacher responsiveness and classroom management	Training on social-emotional coaching Positive reinforcement techniques, Conflict resolution strategies	Teachers	Reduced disruptive behaviors Higher student engagement Improved teacher confidence
<b>Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health Programs</b>					
<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Key Strategies</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Key Outcomes</b>
The Pyramid Model	USA	Social-emotional development and classroom inclusion	Multi-tiered intervention (universal, targeted, intensive), Positive behavior reinforcement, Emotional regulation training	General school population	Higher emotional resilience Better teacher-student relationships Improved school climate
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)	USA	Teaching emotional intelligence and coping skills	Whole-school approach to SEL, Teacher training in emotional communication, Self-awareness, empathy, and social skills	All students (emphasis on vulnerable groups)	Reduced student stress Higher emotional intelligence Better peer and teacher relationships
Kids Matter Primary	Australia	Mental health and well-being framework	Teacher training in emotional literacy, Whole-school approach, Early intervention support	Primary school children and teachers	Improved teacher-pupil relationships Better school mental health awareness Stronger emotional resilience
SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning)	United Kingdom	Social and emotional skills	School-wide SEL curriculum, Teacher-student relational strategies, Focus on empathy and communication skills	Primary and secondary school students	Better student-teacher relationships Improved emotional intelligence Reduced behavioral issues



The Fourth R	Canada	Teaching relationship-building and conflict resolution	Teacher-led lessons on social skills and decision-making, focus on preventing bullying and violence, Engaging youth in critical thinking about relationships	Adolescents and high school students	Stronger teacher-student trust Reduced peer conflicts Better coping strategies for mental health
Anti-Bullying and School Climate Programs					
KiVa Anti-Bullying Program	Finland	Preventing bullying and fostering positive school environments	Teacher training to address bullying Classroom discussions on emotional well-being Whole-school approach to inclusion	General school population	Reduced bullying incidents Improved teacher awareness of student mental health Stronger sense of school belonging

#### 4. Discussion

The foundation of strong teacher-child bonds is deeply rooted in Attachment Theory, which highlights the importance of emotionally supportive relationships for children's emotional security and social competence. The secure attachment between teachers and students, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and sensitivity, allows children to feel safe and valued in the classroom. This sense of security encourages children to explore their environment, take emotional risks, and engage in learning, as they perceive their teachers as stable sources of support, much like their primary caregivers at home (Valdebenito et al., 2022). Intervention programs such as Banking Time, Key2Teach, and Incredible Years Teacher Program (IYTP) have been shown to foster these types of secure relationships by enhancing teacher responsiveness and sensitivity, which in turn improves emotional regulation and reduces behavioral issues (Hoogendijk & Holland, 2020). However, these programs may not fully account for varying attachment styles among children, which could influence the overall effectiveness of the intervention.

In addition to Attachment Theory, Ecological Systems Theory offers a broader lens to understand teacher-child relationships by incorporating the multiple layers of a child's environment, including family, peers, and the broader community. Programs like The Pyramid Model, SEL programs, and SEAL take a more comprehensive approach, considering not only the teacher-student relationship but also the broader school environment in which the child develops. These interventions promote emotional regulation, positive behavior reinforcement, and peer support, recognizing the importance of a supportive and inclusive school culture (Fox et al., 2003; CASEL, 2022). However, while these programs address classroom dynamics and social-emotional development, they often neglect the critical influence of external factors, such as family and cultural contexts, which are central to Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Incorporating these external factors into teacher-child relationship interventions could provide a more holistic and effective approach to promoting mental health and emotional well-being in children.

Therefore, while Attachment Theory emphasizes the importance of secure teacher-student relationships as a foundation for emotional development, Ecological Systems Theory encourages a broader view that accounts for the child's environment beyond the classroom. Combining these two theories could provide a more robust framework for understanding and enhancing teacher-child interactions, fostering environments that not only build emotional security but also support the diverse, multi-layered needs of children in today's educational settings. Future interventions should seek to integrate both theories, taking into account individual attachment needs and the broader ecological context to ensure comprehensive support for children's mental health and social-emotional development.

#### 5. Limitation And Recommendation

Possible limitations of this study include a limited scope of interventions, as it may focus only on a subset of globally recognized methods, potentially

overlooking other successful interventions used in specific regions or educational contexts. This could affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, cultural differences may not be fully considered, which could influence how teacher-child relationships are formed and how mental health is addressed across various cultural and societal settings. For instance, cultures with a tendency toward stoicism might need a more indirect approach to discussing emotions, while cultures that value open emotional expression might benefit from more interactive and expressive methods. Teacher training should also incorporate cultural sensitivity, ensuring that educators understand the social and emotional needs of students from diverse backgrounds. The study may also face challenges in capturing the variation in implementation of interventions, as the effectiveness of such programs often depends on the fidelity and context of their execution, which can vary significantly between different schools and classrooms.

Furthermore, the study may be constrained by the measurement of mental health outcomes, as existing tools for assessing student mental health can be subjective or inconsistent across studies. The effectiveness of interventions may also be influenced by teacher variability, such as differences in experience, training, and teaching style, which may not be fully explored. Moreover, the study might not include long-term follow-up data, which would provide insight into the sustained impact of teacher-child relationships on student mental health over time.

Future research should consider expanding the scope of interventions to include a broader range of strategies used in different cultural, regional, and educational contexts. This would help provide a more comprehensive view of the most effective practices for developing teacher-child relationships and improving mental health outcomes. Additionally, it would be valuable to incorporate diverse perspectives from various educational systems around the world to ensure the recommendations are universally applicable. Future studies could also explore the long-term impact of teacher-child relationships by including follow-up data over extended periods, which would provide deeper insights into how these relationships influence students' mental well-being in the long run.

To address the variability in implementation and teacher differences, future research should consider incorporating data on the fidelity of intervention implementation and account for teacher characteristics such as experience, training, and teaching style. Examining the role of other stakeholders—including parents, peers, and school counselors—in supporting teacher-child relationships could provide a more holistic understanding of how to improve students' mental health outcomes. Furthermore, refining measurement tools for mental health outcomes and ensuring consistency across studies would help enhance the reliability of the findings.

## **6. Implication**

The implications of these recommendations are far-reaching. If implemented, they will create an educational environment where both the academic and emotional well-being of students are prioritized. Teacher development programs that focus on mental health will help educators recognize and address the emotional needs of students, leading to better outcomes in both emotional and academic

development. Teachers who are emotionally supported and well-trained will be more effective in forming trusting, supportive relationships with their students, which are key to improving mental health. At the policy level, adopting trauma-informed approaches and incorporating SEL programs into the curriculum will provide students with the tools they need to manage their emotions and build healthy relationships. These initiatives will help foster a positive school environment that supports students' mental health and overall development, which is especially important for those who have experienced trauma.

For researchers, these recommendations offer a clearer framework for studying the impact of teacher-student relationships on mental health. By combining Attachment Theory with Ecological Systems Theory, researchers can better understand the complex social and institutional factors that influence these relationships. Long-term studies will provide valuable data on how teacher-student interactions affect children's mental health over time, while cross-cultural studies will help refine interventions to suit diverse educational contexts. The integration of technology in education also has significant implications. As digital learning environments become more common, maintaining emotional connections between teachers and students is critical. By adopting AI-based learning systems and providing virtual mentoring, educational systems can continue to support students' emotional well-being despite the physical distance. This can bridge the gap created by remote learning and enhance the overall learning experience.

## 7. Conclusion

The review highlights the importance of teacher-student relationships in fostering children's emotional stability, resilience, and academic success. It confirms that secure, positive teacher-child bonds, coupled with supportive school environments, significantly enhance children's emotional regulation and coping mechanisms, addressing the research question regarding their impact on mental health. Interventions such as Key2Teach, Banking Time, and the Incredible Years Teacher Program have proven effective in improving these relationships and promoting emotional well-being. Based on these findings, it is recommended that teacher training focus on emotional intelligence and conflict management, while schools prioritize creating inclusive environments that encourage positive peer relationships and continuous support from both educators and families. It is recommended for future research to explore the long-term effects of these interventions in various cultural contexts to further understand how these practices can be universally applied to improve student outcomes.

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