

## The role of student-teacher relationship to teacher subjective well-being as moderated by teaching experience

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### ABSTRACT

A good relationship between teachers and students can positively influence the subjective well-being of teachers. However, in the context of middle school setting, a good relationship with students was considered as an effortful attempt for teacher to maintain which was related to the teacher well-being too. It was said that the more teaching experience the teacher has, the easier for them to navigate their relationship with students. Therefore, this study aimed to test whether the teaching experience moderate the impact of the teacher-student relationship to the teacher subjective well-being. The teacher-student relationship was measured using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS), while the teacher subjective well-being was measured by the Teacher Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire (TSWQ). Respondents in this study were 289 teachers at the middle school level from both junior high school and senior high school or equivalent. The analysis technique used was a simple moderation analysis. The result showed that there was a positive relationship between the teacher-student relationship, the teacher subjective well-being, and teacher experience. However, this study indicated that there was no moderation role of the teaching experience in weakening or strengthening the close teacher-student relationship impact on the teacher well-being.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Based on the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 [1], the national education system is an integrated component of education to achieve the goals of national education. To achieve this goal, educational staff such as teachers by their specialties are needed in creating a good learning atmosphere and learning process. As one among stakeholders of education who contributes to the achievement of educational goals, the role of the teacher is considered very important [2]. They must guide and accompany their students so that students can actively actualize their potential following the national values of Pancasila and the Law of the Republic of Indonesia. The impact of this important role is that teachers are often faced with the challenges of how to create the best learning environment so that students get the best learning outcomes. Teachers must also nurture students to have good study skills and life skills, have high competitiveness, and be able to face challenges to achieve various advances in their lives.

Another challenge faced by teachers can also come from the attitude of the students being taught. Some of the misbehaviors are often displayed by students in the classroom (i.e. making noise during class

hours, being passive in learning activities, and arguing with teachers) [3]. The attitudes of these students are only a few of their characteristics as adolescents, which are generally experienced by students in middle schools from junior to senior high schools. This is in line with the theory of psychosocial development by Erik Erikson [4]. It is asserted that adolescents seek and shape their identity as individuals, in which their attempt to do so can cause students to display misbehavior. However, that misbehavior can further make teachers feel unpleasant and exhausted about their job. In other words, teachers feel less happy or unwell about their lives as teachers. In recent years, the phenomenon of teacher subjective well-being in Indonesia is quite alarming in the eyes of the community. Teachers in Indonesia are faced with various things that can affect their well-being, one of which is student delinquency. Based on data recorded at the West Jakarta Metro Police, there were 141 cases of student brawling during 2018-2019, with 95 cases were committed by high school students [5]. This brawling as displayed by students is what often stresses teachers. Teachers have to put a high amount of effort into dealing with and prevent students from being involved in the brawl so that they can carry out their duties as good students in the school [6].

The teacher well-being will decrease when work starts to feel unpleasant nor unrewarding. This happens when teachers begin to think that their duties are no longer in line with their expectations as teachers. It is said that the teaching profession is a job that demands emotion and cognition [7]. This is because the teacher must play an active role in responding to the needs of students inside and outside the classroom. Also, teachers must be able to work professionally in controlling the emotions they feel during the teaching and learning process or while in school. Meanwhile, it is also said that emotion is an inseparable part of every individual [8]. Emotions can impact teacher behavior inside and outside the classroom and are closely related to the health and well-being of teachers. One research shows that the teaching profession stands at the second rank out of 25 jobs with the highest physical and emotional stress [9]. Other research [10] stated that teacher's stress can harm oneself, such as experiencing physical disorders, depression, and tension that can interfere with physiological and psychological functioning.

Teacher subjective well-being is explained as a teacher perception of a healthy and successful life in the workplace or school [11]. According to this study, the concept of teacher well-being has two components, namely school connectedness and teaching efficacy. School connectedness is defined as a feeling of being supported by the school and having a good relationship with the community members in the school. This can be seen from how the school treats teachers so that teachers perceived the degree of care from the school. Therefore, the role of the school in supporting teachers is quite important. Meanwhile, teaching efficacy is defined as the teachers' assessment of their teaching ability to do the job well under certain standards. In other words, it is the teachers' perception of their capacity to work. This component also includes the teachers' belief in their ability to provide successful teaching for students, including students who are challenging and need greater attention (i.e. children with special needs).

These two components of teacher well-being can be enhanced through the teacher's relationship with colleagues and students. Moreover, it is also said that teachers have the responsibility to develop their relationships with their students, especially in building productive relationships in the learning process [12]. The attitude of teachers who care for their students is an important part of their work and can be a source of motivation for their students, but it can also be a very tiring job. Therefore, teachers need to build and maintain a close relationship with their students to facilitate the role of teachers in guiding and educating students in schools. In addition, it is argued that interpersonal relationships with students can be a source of fulfillment of the needs of belonging to teachers [13], so it is important to understand teacher work motivation and well-being.

The interpersonal relationship between teachers and students was introduced by Pianta [14], [15] as a concept of the teacher-student relationship. This can be interpreted as the teachers' perception of their relationship with students which includes three aspects, namely: closeness, conflict, and dependency. The aspect of closeness can reflect openness, warmth, and security in the teacher-student relationship. The conflict aspect reflects the extent of teachers' perception of the relationship as a bad, contradictory, unpredictable, and unpleasant relationship. Finally, the dependency aspect portrays the development of students in their dependence on other people. From these three aspects, it is the closeness that is most desirable in the relationship between teachers and students [12], [16]. Moreover, it is also stated that closeness is the only positive aspect of the relationship between teachers and students because teaching is an activity that is filled with positive emotions [17]. Also, if the teacher manages to form a warm relationship with their students and feels that the relationship can help their students learn more effectively, then this can make the teacher feel happier [16]. Therefore, this study only focuses on the closeness aspect of the teacher-student relationship where *closeness* describes openness, warmth, protection, and security in the relationship between teacher and students.

It is previously known that the relationship between teachers and students is the most determining factor in enhancing the subjective well-being of teachers [12]. This is because the teachers and students are

one unit in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, the positive interpersonal relationship between teachers and students can be a source of pleasure too for teachers, in which teachers who develop affection for their students will feel more valued by their students [17]. This is also the reason why someone chooses the teaching profession as a job and then become a reason for teachers not to leave their job. However, if the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students is perceived as a conflictual relationship, it will be a source of stress for the teacher [18]. Teachers who have a high level of stress can only focus on the teaching part but find it difficult to build the class atmosphere as conducive, and also have difficulty in developing relationships with their students [19].

The role of teacher's experience in teaching greatly affects the subjective well-being of teachers [20] because teachers who have teaching experience for years have no concerns about making students comfortable or close to the teacher. The experience they have will enable them to automatically use various scenarios to improve interpersonal relationships with students and their well-being. Meanwhile, another research [21] had found that the teaching experience of teachers greatly affects the subjective well-being of teachers, because new teachers with little experience tend to be concerned more about their ability to make students comfortable or close to themselves while lacking the strategies to improve interpersonal relationships with students and their well-being.

From the background described, it is known that the role of teaching experience can affect the relationship between the closeness of the teacher-student relationship and the teacher subjective well-being at the middle school level. Based on these past studies, this study aims to find out whether the role of teaching experience can strengthen or weaken the impact of teacher-student relationship to the teacher subjective well-being at the middle school level. The hypothesis proposed in this study is (1) there is a positive relationship between the teacher-student relationship and teacher subjective well-being and (2) there is a moderating role of the teaching experience on the impact of teacher-student relationship to the teacher subjective teachers at the middle school level.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This was a quantitative research because we depict the phenomenon under concern in the form of numerical data to be interpreted using statistical analysis. In gathering the data, we only take one time of data collection, thus making the study a cross-sectional design study [22]. From the research strategy point of view, this study can also be classified as explanatory research because this study aims to explain the moderating role of the teaching experience on the relationship between the teacher-student relationship and teacher well-being [23].

This research targeted the middle school teachers as the participant, which coming from both junior and senior high school. The sampling method used was convenience sampling. Data collection was carried out on 15-16 June 2020 using an online questionnaire from the Google Form application. Link to the questionnaire was distributed to fellow middle school teachers under the researchers' network. The use of the online platform was also in conjunction with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic so that researchers could not take samples directly to schools. We received responses from 289 teachers from various areas of middle schools, i.e. Greater Jakarta, Jabodetabek, Yogyakarta, Pontianak, Bandung, Lamongan, Kulon Progo, Malang, Cirebon, Batam, and Jepara, Indonesia. The age of the participants in this study ranged from 20-60 years (M-age=38.5 years, SD=10 years). Most of the participants were female (N=187; 65.8%), coming from the Jabodetabek area (N=194; 69%). The average teaching experience reported was 140 months or 11 years 6 months (SD=106.2 months).

Before data collection, we adapted the instrument used in the Indonesian language. The adaptation process is carried out by translating the original instrument in English into the Indonesian language with the help of English Literature scholar. We also asked for an expert judgment from two School Psychologists. Afterward, we also tested these adapted instruments for its psychometric properties in which we recruited 100 teachers from middle school as the same with the target participant to fill the instruments and give feedbacks for the layout and ease of understanding.

The instrument used to measure teacher well-being is the *Teacher Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire* (TSWQ) [11]. This measuring instrument has 8 items with 2 subscales, namely teaching efficacy and school connectedness, each of which consists of 4 items. The instrument uses a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 4 (always). All items contained in the TSWQ are favorable, so there is no need to calculate for a reversed score. One example of this item from TSWQ is "I am a successful teacher". The scoring technique for this instrument is done by adding up the total score of each participant. Based on the psychometric adaptation, the TSWQ is found to have a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.865$ , followed by a validity coefficient of corrected item-total correlation (Cr-IT) ranging from 0.518 to 0.721.

This shows that the TSWQ instrument has good reliability and is internally consistent [24]. Besides, all items on the TSWQ instrument were proven to be homogeneously valid with the Cr-IT above 0.2 [25].

The instrument used to measure the closeness of the teacher-student is *Student-Teacher Relationship* (STRS) [26], in which it has 6 favorable items with a 4-point Likert Scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). One example of the item "My students respect me". The scoring technique is done by adding up the total obtained score of each participant. Based on the psychometric testing result on the same 100 teachers as in TSWQ adaptation, STRS instrument is found to have a satisfactory  $\alpha$  of 0.836. Its validity coefficients of Cr-IT are ranging from 0.445 to 0.697 which all are above 0.2 cut-off from [27].

For the teaching experience, it is obtained from the demographic questions listed at the beginning of the questionnaire. The question regarding the teaching experience is phrased as "how long have you been teaching up to this day?" in which the participant answer in years and months.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

Before conducting hypothesis testing, the researcher conducted several preliminary analyses. Descriptive analysis was used to understand the distribution of data obtained, followed by correlation analysis between variables to overview the relationship among the data obtained. The results of descriptive analysis of each variable can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of variable

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
STRS	289	12	24	20.78	2.471
TSWB	289	18	32	26.80	3.188

Notes. STR = Student Teacher Relationship; TSWB = Teacher Subjective Well-Being

As can be seen in Table 1, the participants tended to have scores above the median on both variables. The normality test is further executed using the One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The result shows that the data of the two variables are normally distributed. Before conducting multiple regression analysis or moderation testing, the researcher first carried out a correlation analysis between variables to meet the theoretical basic assumptions of this study. The results of the correlation analysis of each variable can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Inter-variable correlation analysis

	STR	TSWB
STR	1	
TSWB	.599 **	1
Teaching Experience (months)	.197**	.154**

Note. STR = Student Teacher Relationship; TSWB = Teacher Subjective Well-being; \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

Based on the information in Table 2, the teacher-student relationship has a significant positive relationship with teacher subjective well-being ( $r=0.599$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). Thus, the first hypothesis is accepted, since the higher the closeness of teacher-student relationship, it will be followed by the higher subjective well-being of the teacher. Meanwhile, the teaching experience also has a significant positive relationship with the teacher-student relationship, it means that the longer the teaching experience, the higher degree of closeness in teacher-student relationship. The result also showed that the teaching experience also has a significant positive relationship with the teacher subjective well-being, it means that the longer the teaching experience, the higher degree of well-being in teachers. Hence, multiple regression analysis or moderation testing is carried out to answer the research questions and prove the hypothesis of this study. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis

		<i>Coeff</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
Constants		11.465	2.056	5.577	0.000	7.419	15.511
STR	b1	0.730	0.091	7.333	0.000	0.534	0.927
Teaching Experience (months)	b2	-0.004	0.012	-0.340	0.734	-0.021	0.020
Int 1	b3	0.000	0.000	0.430	0.667	0.000	0.001

Note. Dependent variable = teacher subjective well-being; STR = teacher-student relationship  
 $F(1,189) = 57,708$ ;  $R^2 = 0.000$ ;  $MSE = 6,562$ ;  $p < 0.05$

Based on the information presented in Table 3, however, we found there is no moderating effect (interaction effect) of the teaching experience on the teacher-student relationship in predicting teacher subjective well-being ( $b_3=0.000$ ;  $t=0.430$ ;  $p=0.667$  [0.000; 0.001]). Based on these results, it shows that the second hypothesis is rejected because there is no significant impact of the teaching experience on the teacher-student relationship in predicting the teacher well-being of teachers. Thus, the teacher's teaching experience does not strengthen or weaken the degree of teacher-student relationship in predicting the teacher well-being.

### 3.2 Discussion

The purpose of this study is to examine the moderating role of teaching experience in the relation between teacher-student relationship and the teacher well-being. From the results found, there are some points that can be discussed. First, from the correlation analysis, this study proves that there is a direct positive correlation between the teacher-student relationship and teacher subjective well-being. This result indicates that if there is an increase in degree of closeness on the teacher-student relationships, it will be accompanied by an increase in teacher subjective well-being. In other words, if teachers feel that they have a close relationship with students, they will feel more positive about themselves as a teacher. The finding is congruent with the previous findings from the study conducted by Hargreaves [16]. When teacher manages to form a warm relationship with their students and feels that the relationship can help their students learn more effectively, then this can make the teacher feel happier. In other study, it is also found that improving teacher-student interaction can improve teacher well-being, and vice versa [28]. It was found that teachers with high emotional and instructional support, also high in class organization, displayed behaviors characterized by high responsiveness and control. These teachers have profiles that are a combination of high levels of warmth and control, also have effective ways of fostering student learning and development. Regarding teacher well-being, these teachers feel more connected to students and have a higher belief in their ability to teach. Another study further concluded that the teachers displayed high performance in supervising students and paying attention to the signs of students, to identify students who have academic and emotional problems [29].

Second, the result of the correlation analysis also proves that there is a significant and positive correlation between teaching experience and teacher-student relationship. These results indicate that if there is an increase in teaching experience, it will be accompanied with the increase the degree of closeness on the teacher-student relationships. The finding is congruent with the previous findings in which the teaching experience allows teachers to use various methods automatically to build close interpersonal relationships with students [20]. Teachers who have experience in teaching also have less trouble adjusting to new students, and they also have ways to make students feel comfortable and close to the teacher.

Third, there is also a significant and positive correlation between teaching experience and teacher subjective well-being. These results indicate that if there is an increase in teaching experience, it will be accompanied with the increase of teacher subjective well-being. In other words, when teachers have a long teaching experience, they tend to perceive a close relationship with their students and feel more positive about themselves as teachers. Previous study showed that teachers with teaching experience can use various scenarios to improve their well-being [20]. Another study found that, compared to new teachers, experienced teachers have less concerned with their ability to make students comfortable and developed more strategies to improve their well-being [21]. Teachers who have had a lot of teaching experience have a high sense of connectedness, so they don't focus their energies too much on building close interpersonal relationships with students. Teaching experience also supports them in increasing teaching efficacy. With a high sense of connectedness and teaching efficacy, it will make teachers feel more well-being in school. On the contrary, new teachers with little experience tend to be concerned more about their ability to make students comfortable or close to themselves while lacking the strategies to improve interpersonal relationships with students and their well-being.

However, when these relationships are further analyzed with a moderation analysis, it shows that there is no interaction effect from the teaching experience in moderating the relationship between the teacher-student relationship and the teacher subjective well-being. In this study, teaching experience was not a variable that strengthened or weakened the relationship between teacher-student relations and teacher

subjective well-being. This result is contrary to the previous research finding from [20] and [21]. Both studies said that teaching experience will affect teacher-student relationship and teacher well-being. Teachers who have long years of teaching tend to have various teaching scenarios that enables them to take various ways in improving their interpersonal relationships with their students and improving their own well-being. But, in this recent study, we found no moderating effect of teaching experience in the relationship between teacher-student relationships and teacher subjective well-being. The results of this study indicate that for teachers in Indonesia, teaching experience does not strengthen or weaken the relationship between teacher-student relationships and teacher subjective well-being. This indicates that there are other things that are more able to strengthen or weaken the relationship, for example how teachers feel about their work environment and the relationship between teachers and their co-workers. It can be said that teachers in Indonesia may have more opportunities to share their conditions with their colleagues, both in terms of work and personal life, regardless of the amount of teaching experience they have. As stated in other study [30], how teachers feel about their working conditions, whether work situations create stress or create dissatisfaction, can be related to poor mental health conditions. Teachers who were unable to tell co-workers about their feelings of stress or dissatisfaction had a relationship with poor well-being and high symptoms of depression. Based on this, teachers in Indonesia seem to have positive feelings about their work environment and have good interpersonal relationships with their colleagues, thus supporting them to have high teacher subjective well-being. Also, since this study uses a psychometrically valid and reliable instruments, the findings found from this study are considered justifiable and depict the sample condition well to a certain degree as an estimation of the population condition.

As a note, in this study, the measure of the teacher-student relationship uses the positive aspects of closeness only with the instrument created by Pianta [26] and further adapted into the Indonesian context. This aspect of closeness describes the teacher as a safe place for students to be able to communicate openly, warmly, and harmoniously [26]. However, as the study shows, there is no moderating role of the teaching experience in relation between the teacher-student close relationship and teacher well-being. Thus, teaching experience does not weaken or strengthen the relationship between these two variables. However, it is said that both positive and negative aspects actually forms the concept of teacher-student relationship [14]. It might be the case where teachers with long teaching experiences at the same institution or school will lead to them feeling bored and decrease their teaching effectiveness [31], thus making the teacher-student relationship loosen and can even lead to conflict. Conflict can occur because students in the middle school level are in search of identities which makes them prone to conduct misbehavior (i.e. arguing against teachers and being noisy in the classroom), all of them makes the lesser degree of teacher-student relationship [4]. Based on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, it is also said that students in middle school level are all in adolescence period of development, who are in the search for identity. They tend to be closer and spend more time with their peers compared to following the teachers at school. Therefore, it might the case that the role of the teaching experience does not strengthen or weaken the relationship between teacher-student relationship and teacher subjective well-being because of the developmental context of the student under investigation. Moreover, other possible reason which counted as our limitation is the fact that we did not divide the participants based on length of teaching experience which probably affect the research findings. Since we use a ratio scale in measuring the teaching experience, the score distribution becomes broad and causes imbalance in the total number of teaching experience.

It must be mentioned that there are also several things as the advantages of this study. First, as far as we concern, this study is the first study in Indonesia that examines the conditions of teacher-student relationship on teacher subjective well-being, especially in the context of middle school level. The second advantage is the fact that this study produces a reliable and valid instrument to measure the construct of teacher-student relationship and teacher well-being in Indonesian context which can be used as a resources for further research addressing the same issue. The third advantage is this study gives an evidence that the teacher-student relationship has a significant positive relationship with the teacher subjective well-being which supports the findings from previous studies on the relationship between the two. Specifically, our results can be used as a reference for further research addressing the context of Indonesian middle school teachers regarding the teacher-student relationship and teacher well-being.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine whether the teaching experience moderates the effect of the teacher-student relationship on teacher subjective well-being at the middle school level. It is found that there is a significant positive relationship between the teacher experience, teacher-student relationship, and teacher subjective well-being. However, the moderation analysis show that there is no significant moderation effect

of the teaching experience on the effect of teacher-student closeness relationship to the teacher subjective well-being. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the study is accepted but the second hypothesis is rejected.

There are some practical suggestions that can be made for future research. Future study is advised to include not only the closeness aspect of the teacher-student relationship, but also includes the negative aspects of conflict and dependency. Thus, further research can enrich the findings by examining the impact of these two aspects of teacher-student relationship to the teacher subjective well-being. Further research should also look for investigate another variable that can serve in strengthened or weakened the relationship between teacher-student relationships and teacher subjective well-being, such as working condition and interpersonal relationship with colleagues. Practically, the results of this study can be used as discussion material for teachers so that teachers can find out what factors influence the condition of the teacher-student relationship to the teacher subjective well-being in middle school setting.

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