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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN DIMENSION IN THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN HIGH AND COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS: A PARTICIPATORY STUDY OF LOCAL AND STATE TEACHERS IN ATACORA / DONGA DEPARTMENT

*Magloire Aitchedji

Université de Parakou-ENS de Natitingou BP: 72 Natitingou, Benin

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ABSTRACT

For several decades, in Benin, the phenomenon of guilty or desirable relationships between teachers and students of both sexes keeps increasing in school and university settings. Despite the myriad of strategies implemented by the Government of Benin and its partners, the disparity between boys and girls in secondary education is still significant, to the detriment of the latter. The objective of this research was to focus on the subject heeding the untapped human dimension. Therefore, a survey was conducted among teachers across the country using a questionnaire where the teachers were asked to explain the choice of their answer. The results of the survey showed that 61% of teachers thought that this kind of relationship was possible as against 39% who thought that this kind of relationship was not desirable according to the gender.

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INTRODUCTION

At first sight, this topic seems irrelevant given the high number of personalities and articles devoted to it: it is all about “guilty or desirable relationship between teachers and students of both sexes in high school and secondary school in Atacora / Donga departments”. According to the head of the administrative service of Borgou-Alibori “in secondary schools a rapid and permanent growth of these behaviors that significantly exacerbate the dwindling in school setting and dangerously delay the school democratization in favor of girls has been recorded”. Nowadays, given the young age of both teachers and students, it is urgent to focus on the subject with an innovative spirit. It is of paramount importance to realize that human dimension is both the most complex and the most fascinating to understand. Therefore, Tourriere (2006) states: “A teacher could not do his job without the deal in its affective dimension”. This, insofar as everyone is aware of the role and place of youth in the future of nations. Let us recall that the term "affective" draws its etymological root from Latin word “affectivus”, which means “reach, seek to reach”.

According to the Larousse dictionary, the term “affective” means generally “affects, sensitivity, and feelings”. The concept of "Affect" in psychology is an "elementary impression of attraction or repulsion which is the basis of affectivity"

*Corresponding author: Magloire Aitchedji
Université de Parakou-ENS de Natitingou BP: 72 Natitingou, Benin.

Here is the genesis of the idea: “Understanding the affective dimension in the relationship between teacher and students” which could also mean “managing both attraction / repulsion in the relationship between teacher and students”. On the one hand, the research on desirable or guilty relationships between teachers and students of both sexes are reviewed. They help promote the idea that “In adversarial relationship due to lover relationship, there is a world and a legitimate environment”.

On the other hand, we presented some data on the perception of teachers about their relationships with students by focusing on gender differences. We also examined what could be the implications and disadvantages of these relationships and the interpretations by teachers themselves. Then, a thorough analysis highlighted the various implications of the relationship between teacher and students and by taking into consideration the human-affective dimension without denying it.

Background

To understand the affection of teachers to their students, it is essential to clarify what exactly does this concept mean? According to Side (2012), the relationship between a student and his teacher is a key factor in academic success, especially among the youth. However, the quality of this varies according to gender, economic status and child behavior. Similarly, an article in the newspaper “Le Monde” tells us that: (...) Getting to “keep his students” cannot be improvised and is even the primary concern of teachers at the beginning of his profession.

Laurence (2006) examined the concerns of young trainee teachers in schools located in priority education zones. She presented her work on the occasion of the third world conference on school violence, held in Bordeaux. His conclusion is clear. 53% of respondents are afraid of lacking relational skills, 27% not being supported by their colleagues or their management, 14% to be victims of violence and only 6% are afraid not to master their subject. "Young teachers are undermined by the anxiety of being destabilized in the relationship with the student, not knowing how to manage a classroom or lack authority. However, they are very confident in the strength of their intellectual capability" according to Laurence.

But this lack of relational skills shows that it is frequent to see pregnant students in high schools and comprehensive schools. The authors of these pregnancies in the school settings are men of all social conditions. The most striking fact is the case where the authors of pregnancies are teachers of primary or secondary schools who may be the teacher in the classes of such victims.

The importance of the context in the teaching / learning process has been widely highlighted by Sabi (2013), who stressed during the Departmental Administrative Conference, that the situation of pregnancies is particularly alarming in the Atacora- Donga Department where 1648 pregnancies were recorded between 2010 and 2013, an average of 549 pregnant girl students per year.

This situation is neither unique to Benin, nor to Africa. According to the recent report of Benin Plan (2014), "Global trends in the field of education indicate that 39 million girls aged 11 to 15 years around the world are out of the basic education cycle". At the time of this research, the reflections are centered on this practice in order to qualitatively influence the performance in adolescent learning in high and comprehensive schools on the one hand, and on the dangers of this kind of relationship on the other hand. This to better understand human dimension ignored from both sides. This work has the merit of involving teachers in search of solution through their own analysis, rather than restricting the work to the applications of texts and sanctions.

It is for this reason that a discussion through a survey with a questionnaire for teachers was designed: "Can a teacher have an affair with his/her learner"?

Methodological Approach

Target population and sampling

The population and its characteristics

The survey population was the target population that consists of teachers across Benin, at junior and senior secondary schools, university, three subjects in science (Mathematics, physics and biology), and at all ages. These are Local Contractual Teachers converted to Contractual Agents of the Government (ECL-ACE) in training at ENS (High Training-School) in Natitingou District during three years of

consolidation courses (2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013- 2014), of which the numbers of teachers were 1052.

Sampling and sample

The sampling took into account the criteria of oldness in the profession and in the schools in which they taught, age, level of qualification, religion, level of accountability and gender. This sample contained one hundred and fifteen (115) converted trainees of both sex from Atacora / Donga, of which ninety-two (92) men and twenty three (23) women.

To be included, the candidate must freely accept, among other requirements, to answer the question and which will be randomly chosen during the interviews. In the present study, this condition of voluntary participation set aside teachers less motivated that would bias our results because of their lack of involvement in this research.

Research Techniques

Two main techniques were used for this study. These are the observation and survey.

Observation

A documentary observation was made in various articles, books, in libraries and on the Internet, at Beninese Association for the Promotion of the Family, at the Departmental Administrative Conference (DAC) of Atacora- Donga (2013), at the documentation of NGO "ALCRER" - an organization for the promotion and protection of human rights (2013), at the validation workshop of the report on the National Analysis of Situation of Children's Rights of Plan Benin (2014), and also in the records of non-exhaustive recent figures from the Departmental Directorate in charge of Secondary Education, Technical and Vocational Training, Conversion and Integration of Youth (DDESFTPRIJ) in Borgou-Alibori. Finally, the documentation on the ECL-ACE project at the High Training-School in Natitingou and the visit to secondary schools on several occasions before the administration of the questionnaire, were used to verify the conditions under which the courses were taught.

Survey

A survey was conducted among teachers to whom a questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire consists in collecting maximum information of the population surveyed and helps identify the narration and social representations of respondents. On the other hand, this option was designed to facilitate data processing.

Data Analysis

The qualitative was the best method suited to the processing of data owing to the search technique which comprised an open question. The data of the survey were processed and then analyzed. This analysis aimed to go beyond the overall description by establishing several contrasting profiles, which ascertained direct or indirect responsibilities in the progression

of the disaster among teachers and students. A mortality problem in the sample was mainly due to the reorientation (change of cohorts from year to another), but subsidiarily to the dropout of study and the withdrawal of some trainees.

Results and Analysis

The analysis of the question subjected to the community of teachers shows on the one hand, the affirmative answers "yes" and on the other hand the negative answers "No" then their percentages, according to the gender, shown in the table below (A total of 115 teachers responded to the questionnaire administered).

Table 1. Results of the survey: affirmation, negation

	Respondents	"Yes"		"No"		Total (%)
		Answer	%	Answer	%	
Male teachers	92	62	54%	30	26%	80%
Female teachers	23	8	7%	15	13%	20%
Total (Answer/respondents)	115	70	61%	45	39%	100%

Source: Counting of responses to the question

RESULTS

The benefits and implications of " yes "

On the part of the teachers

The counting of the answers to the question: "Can a teacher have an affair with his/her learner? "It appears that the majority (61%) thought it was possible to establish a relationship with his female student. But they said that this implies special conduct by both partners. We must first and foremost point out that there is an African proverb that says: "The goat grazes where it is attached". However, it is important to add that "The goat doesn't graze all the herbs of its surrounding and besides, a teacher is not a goat because he / she is endowed with a reason and emotions". "Therefore, the reason behind the choice of a partner should be to establish a home but not to satisfy the libido or the sexual drive of the teacher. So to say, the soul mate can meet anywhere. However, any teacher who chooses to create his family through his girl student with mutual consent must meet the following conditions:

Respect the age of consent

The age of consent is the age at which an individual if civil minor, can carry on a sexual relationship with an adult without he commits a criminally punishable offense. Age of consent is usually lower than civil majority and that implies the end of compulsory education; MediaWiki (2014). The map showing the countries in which the law imposes an age for age of consent, this age is 18 years in Benin. At 18, a young woman or young man can consent to have sex with an adult, male or female, as long as that person is not in a position of authority, writes WikiMedia (2014). "Age is however not a sufficient criterion of free choice when there is a relationship of subordination (that it is with a parent, father-in law, teacher, instructor, medical doctor, police officer). Thus, a teacher who

would have sex with one of his girl students under the age of 18 in Benin may be condemned".

Compel and restrain oneself to total discretion

It means refusing to speak publicly. He / she will make sure that their relationships or contacts are only limited to their home. In other words, they should never be seen together in school, in the company of each other for any reason or under any pretext whatsoever.

Refrain her company out of the house

The teacher must avoid take her to school by a motorcycle or a car.

Make yourself known officially to her parents

The official nature of their relationship will be materialized through the recognition of both the parents of the girl and those of the teacher as in-laws: all committed by a future union embodied in a legal and / or religious marriage.

Make decision to help the girl student

In this context, help implies encourage further studies to an acceptable level agreed with the student and both parents. For this purpose, he / she will provide to the diverse needs of student i.e. financially and academically. The latter that it is academically, does not imply in any way to give her/him undeserved grade or marks (by the teacher himself / herself or his/her fellow teachers).

Accept to patiently wait

This implies that the teacher must avoid being the author of the pregnancy of the girl student for a period agreed by mutual accord by both sides and favorable to the future of the learner.

On the part of the learner

Any learner involved in serious relationships (which will lead to a wedding) with a teacher must understand that he / she has an important role to play in the success of the project.

- To this end, the discretion required by the teacher to the learner is also at stake.
- As a matter of fact, she should in any way tell anybody at home, in school even disclose this to her friends or her closest friends in her surroundings.

- She must work hard without waiting for any favor from her partner or the teacher dear to her heart.
- Avoid as much as possible any pretext that might lead her to approach the teacher at school and even in the street.
- Given the constraints related to the answers “yes” also the answers “no” need to be addressed.

The disadvantages or disasters of “no”

Of the 115 teachers surveyed, 45 responded “no”, giving then a percentage of 39%. Their refusal of the relationship between a teacher and learner was motivated by several reasons.

The various disturbances

The disadvantages raised by the teachers interviewed were mainly related to different disorders that “yes” would cause. This is first and foremost the polluted climate that the relationship will cause in carrying out his (teacher) work. Indeed, the teacher will be more comfortable to perform his duty with confidence especially in the class where the learner is. Therefore, in the classroom he / she will undergo the teacher unjustified anger or otherwise benefit from wide generosity. For example for a “yes” or “no” ill or well answered in the class, he will punish or congratulate her or the entire class: which is anti-pedagogy and socially dangerous. Indeed, everyone knows that this learner is a girl friend of this influential or of less value teacher. For this reason, any action of the learner in school, on the street or in the family is interpreted in a biased way and mostly negatively. Afterwards, the pregnancies that may result from these relationships are not likely to work things out. Their consequences are catastrophic. Even if the teacher recognizes himself as the author of the pregnancy, the victim is compelled to stop temporarily or forever going to school. Otherwise, she will be going to class affected physically or mentally with less ease.

In the latter case, she emulates negatively because many girls say you can be pregnant and continue going to school without “problem”. In the first case, what mess for parents who had placed their confidence in their daughter to take over the family affairs?

Besides, the most terrible disturbance is the loss of life of the victim and dismissal of the author from his place of work. Indeed, naive and innocent girls poorly prepared psychologically trying to abort and fail by losing their lives. This loss is sprawling: the girl, her family, society and nation are paying the price.

Moreover, the penalties projected by the texts provide administrative arrangements but mostly criminal penalties of which the heaviest is the loss of employment by unscrupulous authors. But the loss of employment is also as suicidal and sprawling as the death of the victim. Insofar as recent studies including that of the OIT (2014) proved that an average African worker and especially a Beninese worker is feeding directly or indirectly dozen of mouths. Likewise, the disturbances related to the loss of employment are also economical given the above disadvantages listed above. We should also recall the disengagement that accompanies the

officialization of relations. As a matter of fact, some parents or guardians “wash their hands” and “give” the girl to the teacher. Thus in the face of this responsibility, the teacher can be of good or bad mood depending on his morality.

It should be noted that the above-mentioned disturbances are observable in a boy student responsible or author of the pregnancy carried by a female teacher even if the collateral damage is less.

Implicit disadvantages

It may happen that the partner chosen by a teacher that it is a “girlfriend” or a fiancée of another student or a member of the same community or origin with the girl. In this case, the future of the student (boy) is mortgaged if he is peaceful. Otherwise, the battle undertaken between the boy student and the teacher can escalate and cause the loss of the life of the teacher as a result of direct attacks or occult missiles. The scenario is the same if the fiancé is a member of the community. Here it must be added that the desire of the teacher's parents to avenge can open a vicious circle which only the beginning is known but the end is incommensurable. The conflict that may result may undermine the communities of the teacher and / or the fiancé or boyfriend. It should be noted that in the case of female teacher as girlfriend of a boy student, the consequences are the same: the despoiled girlfriend / fiancée of the boy student may attempt on the life of female teacher.

It is on these notions of conflict that we will approach the analysis of the results which are our contribution and can result from our previous reflection.

Analysis of results and discussion

From the analysis of the question subjected to the community of the teacher that it: “Can a teacher have an affair with his/her learner” the results and their percentages recorded are presented in the table above. This seems apparently to mean that:

- 61% of teachers thought that this kind of relationship was possible: this figure explains the “inappropriate” behavior of a number of teachers who have been continuously creating an unfavorable climate to the work except when they cited the requirements to be met.
- 39% of teachers thought that this kind of relationship was not desirable: this figure shows a need for serenity. But integrating cultural, intellectual, social differences in a group is not always easy.
- Paradoxically, 13% of the 20% that represent teachers do not expect to have this kind of relationship with their learners: satisfactory result! The teachers seem to be aware of the “contract” that binds them to the education system, and this is an excellent thing. Therefore, why does it often exist an opposition between this “conscience” of the contract and its effective implementation? This shows once again the good sense of women about sexuality issues.

But one may wonder about the remaining 7%! We observed that some female teachers, deeply immature and looking for reference point expect a lot from their students. It is obvious that the expectations of students, in this very case, do not depend on classical education, but rather on “general education”.

Moreover, from the results of the survey, either by the teachers or the learners for the affirmative responses, the restriction to the discretion was repeated. One can examine this conception of “discretion”. What would be the benefit of a student to keep an interesting and important information to herself? Therefore, does she believe that she is valued through such a relationship? But as for the teacher what is his excuse?

For the first question as for the other two, the answer is no! Therefore, teachers should always expect that it would be known from one moment to another, it is only a matter of time. In the case where the learner has a high regard for himself / herself; he / she would at least tell her best friend and so, from the mouth of best friend to the ear of another best friend, everyone will be informed. Otherwise, the learner discloses all the “secrets” of the teacher to his or her friends as evidence of his / her bad behavior, of the sully life he / she lives without any remorse (through telephonic, mail, email exchanges... if possible video). On the forum sexuality (2014), a young girl of 16 years wrote this: “He promised me to keep our relationship in secret but I told a few people around me”. In these circumstances, the adolescent is not at fault given his age but has only one regret, explains Alvin (2006): “Afterwards, she remains little or morally guilty for the mistake she have made, that it is having exposed herself and for not being able to resist the pressure or the desire to go to the end”. From this analysis, there is both the necessity and complexity of understanding this affective dimension.

Teaching is a profession (vocation) closely related to human relationships. Reduce to bare living would probably be a great mistake. This has also been pointed out earlier on by saying that the teacher is first and foremost a human being foremost who simply lives by his profession. In this respect, the notions of “self-confidence” and “self-control” become important variables in school settings. But from the education point of view, know how to manage his emotions, his relational skills, can be very useful, especially in high and comprehensive schools. Become aware of human dimension, whether from teachers’ end or students’ end, should be part of our educational commitment. The subtlety lies in the fact that it must show without ostentation and without disguise the sometimes delicate and brutal exercise from the authority in the classroom.

The write up of this article has highlighted the sensitive nature of the relationship between the teacher and his students, and paradoxically, have also revealed its importance to better canalize this human-affective dimension, without denying it. In view of the above mentioned aspects, we should note that a clear-cut and single answer wouldn’t be responsible. This is why one who commit himself and chooses the option of “yes” or “no” must know what to expect and make sure to be responsible for current and future implications of their choice.

Considering the implications of the “yes” moreover difficult to meet, it is preferable that “the goat is expected to be free to graze leisurely the soft grass of its choice located somewhere else other than where it is attached” according to Fulani’ wisdom. For, all acts performed always catch the perpetrator sooner or later. It is advisable to behave well today so as to secure the future for self and one’s family.

Conclusion

Pregnancy of a learner for a teacher is only the consequence of a cause of the relationship of which nobody wants to address. Learners are innocent souls especially now that the children are enrolled in primary schools as early as 3-4 years old and reach secondary schools very young (10 years). Act responsibly would be one contribution to the training of the future leaders of tomorrow that the Nature and the Nation entrusted to teachers. Between “serve” and “serve people”, the wisdom recommends making the right choice. The Holy Scriptures (the Koran or the Bible) do specify that he who elevates himself will be humiliated and whoever humbles himself will be elevated (not by calculation).

Finally, the paper concludes with a deep sense of incompleteness, easily understandable given the subject. However, recognize as fundamental this “human” dimension which is hidden, and frankly speaking that was significantly underestimated before this very research. Let us end this paper with this Rawi’ statement which specifies that these relationships whether conflicting or ambiguous, rewarding or destructive, unhealthy or trainers, are paramount in building a personality. And what if the relationship between teacher and student is no longer a taboo?

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