

How do Students Experience the Emotions Their Teachers Display in Class?

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Abstract

Emotions are a substantial part of education, and the way teachers express their emotions is highly linked to academic success of their students. Additionally, the emotions of teachers affect the relationship with their students. The relationships students have with their teachers, however, can have a significant impact on their well-being. However, since the Covid 19 pandemic low levels of student well-being have been repeatedly measured. Thus, the present study investigated how students experience the emotions their teachers display. It is also investigated which emotions students would preferably see from their teachers, and which emotions students would not like to see from their teachers. A qualitative study design was chosen for this study. Bachelor students from the University of Twente (N = 18) took part in a semi-structured interview in which questions about their experiences with teachers' emotions were asked. The data of the 18 participants was analysed using an inductive, thematic coding approach. Participants described teachers who openly display emotions in class as more approachable and generally more relatable. However, there were also participants who indicated to prefer to see as little emotion as possible in their teachers, as they consider the relationship between students and teachers to be hierarchical. The emotion most students indicated as preferable was happiness, often mentioned together with general enthusiasm of the teacher do teach classes. However, most participants mentioned that a teacher who is always happy makes it hard to relate, as it makes them perceive the teacher as less authentic. Whilst some students indicated that they would not like their teachers to display any kind of frustration or anger in class, others mentioned that it makes it easier to feel comfortable around a teacher who shows some frustration when things do not work out as planned, as the students then feel more understood when they also struggle with tasks. This research gives valuable insights into students' experiences with teachers' emotions and their effect on student-teacher relationships. Additionally, teachers can use the findings of this study to be more aware about how students experience their emotions. Through use of these findings, positive contributions to students' academic success and well-being can be made.

Keywords: students, teacher, student-teacher-relationships, student well-being, teachers' emotions

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Introduction

The job of teachers is often described as an emotional profession (Frenzel et al., 2016, 2018). Teachers have a multitasking profession which consists of cognitive as well as emotional components. Teaching and designing the curriculum are some of the tasks of teachers, but teachers are also required to express or hide their true emotions, according to the situation at hand (Park et al., 2014). Teachers are constantly required to handle with a variety of emotional situations (Silbaugh et al., 2021). Distinctive from other professions, teachers see emotional labour as a way to reach their teaching aims and enhance positive learning outcomes (Sutton et al., 2009). According to Frenzel et al., (2021) teachers' emotions can affect their students in three different ways. The emotions a teacher displays can directly project on the students, they can shape the student-teacher relationship, and they can shape the way students think by delivering non-verbal social messages. Focussing especially on the first two aspects, it becomes clear how teachers' emotions are linked to the relationships with their students, as well as to students' emotions. However, most research on teachers' emotions focuses on the teachers' perspectives, or on the role of teachers in relation to emotional labour.

Especially since the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic, lower levels of well-being have been repeatedly reported in students (Doolan, 2021). Thus, it is crucial for higher education institutions to improve student-wellbeing to allow students to succeed in their professional development. To date, empirical research on student well-being has not taken the students individual experiences with teachers' emotions into account.

Student-Teacher Relationships

A student-teacher relationship is a relationship between the teacher and the student aiming at gaining trust and respect from each other (Cristine et al., 2022). The relationship can be built by getting to know the students, providing guidance and by encouraging the students to learn. Respect and valuing individuality are most important in building rapport between students and teachers. The teacher should care about the students and believe in their abilities to learn but acknowledge that each student is different and learns at different rates. A positive student-teacher relationship can account for academic success of the student and create a safe atmosphere in the university (Cristine et al., 2022). Students should be able to feel safe and supported for who they are.

Student-teacher relationships can be improved through interpersonal communication between teachers and students. Teachers are encouraged to listen actively to their students.

Additionally, respect and fairness are important aspects in developing a student-teacher relationship. Through praise and honest criticism, trust between students and teachers can be build (Coristine et al., 2022).

Previous research has shown that good relationships promote the students' academic success, lead to higher enthusiasm, and lower dropout rates. Good relationships between students and their teachers also predict higher quality of the teaching. Those students also show stronger social skills and experience more positive behaviour compared to students who perceive the relationship with their teacher as of low quality. The relationship can also help students to develop self-worth and improve their mental health (Myers & Pianta, 2008).

Particularly in higher education, students prefer approachable teachers. They talk to their students, greet them, and are open to them (Coristine et al., 2022). Also, teachers should try to get know their students by talking to them. This way, they get a sense of what is important to the student (Coristine et al., 2022).

A poor student-teacher relationship, however, is often the result of a teacher's lack of awareness. Since every student is individual, some may not respond to a specific learning method how others do. If teachers are not able to detect these students' different needs, relationship problems can occur (Coristine et al., 2022). According to Tucker (2021), every student has a different ability to learn, which is influenced by several factors, namely personality, family backgrounds, mental processes, learning styles, priorities, maturity levels, and academic ambitions. Thus, teachers should consider that every student needs specialized treatment and show empathy for their students. Another factor why poor student-teacher relationships develop is that some teachers only focus on academics (Tucker, 2021). Students want to feel cared for and feel that the teacher is someone they can trust and communicate with, not only on a superficial level (Coristine et al., 2022).

Student-Teacher Relationships on a Theoretical Level

To understand factors contributing to a student-teacher relationship, multiple theories have been developed and used. One of such is the framework for student-teacher relationships in higher education (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Their framework (see Figure 1) can be used to understand how a student-teacher relationship is built, and which factors contribute to the development of a relationship between student and teacher (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Hagenauer & Volet (2014) identified two dimensions in student-teacher relationships. First, the affective dimension, which focuses on the bond between student and teacher. This dimension is the foundation for relationships perceived as trusting and of high quality. Second, there is the

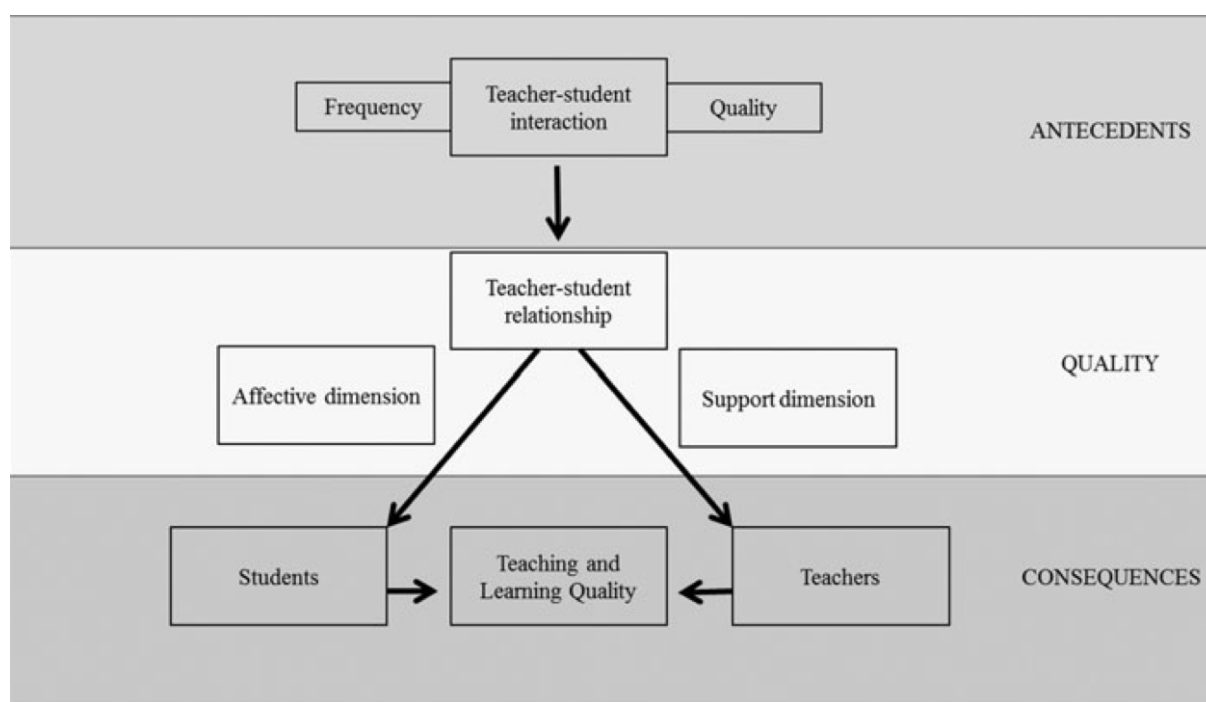
support dimension, which refers to the support necessary for students to achieve high academic results (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

Frequency and quality of the interaction between students and teacher have been identified as linked to the quality of student-teacher relationships (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Higher frequency of interactions can lead to improved student-teacher relationships, but only under the condition that the quality of these interactions is perceived as satisfactory. Low quality interactions do not play a role in developing a good student-teacher relationship (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

Consequences of high-quality student-teacher relationships identified by Hagenauer & Volet (2014) are higher quality of learning and teaching.

Figure 1

Hagenauer & Volet's Framework for Student-Teacher Relationships in Higher Education



Student-Teacher Relationships and Student Well-being

Especially young people do not only build friendships besides their families, they also often spend a lot of time at school or higher education. Thus, the relationship between students and teachers can have a great impact on a student's well-being (Coristine et al., 2022) Studies indicate a link between the quality of the relationship between teacher and students and student well-being. Despite the knowledge about the importance of student well-being, there is no agreement about the definition of student well-being. One definition by Fraillon defines student

well-being as the “degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community” (2004, p.24). Another definition by Hascher (2008) conceptualizes student well-being as emotional experience which is defined by superiority of positive emotions and cognitions towards their institution, people in their educational institution, and the context of their educational institution to negative emotions and cognitions towards the mentioned concepts. However, the absence of consensus on definitions about student well-being makes it difficult to compare studies using different theories on student well-being (Soutter et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, studies on student well-being show that university students oftentimes lack well-being. Multiple factors have been identified which lead to the low levels of well-being in students. One of them is the age of students. University students are usually aged between 17 and 24 years. This age is also often mentioned as critical in developing mental health problems (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018). As an attempt to explain low levels of well-being in students, high performance pressure is often mentioned (Dopmeijer et al., 2021). Additionally, the years of higher education are characterised by impactful changes in the life of students (Gale & Parker, 2014). During the university years, students must find out who they are, and this can be a risk-factor for developing mental health issues (Tett et al., 2017). A study by Backhaus et al. (2020) found that a significant number of university students is struggling with anxiety, depression, or burn-out. Additionally, the Covid 19 pandemic and its impact on students’ lives, such as social distancing or switching to online education, have considerably negatively impacted the well-being of students (Doolan, 2021). A study by Kearns et al. (2015) also revealed that students rarely seek help from professionalised institutions.

Research shows that it is important to focus on improving student well-being, and that high quality student-teacher relationships can lead to higher levels of student well-being.

Student-Teacher Relationships and Emotions

The profession of teachers is an emotional one (Agudo, 2018). In classroom, teachers’ emotions impact multiple variables, such as the atmosphere (Santos et al., 2021), or students’ social competences (Xie et al., 2022). Keller et al. (2014) stated that teachers’ emotions can influence their own behavior, students’ behavior, and students learning process. Teachers themselves indicated that they make frequent use of emotional labor (Keller et al., 2014). Emotional labor refers to decision making in relation to emotions, as well as regulating emotions (Park et al., 2014). Examples of emotional regulation of teachers are for example that teachers should show sympathy even though they dislike a student, or regulate their anger directed at students (Zaretsky & Katz, 2019).

The link between teachers' emotions and students has been studied within the framework of emotional transmission (Menzheritskaya & Hansen, 2019). Emotional transmission refers to the fact that emotions of one person can be projected from one person to another (Zeng & Zhu, 2019). Thus, it can be assumed that teachers and students' emotions are related (Becker et al., 2014). This has also been justified by a study of Frenzel et al. (2009) which revealed that teachers' display of joy led to positive emotions in students as well.

A study by Hagenauer and Volet (2014) revealed that most teachers find it easy to display positive emotions in order to create a safe learning atmosphere and to increase students' motivation to learn about their subject. The regulation of negative feelings is often considered a part of the teachers' neutrality. Thus, teachers often suppress their natural negative emotional reactions by ignoring problems or faking positive emotions (Acheson et al., 2016; Yin, 2016;). However, the genuine expression of negative emotions may also sometimes serve the purpose of fulfilling teaching goals by showing students that negative emotions are considered to be normal (Yin, 2016).

One rather new factor influencing teachers' emotional display in higher education is institutional isomorphism, which refers to the increasing use of national rankings among universities. Due to this development, higher education institutions are forced to structure their programmes in such a way that they can compete with other educational institutions, rather than focussing their programmes on local values of the institution (Espeland & Sauder, 2016). Thus, exam results of students become more relevant, which leads teachers to be more sensitive about their emotional labour to increase student well-being and thus, their academic results (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020).

Aim of the Study

These prospective studies show that the emotions teacher display in class influence the relationships with their students, as well as how important the relationship between student and teacher is for student well-being. Additionally, the studies show that teachers' display of emotions is a crucial part of their profession. Nonetheless, they provide little information about the student's perspective on teachers' emotions. However, multiple studies show that a positive relationship between teachers and students can predict academic success, lead to better social skills and higher perceived well-being of students. Thus, this study aims to close the gap in literature by giving valuable insights into students' individual experiences on teachers' emotions. Additionally, the findings of this research aim to ultimately provide concrete suggestions for teachers on how their emotions affect students, and which emotions they should preferably display, and which not.

Therefore, this qualitative study was conducted to investigate how students experience the emotions that their teachers display. Individual experiences on the effect of their teachers' emotions on them were investigated, and which emotions students would like and would not like to see from their teachers. The following research question will be investigated: how do students experience the emotions their teachers display in class? To address this question, the following sub-questions were developed:

1. How do students experience the emotions that teachers show?
2. Which emotions would students like to see from their teachers?
3. Which emotions would students not like to see from their teachers?

Methods

Design

This study is part of a collaborative research project on student-teacher relationships and student well-being. Together with four other students from the University of Twente in Enschede, The Netherlands, data was collected collaboratively on different topics related to student-teacher relationships and student well-being. As part of this project, this study focuses on how students experience the emotions their teachers display. A qualitative study design was developed in which semi-structured interviews were used to investigate in students' individual experiences with teachers in higher education. The qualitative study design allows the researchers to collect more detailed answers and personal experiences of the students. The usage of a semi-structured interview was chosen as this allows the researchers to structure the interviews to focus on relevant subtopics while still allowing for some flexibility based on the participants answers.

Participants

Eighteen participants were recruited via convenience sampling from the University of Twente in Enschede. The participants were recruited through the social network of the researchers, either in person or over the phone. The sample consisted of nine students who identify as female, and nine students identifying as male. All participants were aged between 20 and 23 years, resulting in a mean age of 21.72 years ($SD = 0.96$) (see Table 1). Further, eight participants were German, six Romanian, two Dutch, one Greek, and one Armenian. Inclusion criteria specified that participants must be over the age of 18, undergraduate full-time students at the University of Twente in Enschede, and a good basic knowledge in English. The last criterion was chosen to simplify the data analysis process by making sure that the data is transcribed in one unified language. A good basic understanding of the English language is needed to ensure participants can understand and answer the interview questions. Additionally,

it was important that the participants were employed full-time students to ensure they had a significant amount of contact with teachers. The University of Twente's faculty of Behavioural, Management, and Social Sciences ethics committee gave approval for this study (application number: 230323).

Table 1

Demographic Data of the Interviewees (N = 18)

Sample Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender				
Men	9	50		
Women	9	50		
Age				
			21.72	0.96
20	3	16.66		
21	2	11.11		
22	10	55.55		
23	3	16.66		
Nationality				
German	8	44.44		
Dutch	2	11.11		
Romanian	6	33.33		
Greek	1	5.56		
Armenian	1	5.56		
Year of Study				
1	0	0		

2	2	11.11
3	15	83.33
4	1	5.56
Type of Study		
International Business Administration	2	11.11
Computer Science	4	22.22
Civil Engineering	1	5.56
Creative Psychology	1	5.56
Psychology	9	50
Management Society and Technology	1	5.56

Materials

The interviews were held online, thus a laptop or another technical device compatible with Microsoft Teams (Version 1.6.00.11156) or Zoom (Version 5.14.0) was required. A stable internet connection was also needed. An informed consent form for the participants was developed (see Appendix B). In the form, participants were informed about the aim of the study, their right to withdraw at any moment, possible risks of the study, as well as about anonymity and confidentiality. They were also informed that the interviews are going to be recorded, and that no one apart from the researchers and the two supervisors will have access to their data. Their data will be stored for six months after conduction of the interview. After six months, their data will be destroyed. Contact information from the researchers was provided as well. For this study, a semi-structured interview guide was developed (see Appendix A). The interview guide includes five questions about students' demographical data, as well as five questions about students' personal experiences with teachers displaying emotions. The interview guide was utilised by all researchers for all the interviews and thus includes questions for the other subtopics as well. However, only those questions which are relevant for this study were included in this report. To give a short introduction to the topic of teachers' emotions, and

to remind students to name specific emotions, three introducing sentences such as “When asked to name emotions, try to be as specific as possible” were added. The interview guide includes questions such as “how do you perceive teachers who display emotions to you?”, followed by the question “what kind of emotions do your current teachers display to you?”. The next question focuses on which emotions students would like to see from their teachers, namely “which emotions would you like your teachers to display to you?”. The participants are also asked if they can think of emotions that they would not like their teachers to display to them. The entire interview was designed to last approximately 30-70 minutes, including questions of the other researchers from the collaborative research project which will not be further analysed in this report. Prompts and probes are also included for each question in the interview guide which could be used to gain further information on the questions. Examples of probes are “could you think of more emotions?”, or “how does it make you feel?”. It was up to the researchers when they felt the need to make use of the prompts.

Procedure

Two pilot tests with two students from the University of Twente were conducted to ensure effectiveness of the interviews. The tests took approximately 45 minutes each. The data from the pilot tests were not considered in the analysis. However, the pilot tests revealed that students tend to answer the questions shortly and that they find it hard to name specific emotions. Thus, more probes were added to ensure that the interviewees produce relevant data. Additionally, before the start of the interviews the participants received a prompt stating “before the interview we would advise you to already think about student-teacher relationships that you encountered at the University of Twente that are memorable for you or had a special or significant impact on you.” To avoid that students answer questions biased by topics from the other researchers, one additional introduction sentence was added to each topic.

The interviews were carried out between March 29 and April 11, 2023. Via WhatsApp, the interviews were scheduled with the researchers. The pilot tests were conducted before the actual interviews were carried out. To ensure for effectiveness, inclusion criteria for the pilot-tests were the same as for the participants of the study. Each interview was carried out online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Participation in the interviews was completely voluntarily. Before the start of the interviews, each participant received an informed consent form which was sent to them via e-mail. Before the start of the interview, the informed consent form had to be signed by each participant. The interviews varied in time, going from 38 minutes to 70 minutes. For each interview, one research team member was present. Each of the members conducted three to four interviews. Before the interviews started, the audio recording was

activated. The interviews started with the researchers reading the interview guide to the participants, and then five questions regarding the demographic characteristics were asked. Then, the questions about student-teacher relationships were asked. Each researcher used the same order of the topics, to lessen the risk of context having an influence on participants answers. Prompts were used by the researchers if they felt the need to elaborate more on specific answers, or if an answer did not yet produce satisfactory outcomes.

Data Analysis

Only data of those who gave consent was analysed. To achieve a written data set, transcripts were conducted using either the transcription programme Otter.ai (Version 3.25.0), or the embodied transcription functions from Microsoft Teams (Version 1.6.00.11156) and Zoom (Version 5.14.0). Afterwards, each transcript was checked by the researchers to minimize errors and to ensure that the transcripts are complete. The data was anonymized so that participants could not be identified by third parties. Subsequently, the 18 transcripts were uploaded in a shared ATLAS.ti web (Version 5.0.0) folder so that each researcher had access to all the obtained data. The interview data was analysed through inductive, thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006), which follow a six-step analysis. This type of analysis was chosen because it allows themes to emerge from the data without any preconceptions of the researchers.

To begin with, all the transcripts were read by the researchers to familiarise with the data. Aim of this is to create a profound understanding and first overview of the data.

In a meeting, the researchers coded two transcripts completely together until consensus on specific codes and themes was reached to ensure intercoder reliability. This enhances the validity and reliability of the study while diminishing the risk of errors.

In the meeting, Initial codes were created by each researcher based on meaningful content in the data. Meaningful content refers to all kind of content that can be used to answer the research questions about teachers' emotions affecting their students, including the personal experiences of the students.

The following criteria were taken into consideration for the development of codes: codes should be related to the research questions and must reflect the meaning of a segment. To ensure that the codes developed reflect significant findings, they should be consistently used for all the data. Furthermore, exclusiveness of codes must be ensured to avoid overlap. Therefore, codes should be specific and clearly defined. Additionally, codes may be subject to change if new information arises that might require modification.

After identifying initial codes, broader themes were developed to order the codes. Based on these codes and themes, a first coding scheme was developed, and the transcripts were coded according to this scheme.

To avoid researcher bias, another researcher had a look at the final coding scheme. In case that the researchers disagreed on specific codes and themes, discussions followed with majority voting.

Making use of the final coding scheme, each researcher coded that part of the data which was relevant to them. Consequently, adjustments were made to the codes and themes, as new patterns were explored in the remaining data. Then, the developed themes were reviewed and adjusted again and in a final step properly defined. The final coding scheme includes the themes, underlying codes, a definition of the codes, their frequency, and example quotes from the data.

In a final step the researcher created an own folder on ATLAS.ti, including all the transcripts and the codes developed. Through this step, it was easier to get an overview of the codes which are relevant for this project, while ignoring the codes and quotes relevant for the other research projects.

Results

The interviewed students showed a wide variety of ways in how they experience their teachers' display of emotions. Thus, three broader themes were developed. These themes ranged from gestural recognition of specific emotions to emotional recognition through behaviours teachers show to their students, as well as the teachers' level of motivation to teach a class. A table visualising the coding scheme can be found at the end of this section (see Table 2). While the developed themes help to organize the data and to focus on topics which were found multiple times in the data, the developed codes give valuable insights into how students experience the emotions their teachers display.

1. Gestural Emotion Recognition

The coding theme "gestural emotion recognition" explores the ability of students to understand and interpret the emotions of their teachers through their body language and non-verbal cues. These cues include facial expression, tone of voice, and gestures. Throughout the interviews, it was found that specific emotions were mentioned multiple times by different students. While display of some specific emotion can have a positive influence on the student, display of another emotion might be negatively perceived by students. Additionally, students showed variation in how they perceive different emotions of their teachers.

1.1 Displaying Happiness

Happiness was defined as a positive emotional state characterized by feelings such as excitement, joy, and satisfaction. Happiness can be displayed in a variety of ways, for example by smiling, or laughing. One student indicated that a teacher is perceived as happy because “she was all smiley”. Another student described that he assumes a teacher is happy when “the teacher seemed to be open and very talkative”. First, the information provided by the students revealed that happiness is an emotion that can play a significant role in affecting the quality of the relationship with their teacher. When asked which emotions students would like to see from their teachers, happiness was one of the most often mentioned. While all participants agreed that happiness is an emotion that can have a positive influence on how they feel themselves, some emphasised that displaying only happiness can hinder a good relationship with their teachers as it makes them seem unreliable and unrelatable. One student emphasised how it is more likely to have more frequent contact with a teacher who displays happiness “If a teacher would show me that he’s happy, I would also feel like more motivated during study time to interact with the teacher”. When asked about the impact of teachers displaying happiness in class, one participant mentioned “If a teacher is happy, I also enjoy the study lesson I have, because it's just a good environment.” However, one student shared experiences with a teacher who always portrayed happiness and satisfaction with their work in class, even though the teacher was not satisfied with them:

I just had the experience that teachers were really nice during the project meetings, and also, the feedback was really nice. And they were always smiley and like, happy from the outside. But then we got like bad grades. And that was really frustrating because then you didn't really were able to align what you get from the teacher and then the grade was really surprising.

For individual students, displaying happiness and satisfaction when the teacher is in reality not happy with the students can be frustrating. Conversely, other students mentioned how a happy teacher encourages them to interact more with them. Overall, while all students agreed that happiness can positively influence the relationship with their teachers, individual students pointed out that faked happiness can hinder the quality of the relationship.

1.2 Openness of Emotions

Openness of emotions was defined as an open and honest expression of emotions without hiding any of them. Numerous students indicated that in general a transparent display of emotions can positively impact the student-teacher relationship. Here, students pointed out how teachers who display their emotions openly seem more approachable:

I enjoy being taught by teachers that display emotion because mainly it changes the experience from something that I could do myself. For example, instead of reading the paper or book related to the subject I'm interested in, I prefer having a human being that I can relate to.

Another student also pointed out that a transparent display of emotions can improve the quality of the student-teacher relationship by creating openness and showing confidence:

I think it's actually pretty nice of them to, like, show what they're feeling. They don't just put up a facade and be like, ok, this is today's activity and then afterwards they just move on. It's like they allow to show that vulnerability within the class. I feel like it generally creates a good bond with your students. It also shows you that you're not afraid to show what you think or what you feel.

Contradicting, one student pointed out that teachers should not be open with their emotions as it is inappropriate for the authoritarian role of the teacher:

I see teachers as very authoritative figures, and for me I feel like displaying emotions should be put to minimum level because that way it sort of shows that teachers are also human and that to me can be a little bit like not of an authoritative figure. And I like teachers be unemotional simply because they work with academics and logical fields. Therefore, the more minimal the better.

While most students pointed out how an open display of emotions can strengthen the student-teacher relationship, one student disagreed because the teacher has an authoritarian role which might be diminished by an open display of emotions.

1.3 Displaying Sadness

Sadness refers to a negative emotional state characterised by feelings such as grief, pain, or sorrow. It can be displayed by crying, but also certain behaviours such as withdrawal and keeping more quiet than usual. One student described that they perceived a teacher as sad that started crying during the lesson. However, other students did not mention which other cues led them to think that their teacher is sad. Nonetheless, sadness was mentioned often by the participants. The information provided by the participants revealed that in line with the sections above, students have different opinions if a teacher should openly display sadness in class, as this emotion can have a strong impact. One student pointed out how a sad teacher would make them feel bad about themselves, as they would attribute the teacher's sadness on their own behaviour:

However, when they are (...) sad, it really makes me uncomfortable because I don't know what's the reason and I obviously would attribute it to myself immediately, even

though I'm not the cause. But you don't have, like, that close of a relationship to ask them why are you in a bad mood?

Contradicting, another student emphasised that displaying sadness could improve the relationship with their teacher, as it makes it easier to relate to one another:

I can see okay, for example, they are concerned with something that's sad or something. Then I can like trust them that I can come to them if I have something that makes me sad and talk to them and like that.

While some students agreed that sadness could negatively impact the relationship because they would wonder if they did something wrong, others pointed out how sadness could strengthen the relationship by making it easier to connect and relate with their teachers.

1.4 Displaying Frustration/Anger

Frustration and anger are intense emotional states which are often accompanied by feelings of hostility or frustration. One student described that a teacher is perceived as angry when they “get really direct and mean”. Another student mentioned that he perceived teachers as angry because “they look (...) in an angry, emotional way”. The information provided by the students revealed that displaying frustration or anger significantly impacts them. When asked which emotions students would not like to see from their teachers, frustration and anger were the most mentioned. One participant indicated that these emotions would make him feel frightened “I guess when the teacher was angry, you get scared”. However, one participant pointed out that displaying anger might be valid if a student misbehaves in class, but not if their frustration or anger has nothing to do with the context in class:

For anger, I would say I feel like this would be really misplaced. Like, if there's a reason, like your student really isn't behaving or is really rude or something, then like, yes, a little bit anger. But if something angers them personally, I feel like they shouldn't like show it.

Contradicting, another student mentioned the opposite, namely that they felt it is okay if a teacher displays anger about a situation outside the classroom, because this could enlighten the mood:

If they get angry, not so much. Only if it's like towards other people of course. But I mean, if they're angry at something else it's also fun. Because I like if they're angry at the outside world like different to class than ranting on about that within your class with your students. It's (...) for me that's kind of good for bonding-wise.

While many participants indicated frustration and anger as emotions which could hinder a good student-teacher relationship because it leaves them scared, others indicated that ranting together

with the teacher about something outside the classroom can have a positive influence on the bond between students and teacher. However, for one participant frustration and anger could only be beneficial for the relationship if it directly relates to a situation in class and is not expressed in extreme emotions.

2. Emotional Recognition Through Actions

The coding theme “emotional recognition through actions” examines the ability of students to identify their teachers emotional state through behaviours. Behaviours were found to be mentioned often alongside with emotions, as students perceived different behaviours as indicators for emotions of their teachers. However, behaviours are not emotions but rather cues for the emotional state of the teacher. For example, a teacher who is stressed might show less patience when the students do not understand a task.

2.1 Behaving Stressed

Behaving stressed was defined as a response to internal or external pressure. Stressed teachers can show different behaviours, for example being worried or having a hard time relaxing. One student perceived a teacher as stressed because the teacher showed “exhaustion from teaching”. First, the information provided by the students revealed that a teachers display of stress has an impact on the quality of the relationship. While some participants indicated that an open display of stress makes it easier to relate to the teacher and thus, positively influences the relationship, others expressed that expressing stress could negatively influence the relationship. One participant answered which emotions he would like to see from a teacher with “I have to say I like it when they show that they are stressed sometimes because it makes me feel less bad when I've stressed because of something.” However, another participant emphasized that he would not like to perceive his teacher as being stressed, because that would make the impression on him that the quality of the teaching suffers from it:

I would not like it if a teacher shows me that he's, maybe he's stressed. Because I would then have the feeling that I can't focus that much during study time, that the teacher maybe just wants to finish everything as quickly as possible, and that we don't focus that much on every single topic during the lesson.

While many participants indicated that an open display of a teacher's level of stress helps to build a better relationship by relating more to the teacher and feeling more understood, others indicated that it would make them feel as if there is not enough time from the teacher's side for the students.

2.2 Giving Praise/Reassurance

This code was defined as behaviours which provide support and encourage the students through positive affirmations. However, this code does not only refer to teachers being proud of their students, but also showing genuine interest in them and provide them with support if they need it. The information from the participants revealed that a strong indicator for a good student-teacher relationship is the number of times the teacher gives praise or positive reassurance to his students. Students all pointed out how they like to receive praise from their teachers as it motivates them to keep working, as well as it can influence their emotions as well:

But like, when they're, like, proud of what you do, and like, support you, and be like, oh, yeah, that's really nice, and like, for example, my supervisor said: oh, my god, I feel like you can do a PhD and be in other publications and stuff like that. So, like, gives you like, this little hype up in emotion.

When asked about an ideal teacher, one participant mentioned that it is of paramount importance to him that the teacher shows interest in his students and encourages them to talk with them:

They seem to be happy to talk with their students in the breaks or so. Also, they ask about our lives or whatever, and not just talk about the stuff we learn at university, and generally interested in our well-being, which is nice.

All of the students indicated how receiving praise and reassurance from their teachers help them to build a better relationship because they feel more valued and understood.

2.3 Behaving Insecure

Being insecure was defined as feeling shy or uncertain, and lacking confidence. The data revealed that displaying insecurity can have an influence on the students. Some participants answered the question which emotions their current teachers display with insecurity. One student described how he concluded that a teacher was insecure by the way they talked “when they present, you see kind of nervousness. They stutter”. Students all pointed out that they would prefer not to see insecurity from the teachers’ side, because it makes them uninterested in the teacher:

When it comes to insecurity (...) I perceive it is that you are not really confident of the subject you're teaching and thus not being confident in the knowledge present. And it's not something that I actively dislike, but unconsciously, that's how I feel, and it makes me not pay attention as I would in a confident teacher.

Another participant revealed how he attributes the insecure behaviour of the teacher to the fact that the teachers are new and not experienced in teaching:

I see a lot of insecurities with some of my professors because they're new, for instance, or they're teaching for the first time. We've had a very easy exam, for example, and they had no clue that the level of examinations should be harder.

All of the students who mentioned to have teachers displaying insecurity in class revealed that for them it not something that is disliked but might hinder them to pay attention to the class.

2.4 Reserved Behaviour

Reserved behaviour refers to a teacher's tendency to keep their true emotions and thoughts to themselves. Thus, students cannot really sense the emotional state of their teacher. One student described a reserved teacher as "monotone (...), they just explain theories". The data revealed that reserved behaviour can have an influence on the quality of the student-teacher relationship. Students perceived reserved behaviour from their teachers as being neutral, not expressing many emotions, and sometimes also as professional. When asked to think of emotions he would like to see in a teacher, one participant replied:

I mean, teachers are also humans, so kind of every emotion would be good, but I just don't think it's that nice if teachers don't show emotions at all. And just yeah, like don't show anything of their emotions. Because that's kind of, I don't know, a bit frightening sometimes. Because you don't know how they react to you and kind of (...) I don't know how to say it. So, I think many different emotions are good.

However, another student pointed out how reserved behaviour of a teacher does not have a bigger impact on him because for him, the content of the class is more important than the teacher:

It's pretty monotone. Like I can't tell you like an example of them showing emotions and me recognizing it as well. You know, cause I'm more focused on the slides rather than how they're because I can hear them. I don't have to also watch them in a way.

Nonetheless, the answer of this student shows a disinterest in building a good relationship with their teacher. While many participants agreed that reserved behaviour from teachers hinders a good relationship by leaving them unsure how to act, one participant pointed out that he is not really focused on the teacher's behaviour but rather the content of the lesson.

3. Teacher's Motivation

The coding theme "teacher's motivation" explores the impact of the teacher's level of motivation to teach a class on the students. Motivation of the teachers was often mentioned alongside with emotions, indicating that students also see their teachers' levels of motivation in context with their emotions. A teacher's level of motivation for their work seemed to have a strong impact the students.

3.1 Displaying Half-heartedness

This code refers to a lack of effort teachers show in class. Characteristics might include a lack of engagement or feelings of indifference. One student described a teacher who lacks enthusiasm as “being in a bad mood, uninterested, appearing as if they don’t care”. First, the information provided by the participants revealed that teachers who lack motivation to teach a class can have a strong impact on the students. One student explained how a disinterested teacher hinders the creation of a bond with a teacher:

Indifference doesn't really seem to create us even a slightly connection with the teacher in general, so I think that's not really good in any teacher that is, yeah, overall, you feel like it is very indifferent... It doesn't really seem like you being there or listening to what he has to say makes much of a difference.

Other students revealed similar answers, all mentioning how a lack of motivation from the teacher’s side impacts their motivation as well “Because then I would feel like, ok, what is the purpose of me even being here if you don't wanna be here?”

All of the students agreed that a teacher who shows disinterest has a negative influence on their relation as it hinders connecting with the teacher in the first place. Additionally, it makes the students uninterested in the subject.

3.2 Displaying Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm was defined as strong and energetic interest in a particular subject. One student described how a teacher is perceived as enthusiastic because they are “being energetic, and (...) caring (...) and happy”. The information provided by the students revealed that displaying passion for their work and their class has a strong influence on them. When asked which emotions students would like to see from their teachers, most of them named enthusiasm. All participants agreed that a motivated teacher makes them interested in the lesson and encourages them to work more collaboratively. One participant answered what emotion he would like to see with:

I think the most ordered, nicest emotion for teacher to show for me is always passion. That just makes it way more fun and way more engaging to be in that lesson, the teacher shows and genuine passion and genuine interest in this topic or in their topic.

Another participant mentioned how an enthusiastic teacher motivates them too during the lesson:

Also seeming interested in their work so that they are kind of passionate about what they are doing and expressing that with their emotions, like being enthusiastic for

example. Because that always encourages me to work, and I feel like there is a purpose behind what I'm doing.

All of the student agreed that a teacher displaying enthusiasm strongly enhances their motivation to work with them.

Connections Between Codes

Even though each codes represents individual content of the data, some codes appear to be more connected with each other than other codes. For example, “giving praise/reassurance” and “displaying happiness” were often mentioned together, because happy teachers seem to be considered as being more involved in giving their students praise and reassurance. This can be seen when looking at an excerpt from a student who assumed that a teacher who gives praise for efforts is also more happy: “if they are, for example, praising me for my efforts(...), I know, of course they are more happy”. Another example of such connections is “displaying happiness” and “displaying enthusiasm”. An excerpt from a student shows how enthusiasm and happiness are connected: “he’s always in a really good mood, positive and encouraging us to work (...). He enjoys giving the lessons”.

Students often mentioned that they would like their teachers to be happy, enthusiastic, and passionate in class to enhance their motivation work. A last example of these connections is “displaying half-heartedness” and “reserved behaviour”, as students seemed to see a lack of motivation connected to more reserved behaviour in interpersonal communication. This can be seen when looking at an excerpt from an interview in which a student mentioned how some teachers do lack motivation in class and are also very restricted when it comes to their behaviour:

I guess there have always been situations where there are some teachers (...) which don't really show the enthusiasm that I would like but are rather more strict or direct in their behaviour and more held back and don't really show their emotions at all because it's like a really distant relationship then. Like when somebody is more direct and doesn't really express positive emotions, or even also not negative emotions, then it kind of always feels like that there is a distance between the student and the teacher and that it's really professional.

Table 2*Coding Scheme*

Theme	Code	Definition	Example	Frequency	<i>n</i>
Gestural Emotion Recognition	Displaying happiness	A positive emotional state characterized by feelings such as excitement, joy, and satisfaction	“I think, obviously, happiness is nice, if they are showing that they are happy and in a good mood”	34	15
	Openness of emotions	Open and honest expression of emotions without hiding any of them	“Overall, I would say I like to see emotions because this shows that they are human beings and not like machines that want us to study everything”	22	8
	Displaying sadness	Sadness refers to a negative emotional state characterised by feelings such as grief, pain, or sorrow	“I can see okay, for example, they are concerned with something that’s sad or something. Then I can like trust them that I can come to them if I have something that makes me sad”	11	6
	Displaying frustration/anger	Intense emotional states which are often accompanied by	“They already get in class, with negative emotions from before, I think it's a bit	44	17

		feelings of hostility or frustration	difficult for the other students to not also feel bad, if they also show like, a lot of negative emotions”		
Emotional Recognition Through Actions	Behaving stressed	Response to internal or external pressure. Stress can manifest physically (e.g., heart rate), as well as mentally (e.g., depression	“I have to say I like it when they show that they are stressed sometimes because it makes me feel less bad when I've stressed because of something”	6	5
	Giving praise/reassurance	Behaviours which provide support and encourage the students through positive affirmations	“One teacher showed concern about the students because many of us are very stressed at the moment. So that shows that they also think of our emotions, or like notice that”	36	13
	Behaving insecure	Emotional state of uncertainty and vulnerability	“When it comes to insecurity (...) I perceive it is that you are not really confident of the subject you're teaching”	7	3
	Reserved behaviour	Teacher’s tendency to keep their true emotions and thoughts to themselves	“They were kind of emotionless to some degree. Or they refrained from showing emotion”	31	14

Teachers' motivation	Displaying half-heartedness	Lack of effort teachers show in class. Characteristics might include a lack of engagement or feelings of indifference	“Being in a bad mood, uninterested, appearing as if they don't care”	16	9
	Displaying enthusiasm	Energetic interest in a particular subject	“Seeming interested in their work so that they are kind of passionate about what they are doing and expressing that with their motions, like being enthusiastic”	34	13

Note. Frequency = how often the code occurred in total; *n* = the number of different participants who mentioned the code.

Discussion

This study explored how students experience their teachers' emotions. Three research questions were developed to investigate into the following sub-topics: students experiences of teachers' emotions, emotions students would prefer to see from their teachers, and emotions students would not like to see. The results of this study show that the emotions teachers display in class have a significant impact on the students. Students seem to prefer teachers who display happiness in class and mentioned enthusiasm as an important behaviour they would like to see from their teacher, because it has a positive influence on them as well. Last, students seem to prefer when teachers do not show insecurity in class. Frustration and anger are also emotions that students prefer not to see, especially when it has nothing to do with the situation in class. Overall, the emotions teacher display in class significantly impacts their students. However, results revealed individual differences between how students perceive specific emotions. The emotions most often mentioned by students are happiness, frustration/anger, and sadness. These emotions seem to come to mind first when students are asked about teachers' emotions.

As mentioned before, teachers' emotions have a significant impact on the students. These findings are in line with Frenzel et al., (2021) who found that teachers emotions can affect their students by projecting on them, as well as by shaping the relationship between teacher and student. Students seem to not only identify emotions from their teachers, but also to link certain behaviours of teachers to specific emotions. Teachers who give appraisal and show genuine interest in their students were perceived as happier by the students. Teachers who seem more interested and motivated to teach their topic were also perceived as generally happier by the students. On the other hand, teachers who lack motivation for their subject were also seen as more restrictive in showing their emotions.

Students seem to prefer a teacher who displays emotions openly because it makes it easier for the students to build a connection with them. Students experience these teachers as more approachable and more relatable. This finding is in line with those from a study of Hagenauer et al., (2015) which revealed that the relationship between teachers and students is significantly related to teachers' emotional experiences. Students find teachers who display their emotions make it easier to connect, and that the display of emotions can create openness by giving the students an expression of what is going on their teachers mind. However, one student mentioned that he would like his teachers to show as little emotions as possible. Answers from this student revealed that he perceives the relationship with teachers to be hierarchical and the teachers as authoritative figures. This is contradicting with the academic

culture of the University of Twente, where little hierarchy is shown (University of Twente, 2023). However, demographic data of this participant revealed that student is from a non-Dutch country. Answers of other students, however, revealed that they align with the academic culture of the University of Twente, and that they prefer when there is as little hierarchy as possible between students and teachers. These students also preferred open display of emotions from their teachers, due to the reasons mentioned before. Thus, there might be a connection between the way students perceive the student-teacher relationship and their preferences on teachers' emotions and behaviours in class.

Students seem to prefer teachers who display happiness, but only if the happiness is authentic and displays the true emotional state of the teacher. If a teacher acts happy the entire time even though he is not feeling happy, students seem to sense the discrepancy. Students might then feel that they cannot rely on that teacher, and this hinders a good connection with them. However, students indicated that a happy teacher makes them feel happier as well. These findings go in line with the emotional transmission theory (Menzheritskaya & Hansen, 2019). The emotions teacher display seem to be projected on the students. A study by Frenzel et al. (2009) also found that teachers display of joy projects on the students. Nevertheless, students find it important that their teacher displays honesty if they are dissatisfied with their work. One general condition is that the dissatisfaction is presented in an honest, yet not indiscreet way. Students like when they can sense where they stand and if they must improve their work rather than only getting positive feedback and then receiving a bad grade in the end. This finding is in line with the results of a study by Turda (2021) which revealed that by offering honest and direct feedback, students' motivation to improve their work enhances. In line with the finding that students generally like it when their teacher displays emotions, some participants mentioned sadness as an emotion they would like to see. A study by Yin (2016) described teachers display of negative emotions as serving the purpose to normalize negative emotions. This study can confirm these findings as multiple students mentioned that they think a teacher who shows some stress or frustration sometimes seems more relatable and makes them feel better about their own struggles. However, other students mentioned that they do not want to perceive their teachers as sad. Students who like when their teacher shows sadness feel encouraged to be more open with their teachers if they ever feel sad. For some students, however, a teacher who displays sadness can make them feel insecure because they would assume that their teacher's sadness is related to their behaviour. In that sense, they would feel as if they had done something wrong. It can also distract students from the classes because they are then more focused on finding out why their teacher is sad, or what they have done wrong,

instead of focussing on the class. However, teachers might avoid that their students get confused if they are open about the source of their sadness and tell them what is going on.

Another emotion revealed by this study is frustration or anger. Students agreed that there is a certain level which is “too much” when it comes to showing anger or frustration. However, the findings did not reveal what students mean with showing too much anger or frustration. Students seem to tolerate a bit of frustration from their teachers. However, while some students find frustration only okay to be displayed in case that it has nothing to do with the class, other students find frustration only okay to be displayed if it relates to something that has happened in class.

As students struggled to differentiate emotions from behaviours, the findings also revealed behaviours teachers show that influence the students. These findings go in line with a study by Keller et al., (2014) which revealed that teachers’ emotions can influence their own behaviour. These include teachers behaving stressed, teachers showing reassurance to their students, teachers behaving insecure, and reserved behaviours which reveal little to no information about a teacher’s emotional state. Behaving stressed mainly has two effects on the students. They either find it likeable, because they feel more understood in their own stress, or they dislike seeing stressed teachers because it makes them worried about the quality of the teaching. Students assumed that a teacher who is stressed probably takes less time for the class and teaching. Results of a study from Arens & Morin (2016) revealed that teachers with high levels of stress have a negative impact on their students’ mathematic achievements. Thus, students fear of lower quality class might be justified.

Showing reassurance strengthens the relationship between students and their teacher as it makes students feel more valued and cared for. Additionally, it can enhance students’ motivation to work in class when the teacher shows them that he is proud of their work. Thus, showing reassurance was found to be a behaviour that influences the relationship with teachers solely positive and only has positive effects on students.

Some students revealed that their current teachers seem to be insecure. Most of the time, students assume that this is due to social anxiety. Insecurity affects the quality of student-teacher relationships negatively as students do not want to be taught by someone who has no confidence in himself. However, all the students who mentioned their teachers were insecure studied computer science or international business administration.

Teachers hiding or concealing their emotions were mostly seen as unreliable and not authentic. It is harder for students to relate to someone who does not reveal his emotions. However, students often mentioned that relating to a teacher improves the relationship.

Additionally, it can diminish students' motivation to work in class because classes with restricted teachers tend to be monotone.

Another factor influencing the student-teacher relationship that was revealed in the study is the teacher's level of motivation. While a teacher who is motivated himself can positively influence the student's motivation, a teacher who shows lack of interest projects the indifference on the students. These findings are in line with those of a study by Kalyar et al., (2018) which revealed that a teacher's level of motivation has a strong influence on students' motivation. In this study, it also became apparent that students tend to attribute emotions to a teacher's level of motivation. They perceive motivated teachers as happier in general, and teachers who lack interest as more frustrated.

Despite the valuable insights this study gives, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. Students were recruited through convenience sampling, resulting in half of the interviewees being psychology students. Students from six different programmes participated. However, the University of Twente offers 20 different bachelors programmes (University of Twente, 2023). A sample including students from more study programmes might allow for broader explanation how students experience the emotions of their teachers. Therefore, future research should aim to explore how from different programmes experience teachers' emotions. A sample with more international students could be helpful in detecting differences.

Additionally, the interview questions focused primarily on students' experiences with teachers' emotions. However, it became evident that the expectations students have about their teachers seem to impact the way they perceive different emotions, such as the hierarchical level of the relationship with their teachers. To obtain more in-depth understanding of these implications, it would have been helpful to include targeted questions addressing the students' expectations. The cultural background of students could also be an interesting factor to consider, to find out if the cultural background of students plays a role in how they experience their teachers' emotions.

This study, nonetheless, provides useful findings in understanding how students experience their teachers' emotions and their effect on the students.

The findings of this study can be used by teachers to understand how the emotions they display to their students can affect their students. First, teachers should be aware that their emotions have a significant impact on their students. As students seem to like teachers who display their emotions openly, teacher can be advised to show their emotions authentically. This study showed how happiness and enthusiasm are important in influencing students' motivation to work in class, and how students perceive a happy and enthusiastic teacher as more

approachable. However, teachers are advised to be considerate when displaying emotions such as frustration, anger, or sadness. While individual students like to see these emotions from their teachers because it makes them seem authentic and relatable, other students might feel insecure and be distracted by it. Thus, it is suggested that teachers are honest and open with their students about the source of their sadness or frustration. Then, students do not have to attribute every emotional state of the teacher onto themselves.

As mentioned before, students seem to have a certain level of frustration and anger that they feel is “too much”. However, findings of this study did not reveal what is meant with “too much”. Thus, future research could focus on finding out how much frustration and anger students experience as tolerable from their teachers, and which behaviours get too much.

The emotions teachers display in class have a strong impact on the students. As found through this study, the emotions teachers display play a significant role in the quality of the student-teacher relationship and consequently students well-being. With the deepened knowledge gathered through this study, suggestions for teaching staff on improving their relationships with the students and students’ well-being could be provided. Teachers play a significant role in the academic experience of the students. Therefore, striving for positive relationships between teachers and students provides an impactful contribution to allowing students to increase their academic success, as well as well-being.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Introduction

To start off, I would like to thank you for taking the time to do this interview with me today. But before we start, I want to give you some more information about the Interview. The overall topic focuses on the effect of student-teacher relationships on student well-being in higher education. The interview is part of a research conducted by five students (Hanna, Lea, Linnea, Maike, and Viola).

The aim of the interview is to gain new insights and to answer multiple research questions. According to the research questions, the interview is divided into the following subtopics: Student-teacher relationships in distance learning, the current barriers to form a beneficial student-teacher relationship perceived by students, students' perception of teachers displaying emotions, the impact of short-term teacher relationships on student well-being, and the boundaries of student-teacher relationships. I will tell you every time when we begin with a new topic.

In order to conduct the interview, we ask you to sign the informed consent which I will send you now. By giving your signature, you agree to all terms mentioned within the informed consent. The interview will be consequently recorded to later on transcribe and analyse the responses. The transcript can only be accessed by the research group and the two supervisors. Your data will be treated anonymously, meaning all information allowing to identify you as a person will be removed. In case that you feel uncomfortable with answering any questions or with your answers being used for this research, you can withdraw from the study at any point.

Please keep in mind that there are no correct or incorrect answers, as we are curious about your personal experience and thoughts. Do you have any questions regarding the information given verbally and written? If not, I would kindly ask you to send me the signed version of the informed consent form back. I will start the recording now.

Demographic Data:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your nationality?
3. What is your gender?
4. What do you study?
5. In what year of your study are you?

How do students perceive teachers displaying emotions to them?

These questions aim to understand how students perceive teachers who show their emotions to them. When asked to name emotions, try to be as specific as possible. Please try to name concrete emotions.

1. How do you perceive teachers who display their emotions to you?

Probes: Could you explain why this makes you perceive them this way?

(If they do not get the question: *Do you like/dislike seeing emotions from your teachers? How does it make you feel when they display emotions to you? Why does it make you feel this way?)*

2. What kind of emotions do your current teachers display to you?

Probes: Is it the same for every teacher, or are there differences? If there are differences, in what way do they differ?

(If they struggle to name concrete emotions or name rather behaviour than emotions) Could you name specific emotions?

3. Which emotions would you like your teachers to display to you?

Probes: Could you think of some more emotions?

Could you be more specific?

Could you explain why you would like to see these emotions? How do they make you feel?

(If they struggle to name concrete emotions or name rather behaviour than emotions) Could you think of concrete examples/emotions?

4. Can you think of emotions you would not like your teachers to display to you?

Probes: Could you think of some more emotions?

Could you be more specific?

Could you explain why you would not like to see these emotions? How do they make you feel?

(If they struggle to name concrete emotions or name rather behaviour than emotions) Could you think of concrete examples/emotions?

5. Can you name differences between the emotions your teachers display to you and which emotions you would like your teachers to display to you?

Probe (in case they do not understand the question): this question aims to detect differences between the current situation and an “ideal” situation. So, think if you would

like your teacher to show different emotions/more emotions/less emotions etc. than they do now.