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Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives of Teacher-Student Relationships With Title 1 Students

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Jessica Teal

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives of Teacher-Student Relationships With Title 1

Students

by

Jessica Teal

MA, Walden University, 2018

BS, Mercer University, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

There was a gap in the United States between developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students and students who are not considered Title 1. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. The conceptual framework for this study was Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The research question for this study focused on determining early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Data were collected in this basic qualitative study through one-on-one interviews with a minimum of 10 prekindergarten to first-grade teachers who were currently teaching Title 1 students. Braun and Clarke's six-step framework was used for thematic analysis of the data, resulting in four emergent themes: (a) teachers are frustrated by external obstacles when creating relationships with Title 1 students for many reasons, (b) teachers empathize with students' background when creating relationships with Title 1 students, (c) teachers use consistent practices and routines to promote teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, and (d) teacher-student relationships promote positive outcomes for Title 1 students. The findings of this study may lead to positive social change because they may help other early childhood teachers learn about strategies that they can use to close the teacher-student relationship gap and increase academic, social, and emotional development for Title 1 students.

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Dedication

Lucas, Liam, and Lincoln, you were my motivation and my push to be the best mommy and example. I dedicate my study to each of you. My desire is for you boys to reach for the stars and pursue all your dreams with fierce dedication.

Acknowledgments

I would like to give special thanks to my best friend and husband, Nick, for his continuous support during this process, and all my dreams and tasks.

I would also like to thank my mama. She taught me work ethic and determination. She modeled for me everything I need to be successful in achieving my goal of becoming a Doctor of Education. She was my first and greatest example of being a teacher.

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Finally, I would like to thank God, for being with me during this process. I have felt His presence and His support each day. I pray that I will use my degree and life daily to bring Him glory.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Many Title 1 students have experiences that make it difficult for them to develop teacher-student relationships (Post et al., 2020). Title 1 students are students who qualify based on their parents' income for a federal program that provides financial assistance to the school district to be used for academic purposes (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Students who have positive teacher-student relationships are more successful in academic performance (Moen et al., 2019). Teachers need to be prepared to develop teacher-student relationships with all students, including those who are Title 1 (Bayly & Bierman, 2022). Bayly and Bierman (2022) suggested that the negative behavior displayed by many Title 1 students impedes the development of positive teacher-student relationships. Children benefit from nurturing and consistent relationships with adults, but many Title 1 students are not consistently exposed to high-quality interactions with adults outside the classroom (Blewitt et al., 2020). Establishing trust in teacher-student relationships is vital for students who are at risk for learning and developmental challenges (Choi et al., 2019). Trust provides safety for children who are at risk for learning and developmental challenges.

Researchers have noted that teachers reported disruptive student behaviors increase teachers' ratings of conflict in the teacher-student relationship (Horn et al., 2021). Moen et al. (2019) argued that establishing positive teacher-student relationships supports social-emotional and academic development and reduces the risks of school failure, especially for children who are living in poverty. Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim (2020) suggested that early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges

of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students are limited and recommended that further research on the topic is necessary for a greater understanding of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. In the current study, I sought to gather perspectives from certified early childhood teachers regarding their experiences with developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students in prekindergarten to first grade. Professional development is needed for the implementation of successful strategies for developing teacher-student relationships (see Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020).

Chapter 1 contains the background of the study, problem statement, nature of the study, research question, and purpose of the study. The conceptual framework for this study is described, and key definitions from the literature are provided. I also explain the assumptions, limitations, scope and delimitations, and the significance of the study in this chapter.

Background

The scope of this study included certified early childhood Title 1 teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students in prekindergarten to first grade. Researchers have investigated how positive teacher-student relationships benefit early childhood children in areas of academic, social, and emotional development (Blewitt et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2019; Li & Lau, 2019; Moen et al., 2019; Tavassolie & Winsler, 2018). However, little research has focused on the early childhood teachers' perspectives of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Post et al., 2020).

To close the gap in early childhood teachers developing positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, teachers need to share their perspectives on practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students (Theisen-Homer, 2021).

When they have positive teacher-student relationships, students have significantly more success socially, emotionally, and academically (Blewitt et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2019). Academic, social, and emotional areas of development intertwine for all early childhood students (Smith, 2023). If teachers are not able to develop teacher-student relationships, there will be negative implications, such as poor student achievement and behavior (Li & Lau, 2019). Many elements contribute to positive teacher-student relationships, and teachers must be reflective and intentional when developing relationships with students (Sutherland et al., 2020) and need to be able to develop positive teacher-student relationships with all students (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). All students benefit from positive teacher-student relationships.

When interviewed, early childhood teachers expressed concerns about developing teacher-student relationships with their Title 1 students (Bayly & Bierman, 2022). Although teachers are taught and encouraged to develop teacher-student relationships, many are challenged to develop teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). There are several influences on teachers, their perspectives, and their development of relationships with students, including the teacher's gender, race, experiences in undergraduate coursework, field experience, administrator expectations, and support from parents (Horn et al., 2021).

Despite the current information regarding teacher-student relationships, little is known about the perspectives of early childhood teachers and their experiences with developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students (Theisen-Homer, 2021). The current study was needed because it may provide early childhood teachers, administrators, and professional development writers with information on early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges that may be used to narrow the gap in early childhood teachers developing positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Problem Statement

The problem under study was that early childhood teachers are often challenged to develop teacher-student relationships with Title 1 early childhood students (see Bayly & Bierman., 2022; Sutherland et al., 2020). There is limited information on how teachers develop teacher-student relationships when teacher-student relationships are difficult to develop (Theisen-Homer, 2021). When early childhood teachers enter their classrooms and encounter some Title 1 students, developing teacher-student relationships becomes challenging (Post et al., 2020). To enhance teacher-student relationships with Title 1 early childhood students, early childhood teachers, administrators, and professional development writers need a better understanding of early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Many Title 1 students have experiences, such as trauma, that make it difficult to develop teacher-student relationships (Blewitt et al., 2020). Developing positive teacher-

student relationships can be beneficial to student growth and achievement (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). In this study, I invited early childhood teachers to share their perspectives about practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Information obtained from this study has the potential to provide early childhood teachers with a variety of perspectives of practices that can enhance the development of teacher-student relationships in Title 1 school and the challenges faced.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Allowing early childhood teachers to provide insight into the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students allowed them to speak out and share their experiences. The findings from this study may be used to support teachers when considering practices for and challenges faced when forming relationships with Title 1 early childhood students. Administration and professional development writers might also use the findings to assist teachers when they are developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Research Question

This qualitative study addressed one research question: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study comprised Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. According to Vygotsky, cognitive development in children is increased through adult interaction. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory supports the development of higher psychological functions, and I used the theory in this study to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives on forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Vygotsky (1978) theorized that physiological growth is guided by adults who provide mentoring, such as teachers and parents. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory focuses on how mentors and peers affect the learning process. In sociocultural theory, Vygotsky highlighted the distance between an individual's current level of intelligence and their potential intellectual level (Saracho, 2017). This theory has a focus on a student's achievement abilities; the areas in which a child needs assistance; and modeling from a mentor, such as a teacher or parent, to help the student reach their potential intellectual level (Saracho, 2017). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory also includes a discussion of how cultural beliefs affect how learning occurs. In sociocultural theory, Vygotsky stated that learning occurs within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the distance between the independent development level and the level of potential development based on the support of mentors, such as adults or peers.

Vygotsky (1978) noted that children learn through relationships, stating that social constructivist learning is a process, and knowledge develops from individuals' interactions with their culture and society. According to Vygotsky, the teacher-student

relationship is important in a social constructivist setting for effective language use and development of the student. Children often need assistance and modeling from an instructor to reach their potential level of development (Saracho, 2017). With the ZPD, Vygotsky emphasized the importance of teacher-student relationships in supporting social-emotional and academic development. In this study, I gathered new understandings from the perspectives of early childhood teachers with Title 1 students. I used the interview protocol to guide opportunities for me to speak with early childhood teachers who have knowledge regarding the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. As I collected data, I used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a lens to gain a more thorough view of early childhood teachers' perspectives. I also applied the same principles to the initial codes, axial codes, and themes during data analysis. The conceptual framework related to this study because it was derived from the perspectives of early childhood teachers of Title 1 students. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory helped me to interpret the relationships between the adult-child relationship and the teacher-student relationship. Further exploration of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory will be included in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

To explore teachers' perspectives of the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, I used a basic qualitative research design and conducted one-on-one interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that researchers conducting a basic qualitative study should be interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meanings they

attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose of this design is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Merriam and Tisdell pointed out that in a basic qualitative study, data can be collected using interviews. The basic qualitative study design was appropriate because it was consistent with exploring early childhood teachers' perspectives of the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Data were collected from a minimum of 10 certified early childhood teachers who teach Title 1 students. I recruited participants using the Walden Participant Pool; early childhood teacher groups on social media; and snowball sampling, where interested participants helped me recruit more participants. I selected teachers who were currently teaching prekindergarten to first grade with Title 1 students as participants. Once possible participants were recruited, I then used snowball sampling as a method to avoid having preexisting relationships with the participants. Semistructured interview questions were used to collect data. I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews using TranscribeMe, an online transcription service. I then identified, analyzed, and reported the data using thematic analysis. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework to thematically analyze the data. I began by using open coding to study concepts from the data before conducting axial coding by naming categories using a word or phrase that reflected its contents. I then identified emerging themes that were identified in the categories. Lastly, I reviewed the data that supported the themes, considered how the emerging themes related to the understanding of my data, and explored how the themes answer the research question in the study.

Definitions

The following terms are defined for the purposes of this study:

Early childhood teacher: Teachers who teach prekindergarten to first-grade students (Horn et al., 2021).

Teacher-student relationships: Relationships between the teacher and the student where the teacher provides emotionally caring, cognitively motivating, and consistent caregiving to maximize developmental opportunities through personalized and predictable care (Choi et al., 2019).

Title I: A federal program that provides financial assistance to school districts with large percentages of low-income students to support these low-income students in accessing high-quality academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

ZPD: The distance between the independent development level and the level of potential development based on the support of mentors such adults or peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Assumptions

Some assumptions are necessary for scholarly research. One assumption in this study was that early childhood teachers would participate willingly. No incentive was offered to the teachers for participating in the study. I assumed that participants would willingly and sincerely share their experiences without the expectations of an incentive.

My second assumption was that the teachers answered interview questions honestly and based on their own experiences. I assumed that the responses from the

teachers reflected their true perspectives on teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

I also assumed that the interview protocol I created accurately captured the early childhood teachers' perspectives. I used a peer reviewer to review the interview questions and provide suggestions for clarifying any confusing wording. Another assumption was that the research method and design chosen were adequate to properly answer the research question.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study encompassed certified early childhood teachers in different Title 1 schools across the United States. This study was delimited to prekindergarten to first grade teachers who were currently teaching in a Title 1 school at the time of the study. For this study, early childhood teachers were defined as certified teachers who were teaching prekindergarten to first grade with Title 1 students.

I included detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis processes to ensure potential transferability. Providing descriptions allows readers, other researchers, and participants of the study to transfer aspects of the study design and findings to make comparisons to other contexts based on as much information as possible.

Limitations

The first limitation of this basic qualitative study was my own biases. As a current Title 1 early childhood teacher, I have firsthand experience with forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. During this study, I kept a reflective journal to help me identify my own biases. Reflexivity requires the researcher to constantly check their

position and subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used the reflective journal to write my thoughts as I went through each part of the data collection and analysis processes (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). I did not allow my thoughts and perspectives to interfere with the objectives of the study.

A second limitation was a small sample size of teachers in the study and finding enough participants to share their perspectives on developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I overcame this limitation by providing a variety of days and times to schedule interviews and by conducting virtual interviews. The sample size should be large enough to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest and address the research question by attaining saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Due to the workload of early childhood teachers with Title 1 students, participants may not have been interested in taking part in this study. Information about the necessary time required to participate in the study was provided to each potential participant so they could decide whether to willingly participate in the study.

Significance

According to Choi et al. (2019), it is important for children living in poverty to have quality teacher-student relationships. The positive teacher-student relationship provides students with close, secure, and nurturing relationships that support the building of the foundation of early development (Choi et al., 2019; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). Warm and nurturing teacher-student relationships support students in self-regulation (Li & Lau, 2019). The results of the current study may provide insight to the

early childhood teacher and Title 1 communities about practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Early childhood teachers are challenged to develop teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students (Sutherland et al., 2020; Theisen-Homer, 2021). According to Bayly and Bierman (2022), many low-income students have behavior challenges, and some low-income children have severe behavior challenges and are behaviorally dysregulated, making it more difficult for the teacher to develop high-quality teacher-student relationships with the students. One of the consequences of childhood trauma is avoiding intimate contact with others, which makes it increasingly difficult to develop teacher-student relationships (Levkovich & Elyoseph, 2023). Many early childhood teachers are ill-prepared to support children's needs (Blacher & Eisenhower, 2023). Exploring early childhood teachers' perspectives on the practices and challenges of teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students can benefit many teachers by providing them with insights on other teachers' experiences, successes, and difficulties when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Early childhood teachers may benefit from this study because they may be able to apply these strategies in the classroom to help narrow the gap between developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students and developing teacher-student relationships with students who are not considered Title 1.

Early childhood teachers need to be prepared to develop teacher-student relationships with all students, even those students who make developing teacher-student relationships challenging (Post et al., 2020). When early childhood teachers are better

equipped and supported to work with Title 1 students, developing teacher-student relationships can be developmentally beneficial for all Title 1 students (Olsen & Huang, 2021). As another implication for positive social change, the findings of this study provide administrators and professional development writers with information so they may better equip and support teachers when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I identified the problem of early childhood teachers being challenged to develop teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I connected the importance of forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students to students' developmental growth. I also explained that the perspectives of early childhood teachers are limited in the extant literature and exploring their perspectives in the current study could help support teachers, administrators, and professional development writers.

In Chapter 2, I will explain the literature search strategies used to become more knowledgeable about the topic and provide a description of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as the conceptual framework of the study. I will also describe the factors that contribute to teachers' development of teacher-student relationships. Current related research that included studies documenting the importance of developing teacher-student relationships, practices of developing teacher-student relationships, challenges that early childhood teachers experience when developing teacher-student relationships, and studies related to the current and historical practices of teacher-student relationships supporting the development of students will be discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem under study was that early childhood teachers are challenged to develop teacher-student relationships with Title 1 early childhood students (see Bayly & Bierman, 2022; Sutherland et al., 2020). There is limited information on how teacher education programs prepare teachers for developing teacher-student relationships when teacher-student relationships are challenging to develop (Theisen-Homer, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

In Chapter 2, I provide information on the literature search strategy used for the current study, a detailed overview of the conceptual framework of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and a literature review related to key concepts of teacher-student relationships, early childhood education, Title 1, and teachers' perspectives. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major themes in the literature related to early childhood teachers developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students and practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Literature Search Strategy

For this literature review, I searched for material on Title 1 schools, teacher-student relationships, gaps in practice, teacher-student relationship challenges, and teacher perspectives from a variety of sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, the internet, and dissertations. Throughout my coursework at Walden University, I maintained my interest in the topic of teacher-student relationships, and many of my papers and assignments focused on this topic. I used current, scholarly, peer-reviewed

sources for the literature review that were accessed from the following online library databases and search engines: Walden University Library, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, EBSCO, Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations, and Education Source. Mendeley was a primary reference manager used.

I used the following key terms to search for information on teacher-student relationships in the databases accessible through the Walden University Library: *teacher-student relationships or teacher-student interactions*. The following key terms were used to search for information on Title 1 in the databases accessible through the Walden University Library: *Title 1, low income, or free/reduced lunch*. The following key terms were used to search for information on teachers' perspective in the databases accessible through the Walden University Library: *teachers' perspective, teachers' perception, or teachers' attitude*. I found most of the articles selected for this literature review through searches conducted through Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and Education Source with delimitations that ensured all sources were peer reviewed and published within the last 5 years.

I began the literature review for this study by researching the gap related to teachers' perspectives on developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Exploring the context behind the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students demonstrated why this topic was relevant and why the gap must be addressed.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study comprised Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) supports the development of higher psychological functions, and I used the theory as a lens to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives on forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students in this study. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory focuses on the fundamental role of social interaction or relationships in the development of cognition. Vygotsky argued that through active engagement with adults, children's cognitive development is fostered.

Children imitate the behavior that they observe from others and increase their development over time (Bluiett, 2018). Children gain their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through relationships with members of society (McLeod, 2019). Human relationships support improved development through challenging and meaningful activities. Through developmentally appropriate environments and experiences created by relationships with adults, children will flourish developmentally by the influence of social interactions (McLeod, 2019). Early childhood teachers' perspectives on developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students were revealed in the current study by applying Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as the conceptual framework.

Sociocultural Theory in the Classroom

According to Vygotsky (1978), children acquire most of their learning through social interactions with others, such as an early childhood teacher. Teacher-student relationships are an essential component in the successful gains of increasing

development (Saracho, 2017). Saracho (2017) suggested that through assistance, children can be involved in development opportunities that guide them into improving their development. Cognitive development is an area of development that can be improved with practice, such as experiences, interactions, and challenging and meaningful activities that stem from the teacher-student relationship (McLeod, 2019). As Saracho noted, interaction and modeling are essential functions of the teacher in relation to developing students' cognitive skills. Vygotsky noted that when students and teachers interact and develop teacher-student relationships, they can create partnerships that encourage increased development. In research regarding social interactions, Vygotsky asserted that exchanges of information within relationships support the learning process. By developing teacher-student relationships, early childhood teachers support the cognitive development in children through effectively assisting and modeling. Saracho argued that cognitive development skills emerge early in a child's life, and these skills develop through social interaction or relationships, which correspond with the sociocultural theory that includes the ZPD.

ZPD

Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as the gap between a child's current intellectual level and potential intellectual level. The focus of ZPD is encouraging children to become self-regulated learners through teachers' assistance and guidance of the learner's intellectual development through planned collaborative activities for cognitive development (McLeod, 2019). Teacher-student relationships create experiences and interactions that support continued development toward potential intellectual level

(Veraksa et al., 2016). Teacher-student relationships can support and further expand children's ZPD through children observing and engaging in developmentally appropriate activities. The teacher-student relationship expands a child's achievement abilities during instances when the child needs assistance and, perhaps, modeling from the teacher (Saracho, 2017). When children increase their developmental skills, teachers can then slowly decrease their support from the student (Vygotsky, 1978). This practice supports students in developing independence.

Vygotsky (1978) expressed the need for adult assistance and modeling during the process of scaffolding the children's development. Scaffolding is effective when the teacher builds upon the student's current level of development (McLeod, 2019). Saracho (2017) highlighted how teachers provide scaffolding to help children improve and progress forward in their cognitive development. Through effective teacher-student relationships, the early childhood teacher can identify the level of scaffolding the child needs.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in Similar Studies

Researchers have used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that describes the ZPD in previous studies. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports the need for positive adult connections, such as teacher-student relationships, to support continued development. In a more recent study, Puntambekar (2022) discussed balancing child-initiated and teacher-directed activities, concluding that teachers support multiple students and scaffolding is distributed across various tools and social scaffolds. Vygotsky described learning as a social experience. In another recent study, Olds (2021) made

connections between having experiences and developing a new language, finding that teachers' practices and perceptions influence students' experiences and their ability to perform. Venketsamy and Sibanda (2021) described the teacher as the more knowledgeable other. Venketsamy and Sibanda argued that children learn from those who have previously mastered a skill and concluded that sufficiently trained teachers are essential in supporting children in language learning.

Using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as the conceptual framework in the current study allowed me to gather teachers' perspectives on teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to help interpret the connections between the adult-child relationship and the teacher-student relationship. The current study contributes to the existing literature by addressing teachers' perspectives regarding practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Exploring these perspectives revealed the influences adult-child relationships have on the development of the child as discussed in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Title 1 Students

The U.S. Department of Education (2018) defined Title I schools as those whose student population comprises 40% or more children from low-income families, calculated based upon the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Families living in poverty have limited financial and educational resources, crowded living conditions, family instability, and limited access to high-quality early education programs (Barnett et al., 2020; Bierman et al., 2021). Schools that are considered Title 1 receive additional

funding from the state to support the schools' efforts in combating the academic differences between students who are considered Title 1 and their more fortunate peers. Title 1 schools also are mandated to provide opportunities for parent and family involvement and workshops. In the Title 1 workshops, parents and guardians are given strategies to support them in increasing home learning activities.

Many low-income families lack knowledge of how to lead home learning activities (Barnett et al., 2020). Barnett et al. (2020) argued that financial hardships, stress, unstable work schedules, unreliable transportation, and lack of access to educational materials and venues are the main barriers that cause low-income families to not engage with their children in home learning activities. Children who grow up in poverty often are not prepared academically or socially for kindergarten (Bierman et al., 2021; McGuire & Meadan, 2022; Moen et al., 2019). Poor academic performance during childhood is connected to low self-esteem, various psychological problems, job insecurity, unemployment, and poverty in adulthood (R.-Turgeon et al., 2022). The effect of poor academic performance affects the child beyond the classroom.

School readiness refers to the basic skills that children have when they enter school and that enable them to adapt, learn, and succeed (R.-Turgeon et al., 2022). School readiness includes success academic, social–emotional, and behavioral areas (Marks et al., 2023). Ansari et al. (2021) argued that children from low-income backgrounds are almost a year behind at school entry, and once these students begin kindergarten behind, it is challenging for them to catch up academically or socially. McGuire and Meadan (2022) stated that children coming from low-socioeconomic situations are often not ready

for kindergarten in many areas, not only academics, but socially and emotionally as well. Developmental delays in social-emotional areas lead to conflicts in the classroom, with teachers tending to report more conflict, lower self-regulation, and lower academic achievement for children living in poverty as compared to their more fortunate peers (Bayly & Bierman, 2022; Chen et al., 2020; Horn et al., 2021; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Sutherland et al., 2020). Many conflicts in the classroom appear in the form of not being able to manage emotions or not getting along with peers (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Teachers are challenged often with these types of conflicts.

LeBoeuf et al. (2023) stated that students from low-income families often have an increased number of days absent and are more likely to be chronically absent from school than students from more affluent families. Chronic absenteeism is defined as a student missing at least 10% of the school year (Bundshuh et al., 2021; LeBoeuf et al., 2023). School attendance is an indicator of academic success, and instructional time is impeded when teachers must spend time catching up one student on material they missed when they were absent. Suspension is another form of absenteeism that impacts many Title 1 students (Bundshuh et al., 2021). As a result of not being ready for kindergarten and conflict-related behavior, many students are suspended from school. McGuire and Meadan (2022) argued that suspension decreases time in the classroom, which impacts the amount of time teachers have with the student to improve teacher-student relationships in the classroom setting.

Teacher-student relationships are important for children who live in disadvantaged areas (Choi et al., 2019; Moen et al., 2019; Post et al., 2020; Stahl, 2022).

Stahl (2022) stated how important it is to establish trust in teacher-student relationships in these disadvantaged areas, stressing how positive school experiences, such as emotional attachment, sense of belonging, and relationship with teachers, are vital for disadvantaged populations. Teachers are exhausting their efforts to close the achievement gap between Title 1 students and their advantaged peers (Miller, 2020). There is a need for more support for students attending Title 1 schools to address the unique needs in schools with greater levels of poverty (Choi et al., 2019; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Miller, 2020; Post et al., 2020). Students living in poverty need specific care; Pertell et al. (2022) argued that children in poverty experience low self-esteem and decreased self-efficacy due to living in impoverished circumstances. As children in poverty experience empathic understanding, they may increase their esteem and self-actualization needs, which supports the need for an empathetic teacher-student relationship. Pertell et al. posited that families of low socioeconomic status may face additional barriers to building relationships, such as unconventional work hours, and more psychological barriers, such as lack of trust in teachers. Parents in low socioeconomic situations often have lower levels of education, are engaged in less parent-teacher contact, are less involved in school, and have lower quality parent-teacher relationships when their children are in prekindergarten, kindergarten and first grade (Pertell et al., 2022). The effects poverty has on children affect the teacher-student relationship.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Wang and Chen (2022) stated that teacher-student relationships are formed commonly through two levels: the dyadic level and the classroom level. The dyadic level

refers to the quality of the relationship between teachers and individual children, while the classroom level refers to how the teacher organizes and instructs the classroom community. Children who experience high-quality relationships during early education develop improved social-behavioral skills, self-regulation, and academic outcomes (Chen et al., 2021; Dolev et al., 2023; Marks et al., 2023; Moen et al., 2019). The effects of positive teacher-relationships are beneficial.

High-quality interactions between children and adults are the primary method used to promote developmental gains (Egert et al., 2020; Romo-Escudero et al., 2021). In the early childhood classroom, these relationships are considered teacher-student relationships. Yang et al. (2021) stated that children spend a significant amount of time with the teachers in their classrooms. Because of the amount of time children and teachers spend together, teachers' language interactions and communications strongly influence the language development of children and the communication skills displayed in children (Yang et al., 2021). As a result of the extended amount of time the teacher and student spend together, there is a great opportunity for the teacher to influence the students.

Teacher-student relationships are defined as relationships between the teacher and the student where the teacher provides emotionally caring, cognitively motivating, and consistent caregiving to maximize developmental opportunities through personalized and predictable care (Blewitt et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2019; Gallo et al., 2022). Tilbe and Gai (2022) stated that the relationships between teachers and students promote increased development specifically in the child's social-emotional and language development.

Through teacher-student interactions, the teacher has the potential to have a great influence on the cognitive and social-emotional development of the students in the classroom. Teacher-student relationships can have positive or negative influences on the students.

Teacher-student relationships can be measured through means of conflict, closeness, dependency, circularity, communication, and involvement (Li et al., 2022). The interactions between teacher and child that outline teacher-student relationships are separated into three domains, emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (Egert et al., 2020). School is an influential environment where learning occurs, and positive teacher-student relationships can help children navigate cultural and academic challenges at a young age (Tobin et al., 2022). Tilbe and Gai (2022) stated that as teachers and children engage in responsive interactions occurring in small groups or one-on-one, children can learn important skills of self-regulation, empathy, and problem-solving. These relationships and interacting environmental influences between teachers and students are critical factors when navigating and understanding the transition into higher education for students (Tobin et al., 2022). The result of these positive interactions is a foundation that promotes academic growth and developmental growth.

When children and teachers share close, positive relationships, teachers are more likely to serve as role models or coaches to promote positive coping and prosocial behaviors for children (Liu et al., 2022). In addition, Liu et al., (2022) argued that positive teacher-student relationships accelerate fundamental cognitive and social skills.

Positive teacher-student relationships entail warmth, support, involves the sharing of positive emotions, open communication, responsiveness, and harmony within a teacher-student relationship (Blewitt et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2019; Gallo et al., 2022; Marks et al., 2023). Tobin et al., (2022) stated that positive teacher-student relationships promote developmental growth, which is essential for successful adjustment during the transition to primary school. High-quality and positive relationships and interactions during early school years of development create learning environments in which children feel supported to engage with their teachers, peers, and classroom tasks (Lu et al., 2023; Tilbe & Gai, 2022). Tobin et al. emphasized that the long-term implications exceeded not only children's future academic and social success but also for their future employability and socioeconomic mobility.

When students feel teachers care about them, they work harder, participate in more challenging expectations, follow classroom and school rules, and meet or exceed their teachers' expectations (Dolev et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022). Gallo et al. (2022) indicated that students who perceive their relationship with their teacher as characterized by a high level of closeness tend to display fewer externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. Positive teacher-student relationships have been connected to the sense of school belonging (Thornberg et al., 2022). There are also connections to teacher-student relationships and students' attitudes towards school authority or towards the law (Virat et al., 2023). This connection results in benefits of positive teacher-student relationships that go beyond early childhood and move into adulthood. Teacher-child relationships have the power to predict developmental outcomes in many domains, including cognitive,

social, language, and literacy development (Dolev et al., 2023; Marks et al., 2023). The growth in these domains is supported by direct instruction from the teacher and indirect instruction from the teacher (Karuppiyah, 2021; Tilbe & Gai, 2022). Direct instruction includes lessons specifically designed to promote cognitive and/or social development. Indirect instruction includes lessons taught by the teacher that occur naturally in the classroom through circumstances or modeling.

Students are more motivated to learn when they have positive relationships with their teachers resulting in higher student achievement (Dolev et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022; Magro et al., 2022; Moen et al., 2019; Olsen & Huang, 2021). Li et al. (2022) also identified that teachers produce higher quality instruction when there are positive teacher-student relationships, which results in higher student achievement. As a result of positive teacher-student relationships, teachers are more aware of students' development (Moen et al., 2019). Students are more likely to express a need for help and assistance from a teacher as a product of positive teacher student relationships (Halladay et al., 2020). Halladay et al., (2020) found that quality and responsive teacher-student relationships resulted in improved social-emotional development in students.

Positive teacher-student relationships have been seen as beneficial for students at risk of becoming involved in bullying (Thornberg et al., 2022). Thornberg et al., (2022) argued that classes with more positive teacher-student relationships resulted in an environment less at risk for a climate of bullying among peers. Thornberg et al. researched and found a connection between teacher-student closeness and closeness among peers that resulted in sympathy. Students who have negative relationships with

their teachers get punished more frequently and have a higher risk of dropping out of school when the students are older (Horn et al., 2021; Loomis et al., 2023). Teacher-student relationships promote improved relationships with peers. Children turn to their adult caregivers for interpreting situations (ten Bokkel et al., 2021). Children are more likely to model peer relationships after their teacher-student relationships and are more likely to seek guidance on peer relationships from within a positive teacher-student relationship (McDuire & Meadan, 2022; ten Bokkel et al., 2021). Teachers play a significant role in children's lives including teaching academic skills but also social and self-regulation skills (Blewitt et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2019; Trang & Hansen, 2021). The benefits from the positive teacher-student relationship overflow into benefitting other relationships in the students' lives.

Students who have good relationships with their teacher have fewer absences from school (Bundshuh et al., 2021). Bundshuh et al., (2021) argued that when students have positive relationships with their teachers, the students realize the staff really does care about what they do and how they are doing. Positive relationships are also fostered through engaging parents. Positive relationships with the family to help combat poor student attendance (Bundshuh et al., 2021). Purtell et al., (2022) argued that positive teacher-student relationships in lower level schools like prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade promote readiness for higher level school.

Professional development that focuses on promoting positive teacher-student relationships is effective in improving students' academic performance, students' development, and school and classroom community (Karuppiah, 2021). Barnett and Cho,

(2023) established the Caring Campus as a method to improve experience for students in school campuses that will positively affect their persistence and success through strengthening teacher-student interactions. Teachers are trained and required to make all students feel belonging and validation (Barnett & Cho, 2023). Feelings of belonging and validation promote positive teacher-student relationships and affect students' academic performance. Often teachers need professional development that is focused on strategies and interventions to promote positive habits in their classroom and school that will support strengthened teacher-student relationships.

Gap in Practice: Teacher-Student Relationship Challenges

The opposite of positive teacher-student relationships results in conflicts that entails frustration, anger, and negativity, lack of trust, poor dyadic rapport, and struggles (Gallo et al., 2022; Horn et al., 2021; Loomis et al., 2023; Theisen-Homer, 2021). When students perceive their teacher-student relationship as characterized by higher levels of conflict, students tend to display greater behavior problems and poorer achievement (Gallo et al., 2022; Horn et al., 2021; Li & Lau, 2019; Loomis et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2023; Theisen-Homer, 2021). Negative teacher-student relationships can be detrimental to students' academic progress, behaviors, and emotions (Chen et al., 2021; Horn et al., 2021; Loomis et al., 2023; Theisen-Homer, 2021). When adolescents experience unfair treatment from teachers, it may impact their trust in adults more broadly which may affect their ability to develop critically important bonds with other supportive adults in their life (Griffith et al., 2022). Other supportive adults include parents and mentors. Chen et al., (2021) stated that children who have low-quality relationships with adults

during early childhood show greater challenges in social-emotional and cognitive development and have a high risk of poor school performance and classroom adjustment.

Children may feel isolated, depressed, or anxious and misbehave in the classroom as a result of negative teacher-student relationships (Chen et al., 202; Li & Lau, 2019). Due to the outcomes of the negative teacher-student relationships, teachers may also become frustrated within the classroom, which results in not effectively addressing children's academic and developmental needs (Chen et al., 2021; Li & Lau, 2019; Post et al., 2020). Teachers rate their relationships with students who exhibit disruptive, challenging, and externalizing behavior as being higher in conflict and they identify the student as more difficult to teach (Bayly & Bierman, 2022; Horn et al., 2021; Loomis et al., 2023; Post et al., 2020). The negative teacher-student relationship negatively impacts the classroom.

Negative teacher-student relationships often cause students to display negative classroom behaviors. The negative classroom behaviors worsen the negative teacher-student relationships. This cycle may lead instructional time to be displaced by behavior management or student removal from the classroom (Marks et al., 2023). The loss of instruction time hinders the academic achievement of students. Conflicts that occur in negative teacher-student relationships can reduce smooth communication and interactions between teachers and students and interfere with the development of basic school-related skills including attention regulation, coping, and reasoning (Liu et al., 2022). Children's behavior problems may cause tension in discussions and relationships between parents, teachers, and other school administrators (Pertell et al., 2022). The negative effects of the

poor-quality teacher-student relationship influence all areas of the school system, not just the teacher and the student.

Negative teacher-student relationships are often worsened by persistent challenging behaviors. Many students display persistently challenging behaviors in the classroom as a result of not being ready for school and/or having social-emotional delays (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Children with persistently challenging behavior can be challenging for teachers to manage in the classroom. Lu et al., (2023) stated that there are evidence-based strategies to deal with challenging behavior. Professional development would be effective in teaching the teachers strategies to combat the challenging behavior persistently found in some students.

Professional development is needed to support teachers in social and emotional competencies for responding effectively to behaviorally challenging children (Bayly & Bierman, 2022; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; McGuire & Meadan, 2022; Post et al., 2020; Richards et al., 2020; Theisen-Homer, 2021; Wink et al., 2021). Wink et al., (2021) reported that teachers need the ability to empathize with students' perspectives and experiences when students struggle to meet behavioral expectations and are challenging to establish positive teacher-student relationships. Working with children from communities affected by poverty is challenging for teachers, particularly in relation to conflict resolution and continued professional development is important (Bayly & Bierman, 2022; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Post et al., 2020; Wink et al., 2021). Relationships where conflict occurs frequently are consistently linked to poorer academic, social emotional, and behavioral outcomes (Liu et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2023).

Professional development focused on conflict resolution would support limiting these negative consequences.

Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers' perspectives are their point of view of a phenomenon (Boylan et al., 2018). Teacher perspectives include their views of themselves, their profession, and their students (Kotaman et al., 2018). Teachers' background knowledge and life experiences shape their perspectives (Clark, 2020). Understanding teachers' perspectives is important regarding their practices of developing teacher-student relationships (Al Shebli, 2021; Horn et al., 2021). Many teachers have reported that having a good relationship with students helps to avoid disruptive behavior inside the classroom and school building (Al Shebli, 2022). Lu et al. found a connection between kindergartners and their teachers. The results indicated teachers rated greater closeness with students who displayed increased motivation toward their schoolwork.

Teachers' perspectives are essential because they identify the motive behind teachers' actions as they develop teacher-student relationships. Teachers' perspectives are critical to creating a warm and welcoming environment (Shih, 2022). Choi et al., (2019) suggested that teachers' views are connected to the stability of care found in early childhood classrooms that are close, secure, and nurturing. Boylan et al. (2018) found that identifying teachers' perspectives can benefit early childhood teachers, administrators, and professional development writers on developing teacher-student relationships that will support an increase in children's development.

Teachers who are experiencing and constantly correcting negative behavior in the classroom may find it hard to perceive a child in a positive way or to build a positive relationship with that student, thus resulting in worsening the negative teacher-student relationship (Horn et al., 2021; Loomis et al., 2023). The teachers' perception of a student affects the teacher-student relationship. Purtell et al., (2022) reported that teachers are more likely to report stronger relationships with parents of high income.

McGuire and Meadan (2022) argued that is important for teachers to have a good understanding of who their students are so that they can understand and manage the social dynamics of the classroom environment. The teacher's awareness of and responsivity to students' academic and emotional needs supports the students' ability to grow and learn because the teacher consistently provides comfort, and encouragement (Tilbe & Gai, 2022). The teachers' perspective of the students in the classroom supports the classroom environment, which supports the teacher-student relationships.

Teachers are often pressured to focus on and to increase academic achievement. The pressure negates the focus away from strengthening teacher-student relationships. The teachers' perception on teacher-student relationships will affect their motivation in strengthening teacher-student relationships (Gehlbach et al., 2023; Horn et al., 2021; Theisen-Homer, 2021). Teacher perceptions on conflict are affected by children's behavior, teachers' stress and biases, and the classroom environment (Chen et al., 2020; Horn et al., 2021; Theisen-Homer, 2021). The benefits from the framework in the current study support further research on early childhood teachers' perspective on teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

The benefits of positive teacher-student relationships do not only affect the students. Teachers reported more joy and less anger or anxiety in their classrooms as a result of positive relationships with their students (Wink et al., 2021). The teachers' perception of the teacher-student relationship affects teachers' emotional outcome of the relationships. The negative implications of negative teacher-student relationships are often a result of the teachers' perspectives or biases. Teachers' biases against children from impoverished families influences the teachers' practices (Chen et al., 2020; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). The influence biases have on the teachers' practices affect the quality of the instruction and education.

Summary and Conclusions

After reviewing previous and current literature on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, I gained an understanding of the effect of teacher-student relationships. Teacher-student relationships provide students with a model to guide them socially and emotionally. Teachers guide students academically and in their development through modeling, scaffolding, and teaching.

Current literature suggested that some of the current reasons that the teacher-student relationship gap still exists with Title 1 students is due to behavior in the classroom. Title 1 students often have challenging behavior due to the lack of adult supervision, delays in social-emotional development, or trauma. This has contributed to the challenges in developing positive teacher-student relationships.

Positive teacher-student relationships are described as safe, warm, and welcoming (Blewitt et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2019; Gallo et al., 2022). Once positive teacher-student

relationships have been established, students trust the teacher and are more motivated to perform on a higher level academically. As students imitate their positive teacher-student relationship, their peer relationships will improve. Overall, classroom behavior will strengthen and promote a positive learning environment for all students.

Teachers' perspectives of Title 1 students are important because it is the teachers' views of their students (Kotaman et al., 2018). Negative perspectives contribute to the challenges in developing teacher-student relationships. Negative perspectives about behavior of Title 1 students directly affect the way teachers teach these students (Horn et al., 2021; Loomis et al., 2023). The teachers' perspectives influence their motives for their thoughts and actions within the classroom. Teachers' lack of knowledge on developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students can contribute to negative perspectives.

The present study filled a gap in the literature by exploring the teachers' perspective of the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. There is extensive literature exploring the importance of teacher-student relationships, but there was a gap in the literature that focuses on developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Exploring the teachers' perspective extended knowledge in education by providing teachers' perspective for other teachers, administrators, and professional development writers to explore when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

In Chapter 3, I will provide details of the methodology applied to my study. This incorporated the research design and rationale. I also will include details about the role of

the researcher and the components of the methodology including participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data analysis, data collection plan, and data analysis plan. I will describe the trustworthiness of my study, which established the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. Lastly, I will include details on the ethical procedures and steps that I took to protect participants.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Exploring early childhood teachers' perspectives on developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students allowed educators to speak out and share their experiences. In Chapter 3, I describe the research method and design, the rationale of their use, and the role of the researcher. I also discuss the methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures for the study.

Research Design and Rationale

This basic qualitative study addressed one primary research question: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students? In this study, I employed a basic qualitative research design to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I collected data through one-on-one participant interviews. Lewis-Beck et al. (2004) expressed that qualitative research includes, but is not limited to, discerning the perspectives of people. Qualitative researchers seek to make meaning and explore motives of behavior (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). I did not use a quantitative approach in this study because I was not seeking numeric descriptions of views of a population. A quantitative approach lacked the ability to capture the in-depth perspectives that I sought to explore. Validity and reliability would not be accomplished through phenomenological research because of subjectivity (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that basic qualitative studies are the most common form of qualitative research found in education. In this type of design, data are collected by interviews, observations, or document analysis. The researcher interprets the participants' understanding of the phenomenon of interest, and the process of data analysis occurs when recognizing recurring patterns that characterize the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because I intended to explore perspectives through interviews.

Through interviewing, researchers can gain access to the observations of others. Interviews also allow us to learn what people perceive and how they interpret their perceptions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). I conducted semistructured interviews because this method of data collection allowed me to acquire contextual data on early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to be objective and to explore a particular question or social issue in a detached manner (Roberts, 2007). As the researcher, I was responsible for conducting this study and collecting data from participants through one-on-one interviews. An interview protocol was used when collecting the data in this study. I listened and clarified as the participants engaged in the interview process. During the interviews, I created conditions that were suitable for communication by asking open-ended interview questions and allowing participants to provide any additional

information they would like at the conclusion of the interview. After collecting the data, I coded and analyzed it in order to answer the research question.

As an early childhood teacher, I identified with the participants that were interviewed. I have taught in the early childhood school setting for 7 years. Due to this experience, there was the potential for bias on my part as the researcher. My teaching experience also includes teaching Title 1 students. These experiences have contributed to my interest in studying early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I used a reflective journal to manage potential researcher biases and applied reflectivity by documenting my thoughts and feelings and decisions throughout the research process.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I selected a minimum of 10 early childhood teachers who had more than 2 years of teaching experience teaching prekindergarten to first grade with Title 1 students. I used this criterion because I believed that these teachers had more experience and would be able to share practices and challenges that they have experienced when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Participants were recruited from the Walden University Participant Pool and early childhood teacher social media groups, where I posted an invitation to take part in the study. Snowball sampling was used to obtain more qualified participants as needed.

The sample size for the study was a minimum of 10 participants. I used a purposeful sampling strategy to obtain a minimum of 10 teachers to participate as well as

snowball sampling to obtain more participants if necessary. The purpose of the sample size was to select a sample that would provide rich data to reflect the phenomenon studied. Applying a purposeful sampling strategy results in selecting participants that meet a specific criterion (Patton, 2015). The criteria for participant selection for this study were that participants (a) currently taught prekindergarten to first grade, (b) currently taught in a Title 1 school, and (c) have more than 2 years of teaching experience. Recruiting a minimum of 10 participants who met the criteria for participation ensured that I reached saturation during data analysis. All participants were required to complete a consent form that was provided through email in order to participate in the study. I continued to solicit participants until I reached data saturation.

Instrumentation

Schamberger (1997) suggested that the interview is one of the most used practices for qualitative data collection. In this study, I gathered data by conducting semistructured, Zoom interviews or phone interviews. I designed my interview questions based on my research question, the literature review, and conceptual framework (see Table 1). While preparing the questions I also reviewed literature on the teacher-student relationships and Title 1 schools. I used my own interview protocol guide (Appendix) to gather demographic data, record minor details, and inform the participants of the study expectations. I developed content validity by consulting with an expert from a local university on this topic for their evaluation of the interview questions. I asked the expert from a local university to consider the extent to which the questions were representative of the questions that a researcher can ask to assess the topic that I explored in this study

and then addressed the feedback they provided by editing the questions as needed to ensure the questions were sufficient to answer the research question. The feedback helped confirm the interview questions' clarity and that they were open ended and not closed questions.

Table 1*Alignment of Interview Questions With Research Questions and Conceptual Framework*

Interview Question	Alignment
1. How are Title 1 students different from other students in your classroom who are not Title 1 students?	Research question Literature
2. How do you define positive teacher-student relationships?	Research question Literature
3. What practices do you use in your classroom to promote positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students?	Research question Conceptual framework
4. How would you describe your influence on your Title 1 students as a result of the teacher-student relationships established in your classroom?	Conceptual framework:
5. What challenges do you experience when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students?	Research question Literature
6. What specific professional development opportunities have you participated in that support positive teacher-student relationships?	Research question Literature
7. What do you do when you are unable to establish a positive teacher-student relationship with a Title 1 student?	Research question
8. Please share an example of a time when you attempted to establish a positive teacher-student relationship with a Title 1 student, but it did not work.	Research question
9. What do you believe might assist you and other teachers in improving your relationships with Title 1 students?	Research question
10. How would you describe negative teacher-student relationships?	Research question
11. How would you describe the behaviors of Title 1 students when there is a negative teacher-student relationship?	Research question
12. As a result of your positive teacher-student relationship, how would you define the behaviors of your Title 1 students?	Research question
13. Is there any additional information that you would like to share regarding developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students?	Research question

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After receiving approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I posted an invitation for the study on the Walden University Participant Pool and early childhood teacher social media groups to recruit participants. Participants who volunteered to take part in the study were emailed a consent form. I verified they met the criteria through email confirmation.

I collected data from one-on-one, semistructured interviews that took place through Zoom or telephone. Teachers who agreed to participate replied that they consented via email. I sent all teachers who agreed to participate a thank you email and a list of interview appointment options for them to select the most convenient date and time slot for them. Two days prior to scheduled interviews, the participants were sent a reminder email regarding their scheduled interview. To be prepared on the day of the interview, I reviewed the interview protocol. Before the interviews, I greeted the participants to make them feel comfortable and reviewed the informed consent letter, confidentiality terms, participants' rights, the purpose of the topic, why it needed to be studied, who it might help, and the importance of the interviewee's participation with them (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants were asked for their verbal permission to use Zoom software or an audio recorder to record the audio of the interview sessions. Recording the interviews allowed me to review the participants' responses to the interview questions. I also let participants know that they could quit or withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason with no consequences. Participants were then asked if they had any questions prior to beginning the interview. After questions were answered

or if there were no questions, I stated that the recording had begun, and the interview commenced.

During the interview, the interview questions were asked one question at a time. I attempted to conduct each interview within a 45-to-60-minute time frame. My thoughts and observations were documented in my reflective journal during the interviews.

At the conclusion of the interview, I immediately debriefed each participant. I reminded the participant that the interview responses would remain confidential and asked them whether they had any questions concerning the remainder of the interview process. I answered any questions the participant had or if they had none, I thanked them for their time and participation. For member checking purposes, the participants were also reminded that they would be sent a two-page summary of the findings for their review.

I documented each step of the data collection process in detail in case there was a need to verify the data with the participants as well as to monitor and maintain the thoroughness and quality of data collection. Member checking was used for trustworthiness and dependability. The data collection process took 3 to 6 weeks to complete.

Data Analysis Plan

After completing the interviews, I sent the audio recordings to TranscribeMe, which is an online transcribing service to transcribe the interviews into written text. I reviewed the written transcripts to confirm their accuracy. The written transcripts allowed me to analyze the data line-by-line for each participant. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated

that data analysis in qualitative research is primarily textual to help researchers make sense of the data.

I used deductive reasoning by reviewing a priori codes that were developed ahead of time based on the theoretical framework, the interview questions, and literature (see Saldaña, 2016). A priori codes for this study include practices, challenges, socioeconomic disadvantages, relationships, and professional development. I then added to the codes as I examined the data inductively by identifying open codes. When open coding, I read the data line-by-line and coded keywords and phrases (see Saldaña, 2016). All significant statements or phrases were organized and coded (see Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used different colored highlighters to distinguish the open codes. In the subsequent rounds of coding, I focused specifically on aspects of the research question until I coded all data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used open codes to support organizing the data into manageable chunks to determine ideas and concepts through the analysis of the data.

Once the open codes were determined, I used axial coding. Axial coding is the process of grouping codes with other codes that share similar meanings into categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Axial coding is a process of going from coding chunks of data to categories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). At this stage, I examined categories and looked for emerging themes. I then reviewed data until the point of saturation, which is when continued data collection does not add new themes or patterns but instead reinforces what has already been determined from prior data analysis (see Burkholder et al., 2016). If I had not reached data saturation with 10 to 12 participants, I would have solicited more

participants until saturation was reached. I identified emerging themes, collapsed, or expanded the emerging themes, and then named the themes. I reviewed the data set to ensure the themes accurately reflected the data, and I recoded data if necessary. I continued to analyze the themes by checking and rechecking my interpretations against the data and collapsing or expanding themes to determine that the themes did answer the research question.

Creswell (2013) stated member checking is the process of providing a summary of study findings to the participants for validation. All participants were given the opportunity to review a two-page summary of the data findings for the accuracy of my interpretations of the data and asked them to make comments to me through email (see Creswell, 2013). I read all comments and contacted the participants if there was any comment that required further explanation or clarification and worked to identify any discrepancies that were reported. Any discrepant findings were identified and discussed. I included quotes from the interviews in the results to provide the lived experiences of the participants in their own voices.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness and validity of qualitative research depends on the observations of the researcher. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are important in establishing trustworthiness. One of the ways to ensure credibility and transferability is to ensure that participants meet the criteria ensuring they have experiences on the topic (Birt et al.,

2016). I confirmed the inclusion criteria were met by all participants before collecting data.

Dependability refers to the strength of findings over time (Burkholder et al., 2016). I achieved dependability by implementing member checking. Member checking is a process of sharing a summary of the findings with the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I asked participants to briefly read the summary and email me within 48 hours if they have any questions or concerns. If participants had questions, we briefly discussed their questions via the telephone. If the participants needed more time, it was given. If I did not hear from participants within 48 hours after emailing the summary of the findings, I presumed that the participants had no questions or concerns. Member checking is used to ensure that content in the study is trustworthy and lacks misinterpretation of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Member checking contributed to dependability.

Transferability is the extent that qualitative studies can transfer to broader contexts (Burkholder et al., 2016). I provided an extensive detailed description of the data and the context. Through my thick description, readers were able to determine the appropriateness of transferring my findings to future research, or to make comparisons to other contexts.

Confirmability refers to the degree that a study including data and interpretations are confirmed or supported by other researchers' findings that derive from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Structured reflexivity processes are used to interpret personal biases and prejudices and to mediate those in order to achieve confirmability. I achieved confirmability through reflexivity by documenting an analysis of my biases, my role in

and responses to the research process, and adjustments that I made to the study based on ongoing analysis (see Burkholder et al., 2016). I also used TranscribeMe, which is an online transcribing service to transcribe the interviews. I manually coded them to gain a deep understanding of the perspective of the participants. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that the purpose is to have no researcher biases as a result of interpreting the data in an unbiased way.

Ethical Procedures

I sought approval of this study and followed ethical requirements according to the Walden University IRB. Ethical concerns related to recruitment and processes were put into place. Universities have established IRBs to review research proposals and to protect the rights of participants involved in research studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I followed the ethical requirements of Walden University's IRB. If I had any ethical concerns related to recruitment or data collection, I would complete an Adverse Event Reporting Form and would send it to Walden University's IRB.

An invitation was posted to Walden University's Participant Pool and early childhood teacher social media group. Participants who volunteered to participate and met the requirements were emailed a consent form. Potential participants from the snowball sampling process received the invitation and consent form. The invitation described the procedures for data collection, confidentiality, and time required for the interview. Participants replied to indicate their consent.

I informed participants that they may leave the study at any time without penalty. Interviews could be ended by a participant if at any time they refused to answer

questions, or no longer wished to participate. Data from any terminated interviews were deleted unless the participant agreed to allow the information provided to be used in the study. Participants had the option to take breaks or reschedule the interview.

All personal identifiers were replaced with words, letters, or numbers to protect the identity of the individual, such as A, B, C, etc. The identifiers were used when describing the findings. I was the only person with access to the data. Participants' information and data shared between me, and each participant remained confidential. I kept data for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university, and to avoid future risks to confidentiality. Recorded materials were erased after 5 years following final approval by the research committee to minimize any future risks related to confidentiality.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the methodology and rationale for this basic qualitative study. I described the role of the researcher as well as the criteria I used for selecting and finding participants. This chapter included a rationale and description for data collection and analysis. This chapter also included methods to improve the trustworthiness of the study. The ethical procedures that were utilized for protection of the participants and the data of this study were also included. In Chapter 4, I will share the results, including the data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore teachers' perspectives on using data for instructional decision making. I recruited participants using the Walden Participant Pool, early childhood social media teacher groups, and snowball sampling. I sent a consent form to the teachers who agreed to participate, and they replied that they consented via email. I also sent all teachers who agreed to participate a thank you email and a list of interview appointment options for them to select the most convenient date and time slot. Two days prior to scheduled interviews, they were sent an email reminding them of their scheduled interview. Each interview was conducted via Zoom or telephone, and audio recordings were transcribed via TranscribeMe. I applied open codes to the transcribed data to identify themes to answer the research question.

In Chapter 4, I present the study results. The chapter also includes a discussion of the study's setting, participant demographics, data collection and analysis methods, and evidence of trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary of key points.

Setting

I used Zoom or telephone to conduct one-on-one, semistructured interviews from my private work office. Participants for this study were 10 certified teachers who were currently teaching prekindergarten to first grade Title 1 students and had 3 or more years of experience. I assigned an alphabetic code to each participant: PA through PJ. There were no personal or organizational conditions that affected the gathering of data or the analysis of the data. All 10 interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed via TranscribeMe.

Demographics

I conducted this study with 10 early childhood teachers. All 10 participants were female teachers responsible for teaching prekindergarten to first grade Title 1 students. Participants' years of teaching experience ranged from 3 to 30 years.

Data Collection

I recruited potential participants from the Walden Participant Pool, early childhood social media teacher groups, and snowball sampling. After obtaining approval from the Walden University IRB (Approval No. 05-25-23-0743131), I sent a consent form to the teachers who agreed to participate, and they replied that they consented via email. I sent all teachers who agreed to participate a thank you email and a list of interview appointment options for them to select the most convenient date and time slot.

To collect data for this basic qualitative study, I conducted semi structured interviews with all 10 participants. Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed-upon time. On the day of the interview, I tested all audio recording devices before meeting with each participant virtually from my private office. At the beginning of each interview, I thanked the participants and reminded them that I would be recording the audio of the interview via the Zoom platform or telephone. Each participant was reminded that a transcription of the interview would be produced via the TranscribeMe service. I then discussed confidentiality, the participant's right not to answer any interview questions, and the option to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. The interviews were conducted as scheduled using the interview protocol guide (see Appendix B) and the specific questions from the participant interview

questions form (see Appendix A). Each participant was interviewed for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. After the interviews, I reminded the participants that a two-page summary of study findings would be emailed to them and that they would have 48 hours to review it and contact me with questions or comments.

I did not deviate from the planned data collection process described in Chapter 3, and there were no unusual circumstances during the data collection process. All collected data were stored on my personal, password-protected computer. No one has access to the data other than me. All files and data related to this research will be removed and destroyed after 5 years from the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Interview Analysis

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to analyze the data collected in this study: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and writing the report. There were no unexpected conditions encountered during the data analysis process.

Phase 1: Familiarizing Myself With the Data

For Phase 1 of the analysis process, I prepared and organized the data. The written transcripts were compared with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. I organized the transcripts based on the date of each interview and copied each transcript into a separate Microsoft Excel spreadsheet so that each interview question and participant's answer were in a single column. The interview questions were changed to a blue font to help

distinguish them from participant responses. After each interview, I listened to the recordings several times and noted thoughts and feelings in my reflective journal. I listened to the recordings again while reading the transcribed data to make sure the transcriptions were accurate and then read the transcripts twice to become familiar with the data.

Phase 2: *Generating Codes*

Data analysis for this study consisted of inductive reasoning strategies. Bingham and Witkowsky (2021) suggested that inductive strategies can help a researcher analyze data while maintaining a focus on the research questions, allowing themes to be identified and a connection to be made with the conceptual framework. This approach may also strengthen the trustworthiness of a study (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021).

I began inductive analysis using open coding and started by reading the transcripts line-by-line to identify codes in the data. All identified statements or phrases that represented an open code were manually copied to a new column adjacent to the interview text in the spreadsheet. I typed the corresponding open code in another new, adjacent column.

As each new open code was identified, I entered it into the codebook with the data source and example excerpt. Throughout the coding process, I documented and organized the codes in the codebook. Once all transcripts were coded, I reviewed the open code list to ensure there were no identical codes. Examples of open codes are shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Examples of Open Codes*

Code	Participant	Excerpt
Time	PE	“It takes time to build those relationships.”
	PG	“It takes a long time.”
Trust	PD	“The students feel that they have someone that they can trust someone that they like.”
	PA	“Basically, the amount of time and effort you put into getting to know individual students, getting to know their background a little bit, getting to know their parents, getting to know their interests so that you can bring some of that into the classroom environment. It brings a certain comfort level in a certain trust level with those students.”
Mentorship/support	PC	“I asked to shadow other teachers, because I saw the relationships that they built with their kids. I saw the way they interacted, heading out on field trips, heading out to recess, going to the buses. I saw that.
	PJ	“I think maybe mentors would help a lot of it is like the case by case. So having a teacher who has been there would help.”
Background	PH	“You don't know what they experience, and you don't know what's made them like you know the way they are you know because it's like everybody has their own things.”
	PE	“The ones that do have trauma from home--I have noticed that as a teacher, I do better when I know the situation they're coming from. I was able to handle situations better because I had the background of my triggers or what to do if they are you know in a state of trauma or acting out.”
Advocacy	PC	“My students understand that I am there for them that I will advocate for them. I will be there for them throughout this year and throughout the rest of their lives.
	PE	“If a student is too late to get breakfast from the café, I think that comes down to advocating for our students. When this child came here to learn today, for me to do my job, I need something for them to eat.”
Motivation	PH	“They know that they're in a place where they're safe and loved. I have seen an increase in their academic abilities.”
	PA	“Whereas if they didn't have that relationship with me, they might not be as willing to put forth the effort to tackle hard things.”
Hunger	PB	“They come in hungry, they come in late. I try not to discourage them you know. I'll try to catch him up. One student, she always came to school you know, hungry, clothes dirty, and sleepy.”
	PF	“There are children that come into the classroom who have not slept, are hungry, and not prepared. It starts them off negative.”
Limited professional development	PA	“If it gets talked about a lot, just in general or in staff meetings, but as far as an actual professional development, that's never been an offer to me. And I've never really seen that anywhere.”
	PC	“We had some trauma training throughout school, but it's been kind of minimal. So, I did some trauma informed studies on my own just kind of doing some webinars and reading a couple of books over the summer just to kind of see where those behaviors come from.”

Next, I used axial coding to create categories from the codes in the codebook by creating another Excel spreadsheet with all open codes on separate lines. Each of the codes was printed and cut into individual slips of paper. I grouped codes together that were similar. If codes had a similar meaning, they were condensed until all the codes had been placed into categories, and these were then taped to a wall and rearranged into categories. I reviewed the codes and categories several times to ensure that each code belonged in the chosen category and that each category represented all codes assigned. From this process, I identified 10 categories. I then arranged the open codes on the spreadsheet so that each category was listed with the corresponding codes beneath it. Examples of the codes and categories are in Table 3.

Table 3*Examples of Open Codes and Categories*

Category	Code	Participant	Excerpt
Obstacles	Time	PD	“So, it's just going to take time and you're just going to have to get to know them.”
		PC	“And a lot of times it just takes time and especially for those kiddos that have not had safe examples in their life.”
	Limited professional development	PH	“I really can't say that any professional development has been targeted on teacher-student relationships.”
		PI	“I am not sure that there's been a particular PD on teacher-student relationships.”
Challenges	Students' behaviors Parents	PB	“He would leave the classroom without permission.”
		PE	“The student would destroy the classroom.”
		PG	“Parents may be working, and I can't get into much with them.”
		PJ	“You know when a parent or guardian does not like the teacher.”
External factors	School's not priority	PD	“We had lots of tardies. One student, I think, had 42 tardies.”
		PJ	“Often students will lack supplies.”
	Background	PA	“I would dig a little deeper and find out more information or maybe find out from other people that know that child.”
		PB	“I think it's important to know a little background history of the child you know.”
Support	Mentorship	PE	“We went to a teacher who did morning meeting phenomenally. We were able to be the students and participate.”
		PF	“Through sharing our experiences- what hasn't worked for you and letting everybody know what is working.”
	Administration involvement	PC	“My principal recommended a behavior intervention.”
		PF	“The student would go check in at the principal's office.”
Outcomes	Motivation	PD	“They're going to respect you to where they're going to want to do the things that we're asking of them, trying their best in school.”
		PF	“Students who are feel like they're loved, needed, wanted and believed in, they seem to want to do more for you.”
	Trust	PC	“They're getting that comfort from an adult that they can trust.”
		PI	“If there's not trust there, that's a negative teacher student relationship.”
Investment	Students' interests	PJ	“I try to get to know my students, what they're interested in.”
		PC	“We do a lot of interest surveys.”
	Time outside of instruction	PI	“Lunch with the teacher”
		PE	“Finding him at our title nights or after school activities.”
Practices	Morning meeting	PA	“Daily morning meetings.”
		PE	“I am a huge morning meeting fan.”
	Social emotional learning	PF	“We start every morning with social emotional learning.”
		PI	“We have a social emotional teacher that helps the students.”
Socioeconomic barriers	Hunger	PB	“They come in hungry.”
		PC	“They've come in hungry where they haven't had breakfast.”
	Lack of sleep	PF	“The students are sleepy.”
		PC	“I will let them sleep in the calm down corner.”
Communication	Parent connection	PJ	“Positive phone call to parents within the first two weeks.”
		PC	“We'd had multiple conferences, multiple phone calls.”
	Student connection	PE	“I've had upper grade students come back and want to talk to me.”
		PF	“Being able to talk to the children and communicate with them.”
Academic growth	Ready to learn	PE	“They're also always participating.”
		PF	“They are a more positive part of the classroom.”
	Effort	PD	“They started trying their best in school.”
		PI	“They give their best effort.”

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

After completing Phase 2, I examined the categories to identify themes. I manually printed the categories on separate slips of paper and moved them by hand on a table to form groups that contained similar meanings or characteristics and gave each group a theme name. I reviewed the themes and groups several times to ensure that each category belonged in the group and that the name assigned was an accurate reflection of the categories. From this analysis, I identified four themes: (a) teachers are frustrated by external obstacles when creating relationships with Title 1 students for many reasons, (b) teachers empathize with students' background when creating relationships with Title 1 students, (c) teachers use consistent practices and routines to promote teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, and (d) teacher-student relationships promote positive outcomes for Title 1 students. Finally, I considered and determined that the themes answered the research question.

Phase 4: Reviewing the Themes

In Phase 4, I reviewed the codes and categories to ensure they aligned with the themes. I did this using a new Excel spreadsheet to create an audit trail, making sure there were clear pathways from codes to categories to themes. Transcripts, codes, and categories were reread several times to ensure clarity and that there was enough data to support each decision and each theme.

I continued to review the transcripts to see if the themes were aligned with the data. I also reviewed the pathways of codes to categories to themes before considering and ultimately concluding that the themes answered the research question. The results of

my data analysis were sent to a peer debriefer for feedback. I chose to work with a peer debriefer to assist in a complete analysis of the data and help determine if my interpretations and findings were reasonable. The peer debriefer was a professor of statistics and familiar with research data analyses but unconnected to me or this study. Using a peer debriefer can also enhance the reliability and validity of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Through reflective dialogue, the peer debriefer assisted in the clarification and alignment of the study's themes and determined the findings to be logical and grounded in the study data.

Phase 5: Defining and Labeling Themes

In Phase 5, I defined and named the final themes. I evaluated the relevance of each theme in answering the research question and reviewed the categories to ensure that the themes were accurate representations of the categories. During the data analysis process, I did not find any discrepant cases or evidence that would contradict the findings, so further analysis was not required. Discrepant cases are data that may not align with study findings or be supported by identified themes (Merriam, 2009).

The research question for this study was: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students? The themes identified to answer the research question were (a) teachers are frustrated by external obstacles when creating relationships with Title 1 students for many reasons, (b) teachers empathize with students' background when creating relationships with Title 1 students, (c) teachers use consistent practices and routines to promote teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, and (d) teacher-student

relationships promote positive outcomes for Title 1 students. Categories and themes can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Categories and Themes

Categories	Themes
Obstacles Challenges	Teachers are frustrated by external obstacles when creating relationships with Title 1 students for many reasons.
External factors Socioeconomic barriers	Teachers empathize with students' background when creating relationships with Title 1 students.
Practices Investment Communication Support	Teachers use consistent practices and routines to promote teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.
Outcomes Academic growth	Teacher-student relationships promote positive outcomes for Title 1 students.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

The last phase was completing a summary analysis of the themes and writing about the results. Braun and Clarke (2012) emphasized that writing the report is not simply about reporting results and that the researcher should use the data analysis to provide a story about the data. After I completed data analysis, I determined that the four emergent themes answered the research question and then used them as the structure to write about the study data.

Discrepant Cases

During the data analysis process, I did not find evidence that would contradict the findings, so further analysis was not required.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research, researchers should consider (a) credibility, (b) transferability (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Ravitch & Carol, 2016).

Credibility

Credibility is the measure of confidence in research findings that are based on believable and plausible collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To address credibility for this study, I used a semistructured interview format, with follow-up questions as necessary to reach data saturation (see Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I developed a rapport with study participants to enhance the experience for complete and accurate descriptions. To establish rapport, I remained calm, friendly, and professional during all participant interactions. I continued to interview participants until saturation was reached to minimize limitations that may have occurred because of the small sample size in this study. Once interviews were complete, I reminded the participants that a two-page summary of study findings would be emailed to them after the data analysis, and that they would have 48 hours to review it and contact me with questions or comments. Member checking is an additional measure of credibility and helps to ensure that the findings reflect participants' perspectives and experiences. I did not receive any comments or questions from member checking so no further action was needed.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the point that study findings can be applied to broader contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transferability is the extent that qualitative studies can transfer to broader contexts (Burkholder et al., 2016). I provided an extensive detailed description of the data and the context. Through my thick description, readers can determine the appropriateness of transferring my findings to future research, or to make comparisons to other contexts.

Dependability

Dependability of a study represents the stability, trustworthiness, and repeatability of research findings (Burkholder et al., 2016). To address dependability, I used an interview protocol guide to increase consistency in questioning. I used data saturation, analysis of discrepant findings, peer debriefing, and member checking to confirm data accuracy. There were no comments or questions from participants, so no clarifications were needed. Data saturation was reached when continued data analysis did not add any new codes, categories, or themes. Discrepant case analysis and member checking were used to enhance validity. During the data analysis of my research, I did not find evidence that would contradict the findings, so further analysis was not required.

Confirmability

The extent to which other researchers may verify research results is called confirmability. Researcher bias may negatively affect confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Reflexivity is a strategy used to remove bias by journaling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To achieve confirmability for this study, I kept a journal to record notes regarding

my feelings, thoughts, and opinions during the entire. I also acknowledged and journaled my personal biases which can influence study findings.

Results

I explored teachers' perspectives on practices and challenges of developing positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students using a basic qualitative study with semistructured interviews. For each interview, I asked 13 interview questions (see Appendix A). The interview questions were developed using Vygotsky's sociocultural theory framework and literature review. Interview questions are outlined as follows: one, two, three, five, six, seven, eight, ten, eleven, and twelve are correlated with my research question, interview questions three and four are correlated with the conceptual framework of my study, and interview questions one, two, five, six, and nine are correlated to the literature review. During the data analysis of my research, I did not find any discrepant cases or evidence that would contradict the findings, so further analysis was not required.

Theme 1: Teachers are Frustrated by External Obstacles When Creating Relationships with Title 1 Students for Many Reasons

The participants in this study expressed frustration with external obstacles when creating relationships with Title 1 students. Participants described themselves as often overwhelmed and challenged to effectively establish positive relationships with Title 1 students. The teachers indicated that creating the teacher-student relationship was vital for school day success. However, participants noted that time and professional development needed to increase to improve effectiveness. Overall, participants expressed that students' behaviors and limited parent involvement hindered creating relationships

with Title 1 students. They explained that the obstacles and challenges made it difficult to create teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Obstacles

When asked about creating teacher-student relationships, all participants spoke about the challenges they faced when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. PC explained that time was a negative factor, “I am stressed for time.” PG asserted, “It takes a long time.” PC continued,

And so, it's like they want to tell me a story or they want to connect in a way. And I'm like, yeah, but we got to get to math groups, or we have to get to reading, or you know, the bathroom break, we had to go, it's a lot of time, it's that pressure of time. And I feel myself being shorter with them than I would like to be.

PD shared,

So, it's just going to take time and you're just going to have to get to know them. And unfortunately, it may have to be during lunch break. I will have somebody who wants to eat lunch with me just about every day. And I'll let them choose whether we eat in the cafeteria and sometimes we come back to the classroom. And eat there. And it's private. We talk, and sometimes friends do it together with me. But it's going to take time. I think that that makes a difference.

When asked about creating teacher-student relationships, all participants spoke about the limited professional development they received on creating teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. PC explained that she has participated in a lot of professional development, but “it is not on teacher student relationships.” PH asserted, “I

really can't say that any professional development has been targeted pm teacher-student relationships.” PC continued,

Professional development on teacher-student relationships has been minimal. So, I did some trauma informed studies on my own, just kind of doing some webinars and reading a couple of books over the summer just to kind of see where those behaviors come from.

PI shared,

I am not sure that there's been a particular PD on that. I think at best, it would be classroom management, PDs, but I mean, even then, that's more just teaching routine than different strategies so that kids don't get bored. I wouldn't necessarily say that there's been a PD that really focuses on relationships.

PA explained, “It requires a large amount of time and effort to put into getting to know individual students.” PJ said, “I have not participated in any professional development on developing teacher-student relationships that I can remember.” Participants expressed frustration with external obstacles when creating teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Challenges

Participants described the challenges they faced when forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students as being connected to student behaviors. PD reflected, “The students are often angry and become very aggressive.” PB reported, “The student would hit teachers and leave the classroom without permission.” PE explained, “children with trauma may be acting out.” PI described one student’s behavior when stating, “One

student had verbal and physical outbursts. She would hit me over and over again.” PJ explained, “They're obstinate. They may disrupt the rest of the learning environment of their students. Maybe attention seeking kind of behaviors and that kind of thing.”

PF indicated,

He had a wall up and he didn't want the relationship. He wanted to do what he always wanted to do. He would destroy the classroom in front of his mother and his mother was right there and he still carried on.

Participants described the challenges they faced when forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students as also being connected to limited parent involvement. PF shared, “Title 1 students’ parents aren't always involved.” PC explained, “I think it's typical that a lot of times it can be hard to reach title one parents. We don't always have the same phone number, or it hasn't been updated.” PB shared, “Sometimes Title 1 parents are offended that you are trying to help their kids maybe with extra food or clean clothes. They can become difficult to work with when they are offended.” PJ suggested, “Parents may be working, and I can't get into much with them. The lack of communication makes it hard for us to work as a team.” Participants described the challenges they faced when forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students as being connected to student behaviors.

Theme 2: Teachers Empathize With Students' Background When Creating Relationships with Title 1 Students

Participants in this study expressed their perspectives on empathizing with students' backgrounds when creating teacher-student relationships. They explained that to adequately develop teacher-student relationships, teachers need to empathize with the Title 1 students' backgrounds. Participants discussed the need for a variety of connections with students to increase empathy towards Title 2 students.

External Factors

Participants in this study discussed the need for empathy toward the lack of school being a priority for many Title 1 students. Many participants explained that parents often influenced students to not value their education or school experience. For example, PH shared, "Sometimes education just isn't valued by the guardian and that goes over into the student." PC shared, "And just knowing that those kids aren't necessarily coming in with school being their top priority." PG stated, "Title 1 students don't have the same level of respect for education as I see in other students."

Participants also explained the need to have empathy of the background of Title 1 students when developing teacher-student relationships. PE explained, "we don't know some of our title students, the background what they come from." PC shared,

If you already know it's an issue, it's easier for you to get ahead of it and say, I already know she had this issue with the student. So, kind of relating that to my kids now and seeing you know what causes the issues.

PE stated,

And I was able to handle situations better because I had the background of my triggers or what to do if they are you know in a state of trauma or acting out. So, I even reached out to the parents to see if there were some things that I could do to help to connect. But also speaking with the parents to see if they could help with the relationship. Because we all had to have to be a team.

Participants explained that since different students express themselves and their trauma differently understanding their background helps the connection.

Participants in this study explained the need for empathy when forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. They also shared that it can be more challenging to display empathy when students do not prioritize school and when background knowledge is not made available to them. Participants expressed the need for awareness for empathy.

Socioeconomic Barriers

All participants in this study discussed the implications of the socioeconomic barriers influencing teacher-student relationships and establishing empathy toward Title 1 students. Many participants explained that this was necessary because of the influence socioeconomic barriers have on the students' behavior and school readiness. For example, participants noted the influence hunger has on developing teacher-student relationships. Participants explained the need for empathy regarding hunger. PE shared,

I think that the food plays into their behavior as well. They have an empty belly, so like the teacher I always made sure that I had something for them to eat or could get them something to eat. Some Title students get their only meals from school.

PB stated, "One student was having some behavior problems and I wanted to find out what the problem was and after I talked with him some I learned that he was hungry."

Participants explained that since each student had different socioeconomic barriers it was important to be prepared for their needs, especially with food. PB also stated, "I made sure, you know, that I had what they needed." PC also noted, "I can pass them breakfast without it being obvious to everyone where we're already in class."

All participants further shared the need for empathy towards sleepy students because of socioeconomic barriers, as many Title 1 students come to school exhausted. PB said, "I allow him to take that moment to sleep. Because you never know what's going on in the home." PC stated, "I have students that will come in, just exhausted. I mean, unable to keep their head off head up right from the bus." PC continued,

They're coming in tired. I've had homeless students who don't necessarily know where they're going to sleep for the rest of the week. If you don't know where you're sleeping tonight, that's on the front of your mind. Not fractions, you just don't care about fractions when you don't know where you'll be sleeping tonight. That's going to be in the front of your mind.

PF explained, "It is a challenge when there are children that come into the classroom who have not slept. They've played video games all night long. Their parents want to be there for their children, but if they're working the night shift and their child is with the babysitter or with the grandma, you know, it makes it difficult to make sure the child is asleep and are ready for school the next day." PH shared, "Some of my first-grade Title 1 students are exhausted during the school day because they were taking care

of their younger siblings during the night.” Lack of food and lack of sleep are some of the challenges the students are facing and empathy is vital for establishing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Theme 3: Teachers use Consistent Practices and Routines to Promote Teacher-Student Relationships With Title 1 Students

Participants revealed many practices and routines that promote positive teacher-student relationships when applied consistently. They shared that despite challenges there have been practices that have supported establishing positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Participants revealed that practices, investment, communication, and support all played a role in establishing positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Practices

When asked about practices for establishing teacher-student relationships, the participants expressed the importance of a morning meeting. PE stated, “We try and use our morning meeting time to get to know everybody to build those relationships amongst each other. So, then the relationship is not just with me as the teacher, the relationship is also with the students each student together.” PG expressed,

So each morning I have a morning meeting with students, and we do an attendance question and that's just a way to kind of gauge how my students are feeling that morning and if we need to have a separate conversation about something that's going on and get to know them a little bit better.

PA described,

One of the most powerful things I think I do is daily morning meetings, and those morning meetings facilitate positive relationships because all students take part. All students are invested in that. They look forward to it. It's a routine that happens every single day, no matter what first thing, it sets the tone of our day, and it's an opportunity for students to view to give their opinions about things, to solve problems together, and to get to know each other as a class that really builds community.

The participants also discussed the need for social emotional learning. PF stated, "We start every morning with social emotional learning." PC stated, "Many Title 1 students don't always have those regulation skills already." PC continued, "We practice a lot of how to regulate and how to calm down. We practice using the calm down corner and different tools throughout the classroom to help teach students to regulate themselves." PD shared what she tells her students. PD stated,

Your job is whenever you feel angry, you just come give me a hug. That's what you're supposed to do. We will handle everything else. You just come give me a hug. We're going to sit here. We're going to calm down. And then we can move forward.

Investment

Several participants expressed their opinions regarding the need to invest in students' interests. PC mentioned, "We do a lot of interest surveys and that kind of thing at the beginning of the year to help get to know the students." PE also stated, "I sent home beginning of the year questionnaires to parents to help me get to know the students

better.” PG reinforced the need to learn students’ interests: “And then I also send home at the beginning of the year or when a new student starts a letter about anything that they're interested in.” PG continued, “I have one student last year who was all interested in trains. And so I found as many books as I could about trains, and I've tried to incorporate them.” PJ described, “I just try to get to know them early on by noticing you know, well, what's on their T-shirt as simple as that. If they are wearing Mario and trying to relate to them through that.” PC continued:

So just trying to pull him to the side and talk about anything nonacademic, just what are you doing at home you know? Are you playing these sports? What kind of games are you playing? More of a gamer. So, what kind of games are you playing? Oh, that's really cool. I played that one time and just tried to build that relationship.

Many participants also described investing in students outside of the classroom. PG said, “that I can maybe show up and show that I support them even outside of school.” PD described, “You're going to have to figure out what ticks for each child because there may be some kids that don't want to eat lunch with me, but at recess they are right by my side.” PC stated:

“So, if they have a game or sometimes it's a game, sometimes it's a birthday party, sometimes it's we want to go to the park. Can you come? And so, you know I have my own babies. So, it doesn't always work out, but I try at the beginning of the year to send home a form where they fill out a time that you know something

special or an event that they have going on. So that I can attend something like that throughout the year. And then I just kind of send reminders through the year.”

PE revealed, “I spent time with him at recess or finding him at our title nights or after school activities to try and make an out of the building connection.”

Communication

All of the participants valued communication as an important practice when establishing teacher-student relationship with Title 1 students, which included student and parent connections. When PA spoke of the connections she makes with students, she stated, “We communicate about things other than just school throughout the day.” PE explained, “taking time with them to discuss some of those things to kind of build that rapport with them.” PF emphasized the importance of, “Being able to talk to the children and communicate with them in a way that they understand what the needs are in the classroom.” PG stated,

Title 1 students must be comfortable talking to each other and expressing concerns and understanding that somebody is there to support them. So, I'm going to learn as much as I can about baseball so we can have that conversation. Then if we need to have a separate conversation about something that's going on and get to know them a little bit better.

Participants emphasized the need to connect to Title 1 students on their level. PC described, “So, a lot of that is just getting on their level and proving that to them every day. I am a safe adult. I am here for you. This is what a safe adult looks like. You have

me, you can trust me.” PG similarly noted, “I get on their level when I talk to them.” PJ stated,

I definitely try to get to know my students, what they're interested in, what they like to do outside of the classroom. You know, what do they do at home? Do they play sport? Do they listen to music? You know, just connecting with them on a different level.

Participants also expressed the importance of making connections with Title 1 students' parents. PC stated, “I make sure that they know I'm reachable. So, if they reach out on dojo, I'm going to respond back to them.” PJ stated,

I contact every parent within the first 2 weeks. I send positive notes home to their parents. I send pictures throughout the day because then that kid feels like, oh, this teacher notices me and to help the parents feel connected to our classroom.

PC continued, “And I talked to mom multiple times. We've had multiple conferences, multiple phone calls. We talked in the morning. We talked in the afternoon.” Participants shared the importance of connecting with parents to support connections with students.

PE stated, “But also speaking with the parents to see if they could help with the relationship. Because we all have to be a team.”

Support

Participants revealed mentorship with other teachers as a method to support positive teacher-relationships. PC shared, “I asked to shadow other teachers, because I saw the relationships that they built with their kids. I saw the way they interacted,

heading out on field trips, heading out to recess, going to the buses. I saw that.” PE responded,

We actually went to observe a teacher who did a good morning meeting. And we were able to be the students and participate in the morning meeting and she was the teacher. And actually, that was my turning point with morning meeting. When I sat down, and I got to do it with them and have her lead it from another person on my level.

PF described, “sharing our experiences, getting maybe having little PLs on shared experiences, what's worked for you, what hasn't worked for you and letting everybody know what is working and sharing those?” PJ explained, “I think maybe mentors, you know, a lot of it is like the case by case. So having a teacher who has been there.”

Participants in this study also expressed the need for administration involvement for support to develop teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. PF described, “Removing her from the situation did eventually help. She would sometimes go to another class, or she went to the principal's office and sat with her.” PI described, “Have administration sit in your room and actually experience your job. Yeah. So that they could see the barriers or challenges that you face and provide specific support.” PC shared an experience with administration support by stating, “My principal recommended a behavior intervention.” PF continued, “The student would go check in at the principal’s office.”

Theme 4: Teacher-Student Relationships Promote Positive Outcomes for Title 1

Students

Participants expressed positive outcomes because of teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. They specifically noted the beneficial outcomes as motivation and trust.

Outcomes

Many participants explained motivation as a positive outcome of teacher-student relationships. PC stated, “The students tried hard things because someone has believed in them and now they know they can do it.” PD explained, “they're going to respect you to where they're going to want to do the things that we're asking of them, trying their best in school.” PF stated, “Students were more apt to want to please me and to do what needs to be done in the classroom.” PF continued, “Students who are feel like they're loved and needed and wanted and believed in, they seem to want to do more for you and do more for their parents.” PB stated, “I say more incentive for students to believe that you're trying to help them and once they feel comfortable in that situation, then no matter what you do, they're all on your side.” PJ stated, “So they want to show you that, hey, I can do this!” PI also stated, “The students want to behave this way for you because they know that's what you would want.

Many participants also indicated trust as a positive outcome of teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. PA revealed, “It brings a certain comfort level in a certain trust level with those students.” PC stated, “I think a lot of it comes down to trust. They're getting that comfort from an adult that they can trust. And I've seen that make a

big difference.” PD also explained, “someone that they can trust and someone that they like. It makes a better environment for all.” PI revealed, “If there's not trust there, that's a negative teacher student relationship.”

Academic Growth

When asked about the outcome of positive teacher student relationships, teachers identified academic growth through students being ready to learn and students' effort. Participants described Title students eager to learn because of the environment created by positive teacher-student relationships. PE explained,

You're building that relationship through that as well with the academics. I think it's also important that in the classroom, students feel needed and important. So having the responsibilities and roles and jobs in the classroom, I think that that helps them feel a part of the family that we are creating.

PF explained, “They just want to be a more positive part of the classroom.” PG described students as ready to learn as, “Those students are typically more encouraged to do what they're asked, and they're more willing to do what they're asked. They are kinder towards their friends. And more respectful of adults and other authority in the building as well.” PH stated, “My classroom runs smoothly and therefore it optimizes our instructional time and we're not having to spend a lot of time on you know.” PA stated, “They get excited about being there and then usually as a part of that, they want to learn, and they learn more.”

Participants described the academic growth outcomes because of students' effort. PB explained, “So once the student feels that you can help them, then they're more apt to

allow you to help them, or to reach out and let you know some of the things that's going on with them.” PC described,

The way that I talked to them in the way that excited them, and I would listen to them, it made a massive difference for how they wanted to then go off and write and go do the things that I was asking.

PD explained,

She didn't go to the celebration because she didn't earn the points because she missed so much class time and didn't earn enough points. And so that became a conversation that you know she said she had with her mom. So, she could get there on time. And it worked you know. She started coming to school on time!”

PI stated, “They give their best effort and usually are very respectful.” PJ stated, “They're willing to work together. And the student is willing to try and go outside of their comfort zone. In order to learn and do their best.” PA noted,

I really believe that if they care about you and they trust you, they work hard for you. Whereas if they didn't have that relationship with me. They might not be as willing to put forth the effort to tackle hard things.

Summary

This study was designed based on the research question to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. In Chapter 4, I reviewed the data analysis of this study. I described the setting and data collection for this basic qualitative study which

was conducted using semistructured interviews for all 10 participants. I described the data analysis procedure I used for qualitative data analysis.

The first theme was that teachers are frustrated by external obstacles when creating relationships with Title 1 students for many reasons. All participants described the importance of creating teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Nine participants described the frustration they experience because of external obstacles when creating teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students for many reasons. All participants discussed the time needed to establish teacher-student relationships. The participants indicated that they had received limited professional development focused on creating teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Participants expressed challenges when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Some participants described students' behaviors as a challenge and other participants explained that Title 1 parents can be a challenge.

The second theme was that teachers empathize with students' background when creating relationships with Title 1 students. All participants in this study discussed the importance of understanding Title 1 students to express empathy. Many participants explained that it is important to understand that school is not a priority for many Title 1 students. Participants also explained the need to understand the students' backgrounds. Participants shared the socioeconomic barriers that influence Title 1 students such as hunger and lack of sleep.

The third theme was that teachers use consistent practices and routines to promote teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. When asked about practices and

routines, participants expressed the importance of morning meetings and social emotional learning as methods to promote teacher-student relationships. Several participants expressed their opinions regarding investing in students through students' interests and investing time out with students outside of instruction. Participants also expressed the need for communication through students and parent connections. Participants indicated a need for support when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students through mentorship with other teachers and administration involvement.

The fourth and final theme was that teacher-student relationships promote positive outcomes for Title 1 students. Many participants explained the positive outcomes that occur because of positive teacher-student relationships such as students' motivation and trust between the teacher and the student. Participants also explained the academic growth that results from positive teacher-student relationships because students are ready to learn, and students put forth effort toward academic achievement.

In the chapter, I also explained the processes of addressing the trustworthiness of this study. I described credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through member checking, development of a rapport with participants, journaling, peer debriefing, data saturation, and using quotes from interviews to establish trustworthiness. During the data analysis of my research, I did not find evidence that would contradict the findings, so further analysis was not required.

In Chapter 5, I will interpret the findings and describe the limitations, recommendations, and implications of this study. An analysis of the results for each theme is given with an explanation of how it is aligned with the research question and the

peer reviewed literature included in Chapter 2. I include a description of limitations and recommendations for addressing the limitations in detail. I also will explain topics for further research, opportunities for social change, study implications, and provide a conclusion for this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I gathered data through semistructured interviews over Zoom or the telephone with 10 participants who were certified early childhood teachers with at least 2 years of experience teaching preschool through first grade in Title 1 schools. Four themes emerged from data analysis: (a) teachers are frustrated by external obstacles when creating relationships with Title 1 students for many reasons, (b) teachers empathize with students' background when creating relationships with Title 1 students, (c) teachers use consistent practices and routines to promote teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, and (d) teacher-student relationships promote positive outcomes for Title 1 students.

In Chapter 5, I explain the findings of this study and describe early childhood teachers' perspectives on practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to frame the research findings and compare conclusions with current literature. The implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are also provided. I conclude the chapter with my reflections on this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

I began data collection after receiving approval from the Walden University IRB to do so. I used Walden's Participant Pool and snowball sampling strategies to recruit 10 participants for semistructured, one-on-one interviews. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006)

six-phase framework for the analysis of data. Four themes emerged from data analysis that directly connected to the conceptual framework. To examine the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, I used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was used as the conceptual framework to better understand teachers' perspectives. According to the conceptual framework, cognitive development in children is increased through adult interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

Theme 1: Teachers are Frustrated by External Obstacles When Creating Relationships With Title 1 Students for Many Reasons

Researchers have concluded that teachers are challenged to develop teacher-student relationships (Post et al., 2020). This is consistent with the findings of the current study. Participants in this study described themselves as frustrated by external obstacles when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students for many reasons. PF explained,

He had a wall up and he didn't want the relationship. He wanted to do what he always wanted to do. He would destroy the classroom in front of his mother and his mother was right there and he still carried on.

Participants also described the behaviors of Title 1 students as challenging. They explained that many Title 1 students are angry and often aggressive. PJ expressed, "They're obstinate. They may disrupt the rest of the learning environment of their students. Maybe attention seeking kind of behaviors and that kind of thing."

Many conflicts in the classroom appear in the form of not being able to manage emotions or not getting along with peers (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Teachers are

challenged by these behavioral conflicts when developing teacher-student relationships. Teachers rate their relationships with students who exhibit disruptive, challenging, and externalizing behavior as being higher in conflict, and they identify these students as more difficult to teach (Bayly & Bierman, 2022; Horn et al., 2021; Loomis et al., 2023; Post et al., 2020). These challenging behaviors frustrate teachers when they are creating relationships with Title 1 students. Children's behavior problems may cause tension in discussions and relationships between parents and teachers (Pertell et al., 2022). The negative effects of the poor-quality teacher-student relationship influence teacher and parent relationships, not just the teacher and the student relationships.

Parents in low socioeconomic situations often have lower levels of education, are engaged in less parent-teacher contact, are less involved in school, and have lower quality parent-teacher relationships when their children are in prekindergarten, kindergarten and first grade (Pertell et al., 2022). The participants in the current study expressed similar challenges regarding the parents of their Title 1 students, like not being able to contact them or the parents not valuing education. Participants also described the challenges they faced as limited parent involvement. PF shared, "Title 1 students' parents aren't always involved." PC explained, "I think it's typical that a lot of times it can be hard to reach Title 1 parents. We don't always have the same phone number, or it hasn't been updated."

Often teachers need professional development that is focused on strategies and interventions to promote positive teacher-student relationships. Liu et al. (2022) stated that there are evidence-based strategies to deal with challenging behavior, and

professional development would be effective in teaching the teachers strategies to decrease challenging behavior. However, all participants in the current study indicated that professional development on teacher-student relationships was limited. PI explained,

I am not sure that there's been a particular PD [professional development] on that. I think at best, it would be classroom management, PDs, but I mean, even then, that's more just teaching routine than different strategies so that kids don't get bored. I wouldn't necessarily say that there's been a PD that really focuses on relationships.

Participants shared their frustrations when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. They provided examples of challenges that influenced their frustration toward developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Working with children from communities affected by poverty is challenging for teachers, particularly in relation to conflict resolution and continued professional development is important (Bayly & Bierman, 2022; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Post et al., 2020; Wink et al., 2021). Relationships where conflict occurs frequently are consistently linked to poorer academic, social emotional, and behavioral outcomes (Liu et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2023). Professional development focused on conflict resolution would support limiting these negative consequences.

Theme 2: Teachers Empathize With Students' Background When Creating Relationships With Title 1 Students

The U.S. Department of Education (2018) defined Title I schools as those whose student population comprises 40% or more children from low-income families, calculated

based upon the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Families living in poverty have limited financial and educational resources, crowded living conditions, family instability, and limited access to high-quality early education programs (Barnett et al., 2020; Bierman et al., 2021). Students who are considered Title 1 experience socioeconomic barriers that influence their school experience. This is consistent with the findings of the current study. Participants in this study described the socioeconomic barriers that many Title 1 students face as hunger and limited sleep. PC explained,

They're coming in tired. I've had homeless students who don't necessarily know where they're going to sleep for the rest of the week. If you don't know where you're sleeping tonight, that's on the front of your mind. Not fractions, you just don't care about fractions when you don't know where you'll be sleeping tonight. That's going to be in the front of your mind.

Participants explained the importance of understanding a students' background to support their ability to make connections through empathy. PE expressed,

And I was able to handle situations better because I had the background of my triggers or what to do if they are you know in a state of trauma or acting out. So, I even reached out to the parents to see if there were some things that I could do to help to connect. But also speaking with the parents to see if they could help with the relationship. Because we all had to have to be a team.

Participants explained that since different students express themselves and their trauma differently, understanding their background helps the connection. Children who grow up in poverty often are not prepared academically or socially for school settings

(Bierman et al., 2021; McGuire & Meadan, 2022; Moen et al., 2019). Participants stressed the importance of having empathy towards Title 1 students. As children in poverty experience empathic understanding, they may increase their esteem and self-actualization needs, which supports the need for an empathetic teacher-student relationship (see Bierman et al., 2021). The participants in the current study expressed connecting with Title 1 students and their families with empathy supports establishing more positive teacher-student relationships. Wink et al., (2021) reported that teachers need the ability to empathize with students' backgrounds when students are challenged to develop teacher-student relationships and when students are challenged to follow school and classroom expectations. PB stated, "I made sure, you know, that I had what they needed." PC also stated, "I can pass them breakfast without it being obvious to everyone where we're already in class."

The teachers' perception of a student affects the teacher-student relationship. When a teacher empathizes with Title 1 students' backgrounds, they are more likely to perceive the student with empathy and the teacher-student relationship is more likely to be positive. When asked about connecting with students, participants stressed the importance of understanding the Title 1 student, which included the students' background information. PE stated, "We don't know some of our title students, the background what they come from." These findings are consistent with current research teachers empathizing with students' backgrounds when creating relationships with Title 1 students. McGuire and Meadan, (2022) argued that is important for teachers to have a good understanding of who their students are so that they can understand and manage the

social dynamics of the classroom environment. The teacher's awareness of and responsiveness to students' academic and emotional needs supports the students' ability to grow and learn because the teacher consistently provides comfort and encouragement (Tilbe & Gai, 2022). Participants in the current study shared that they believed their empathy towards Title 1 students strengthened their ability to develop teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Theme 3: Teachers use Consistent Practices and Routines to Promote Teacher-Student Relationships With Title 1 Students

Participants indicated the need for consistent practices and routines when promoting teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Yang et al. (2022) stated that children spend a significant amount of time with the teachers in their classrooms. As a result of the extended amount of time the teacher and student spend together, the teacher has a great influence on the students' development and skills. PA explained,

One of the most powerful things I think I do is daily morning meetings, and those morning meetings facilitate positive relationships because all students take part. All students are invested in that. They look forward to it. It's a routine that happens every single day, no matter what first thing, it sets the tone of our day, and it's an opportunity for students to view to give their opinions about things, to solve problems together, and to get to know each other as a class that really builds community.

Participants also described the social emotional learning that occurs with consistent practices and routines. They explained that students learn regulation skills and

coping skills that support their emotional needs. PC explained, “We practice a lot of how to regulate and how to calm down. We practice using the calm down corner and different tools throughout the classroom to help teach students to regulate themselves.” Tilbe and Gai (2022) stated that as teachers and children engage in responsive interactions occurring in small groups or one-on-one, children can learn important skills of self-regulation, empathy, and problem solving. Stahl (2022) stressed how positive school experiences, such as emotional attachment, sense of belonging, and relationships with teachers, are vital for disadvantaged populations.

Children who experience high-quality relationships during early education develop improved social-behavioral skills, self-regulation, and academic outcomes (Chen et al., 2021; Dolev et al., 2023; Marks et al., 2023; Moen et al., 2019). The participants in the current study expressed similar outcomes. When asked about their perspectives regarding positive outcomes of teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, participants named several positive outcomes for their students, including students being more motivated and displaying increased efforts toward their academic coursework. Participants shared various pieces of evidence that supported teacher-student relationships promoting positive outcomes for Title 1 students.

Wang and Chen (2022) indicated that teacher-student relationships are formed through two levels: the dyadic level and the classroom level. The dyadic levels refer to the quality of the relationship between the teacher and individual students, while the classroom level refers to practices and routines that the teacher organizes and instructs in the classroom community. Children who experience high-quality relationships during

early education develop improved social-behavior skills, self-regulation, and academic outcome (Chen et al., 2021; Dolev et al., 2023; Marks et al., 2023; Moen et al., 2019).

The current study findings support this conclusion. All participants in this study explained the importance of connecting with students and their interests. PJ explained, “I just try to get to know them early on by noticing you know, well, what’s on their t-shirt as simple as that. If they are wearing Mario and trying to relate to them through that.”

Participants shared various practices and routines they have established in their classroom, such as morning meetings and social-emotional-learning instruction, to strengthen connections between the students and the teacher. They shared examples of strategies that they have used to promote positive teacher-student relationships like communication with students and parents. Teachers create learning environments in which children feel supported to engage with their teachers, peers, and classroom tasks (Lu et al., 2023; Tilbe & Gai, 2022). Halladay et al. (2022) found that quality and responsive teacher-student relationships resulted in improved social-emotional development in students. When asked about practices for establishing teacher-student relationships, the current study participants also discussed the need for social emotional learning. PF stated, “We start every morning with social emotional learning.” PC stated, “Many Title 1 students don’t always have those regulation skills already.” PC continued, “We practice a lot of how to regulate and how to calm down. We practice using the calm down corner and different tools throughout the classroom to help teach students to regulate themselves.”

Teachers tend to report more conflict, lower-self regulation, and lower academic achievement for children living in poverty as compared to their more fortunate peers (Bayly & Biermann, 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Horn et al., 2021; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; Sutherland et al., 2020). Many participants in the current study stressed the need for support from mentor teachers and administration when establishing routines and practices for developing teacher-student relationships Title 1 students. PF described, “sharing our experiences, getting maybe having little PLs on shared experiences, what’s worked for you, what hasn’t worked for you and letting everybody know what is working and sharing those?” Participants shared that they believe they need support in promoting positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. These findings are consistent with current research regarding teachers needing support that is focused on strategies and interventions for promoting positive habits in the classroom and school that are targeted toward supporting teachers in promoting teacher-student relationships (see Barnett & Cho, 2023).

Theme 4: Teacher-Student Relationships Promote Positive Outcomes for Title 1 Students

Researchers have concluded that teacher-student relationships are an essential component in the successful gains of students (Saracho, 2017). Many positive outcomes stem from the experiences and interactions in teacher-student relationships (McLeod, 2019). This is consistent with the findings of the current study. Participants described their confidence in the benefits of teacher-student relationships. PA explained, “Teacher-student relationships are the key to academic achievement and development.”

Participants also described the positive outcomes of teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, explaining that trust was a positive outcome that was often a result of teacher-student relationships. PC expressed, “I think a lot of it comes down to trust. They’re getting that comfort from an adult that they can trust. And I’ve seen that make a big difference.” Stahl (2022) stated how important it is to establish trust in teacher-student relationships in disadvantaged areas. Participants in the current study shared that they perceived teacher-student relationships as effective in supporting trust among Title 1 students.

Children who experience high-quality relationships during early education develop improved social-behavioral skills, self-regulation, and academic outcomes (Chen et al., 2021; Dolev et al., 2023; Marks et al., 2023; Moen et al., 2019). Lu et al. (2023) described a connection between teacher closeness with students and increased student motivation toward schoolwork. The participants in my study expressed similar outcomes. When asked about their perspectives regarding positive outcomes of teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, participants named several positive outcomes for their students. They explained that students were more motivated and displayed increased efforts toward their academic coursework.

High-quality interactions between children and adults are the primary method used to promote developmental gains (Egert et al., 2020; Romo-Escudero et al., 2021). In the early childhood setting, these interactions are referred to as teacher-student relationships. The ways that teachers establish positive teacher-student relationships with students results in many positive outcomes including developmental gains (Chen et al.,

2021; Dolev et al., 2023; Marks et al., 2023; Moen et al., 2019). Liu et al. (2022) concluded that positive teacher-student relationships accelerate fundamental cognitive and social skills. The current study findings support this conclusion. All participants in this study referenced the ways that teacher-student relationships promoted positive outcomes for Title 1 students. PA explained,

I really believe that if they care about you and they trust you, they work hard for you. Whereas if they didn't have that relationship with me. They might not be as willing to put forth the effort to tackle hard things.

Participants shared various positive outcomes that resulted from teacher-student relationships. They shared examples of outcomes that influenced students and their attitudes academics, instruction, and school and classroom communities. When students feel teachers care about them, they work harder, participate in more challenging expectations, follow classroom, and school rules, and meet or exceed their teachers' expectations (Dolev et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022). Gallo et al. (2022) indicated that students who perceive their relationship with their teacher as characterized by a high level of closeness tend to display fewer externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. Participants mentioned that students are more motivated to increase their effort on classwork and participation during instruction. Virat et al. (2023) also made connection to teacher-student relationships and students' attitudes toward school authority or towards the law. Participants indicated that students were more likely to follow classroom and school rules when a positive teacher-student relationship had been established.

Students are more motivated to learn when they have positive relationships with their teachers resulting in higher student achievement (Dolev et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022; Margo et al., 2022; Moen et al., 2019; Olsen & Hung, 2021). When asked about the results of positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, most participants reported increased motivation and effort that lead to increased school readiness. PJ stated, “They're willing to work together. And the student is willing to try and go outside of their comfort zone. In order to learn and do their best.” These findings are consistent with current research regarding teacher-student relationships being an essential component in successful gains for increasing development in children (Saracho, 2017). Participants shared that they believed their focus on promoting teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students resulted in positive outcomes for students including readiness for learning. Many teachers reported that having good relationships with students helps to avoid disruptive behavior inside the classroom and school building (Al Shebli, 2022).

The Findings’ Relationship With the Conceptual Framework

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory consists of one construct: the social constructivist learning process. This construct indicates that knowledge develops from individuals’ interactions with their culture and society (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, the teacher-student is important in a social constructivist setting for effective language use and development of the student. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory states that learning occurs within the ZPD. The ZPD is the distance between the independent development level and the level of potential development based on the support of mentors such as adults or peers. Participants in this study expressed feelings and

experiences on the influence teacher-student relationships have on the development of children. PB explained, “So once the student feels that you can help them, then they're more apt to allow you to help them, or to reach out and let you know some of the things that's going on with them.” Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory supports the development of higher psychological functions and was used to explore early childhood teachers’ perspectives on forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

This theory has a focus on a students’ achievement abilities, the areas in which a child needs assistance, and modeling from a mentor such as a teacher to help the student reach their potential intellectual level (Saracho, 2017). Participants in this study shared their perspectives on the positive outcomes of teacher-student relationships on academic achievement. Some participants found effort and motivation toward academic instruction to increase. PI stated, “They give their best effort and usually are very respectful.”

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory helped to interpret the relationships between the adult-child relationship and the teacher-student relationship. Participants in this study recognized the importance placed on the teacher for establishing positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students, despite the challenges. They noted that the positive outcomes influence the development and academic achievement of students.

Participants described Title students eager to learn because of the environment created by positive teacher-student relationships. PE explained,

You’re building that relationship through that as well with the academics. I think it's also important that in the classroom, students feel needed and important. So

having the responsibilities and roles and jobs in the classroom, I think that that helps them feel a part of the family that we are creating.

PF explained, “They just want to be a more positive part of the classroom.” PH stated, “My classroom runs smoothly and therefore it optimizes our instructional time and we're not having to spend a lot of time on you know.” PG described, “Those students are typically more encouraged to do what they're asked, and they're more willing to do what they're asked. They are kinder towards their friends. And more respectful of adults and other authority in the building as well.”

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory has been used by researchers to better understand how cognitive development in children is increased through adult interaction. Researchers have used Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory as a research framework to examine the influence adult-like mentors have on the development of children (Saracho, 2017). The findings of this study support the use of examining the teachers’ influence on academic and developmental growth through developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Limitations of the Study

There were two limitations to this study. These included researcher bias and small sample size. To address the limitation of researcher bias, which can affect data analysis (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016), I kept notes regarding my feelings and thoughts throughout the data collection process. I consistently acknowledged my feelings, opinions, and prejudices when recording and analyzing data and I kept a reflective journal. I used member checking to ensure that the findings reflected participants’ perspectives and

experiences. I also used data saturation, analysis of discrepant findings, and discussed findings with a peer debriefer to confirm data accuracy. No discrepant data were found.

The first limitation of this basic qualitative study was my own biases. As a current Title 1 early childhood teacher, I have firsthand experience with forming teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I used a reflective journal that helped me to identify my own biases. Reflexivity requires the researcher to constantly check their position and subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used a reflective journal to write my thoughts as I went through each process of the study data collection and analysis (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). I did not allow my thoughts and perspectives to interfere with the objectives of the study.

A second limitation was a small sample size of teachers and finding enough participants to share their perspectives on developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I overcame this limitation by providing a variety of days and times to schedule interviews and by conducting virtual interviews. The sample size should be large enough to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest and address the research question by attaining saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Due to the workload of early childhood teachers with Title 1 students, participants may not have been interested in participating in this study. Information about the necessary time required to participate in the study was provided to each potential participant so they could decide whether to willingly participate in the study.

Recommendations

Results from this study may add to the research regarding teachers' perspectives of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Future research may build on the findings of this study. The first recommendation for future research is to study the frustrations teachers have when developing teacher-student relationships. There is a lack of professional development in developing teacher-student relationships. Professional development is needed to improve teachers' approaches on developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students (Bayly & Bierman, 2022; Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020; McGuire & Meadan, 2022; Post et al., 2020; Richards et al., 2020; Theisen-Homer, 2021; Wink et al., 2021). McGuire and Meadan (2022) explained the importance of professional development in establishing teacher-student relationships. Participants in this study described the importance of professional development, but suggested they needed additional professional development that was more applicable to establishing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Studies exploring a better understanding of training effectiveness may help to ensure that professional development opportunities are helping teachers improve their practices when establishing teacher-student relationship with Title 1 students.

The second recommendation is to explore the backgrounds of Title 1 students to support establishing feelings of empathy. To be effective, teachers need empathy to understand the external factors and socioeconomic barriers that influence Title 1 students (Wink et al., 2021). Participants in this study reported that understanding each students' background supported them when creating teacher-student relationships with Title 1

students because they felt empathy towards the students, their families, and their situations. Research to explore ways to provide additional background knowledge on students may support the teacher in better understanding the students and making connections with them.

A third recommendation for future research includes studies to explore teachers' practices and routines that are targeted toward promoting teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Participants in this study discussed their challenges to establish teacher-student relationships with Title 1 student. Providing access to varied types of practices and routines may support teachers in establishing these more challenging teacher-student relationships. A better understanding of teachers' perspectives and experiences may help explain what practices and routines are most effective in supporting the development of teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

The final recommendation is that further research be conducted on the positive outcomes of positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Most study participants reported positive outcomes because of the teacher-student relationship, yet they are challenged to establish teacher-student relationships with all students specifically some Title 1 students. A study considering the positive outcomes of teacher-student relationships may promote more focus on the importance of establishing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Implications

There are several implications for this study that contribute to positive social change. This study may contribute to positive social change by providing early childhood

teachers with insights on other teachers' experiences, successes, and difficulties when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Study findings may provide information to teachers who want to improve their practices when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Another implication for positive social change would be providing administrators and professional development writers with the findings so they may better equip and support teachers when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. When school leaders have a better understanding of teachers' perspectives, providing appropriate support may be improved. School administrators may also use these findings to provide more effective coaching and professional development.

Study findings indicated that participants expressed the importance of teacher-student relationships yet described professional development on the topic as limited. The implications of this study may encourage professional development writers to build on the practices used to promote positive teacher-student relationships. For example, since positive teacher-student relationships were beneficial, professional development writers may use this study to increase the focus on developing professional development on the practice of establishing teacher-student relationships. Positive social change may occur if professional development writers continue to build on the practices used to promote positive teacher-student relationships, which may reduce frustration for teachers when developing these relationships with Title 1 students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood teachers' perspectives of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Research exists on teacher-student relationships, but a study to investigate the perspectives of teachers' perspectives and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students was needed. The results of this study demonstrated participants' frustration with developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students due to obstacles and challenges such as time and students' behaviors. Participants explained the importance of empathizing with Title 1 students by considering their background and socioeconomic barriers. Study findings also demonstrated the use of consistent practices and routines to promote teacher-student relationships like communication, support, morning meetings, and more. Participants described the positive outcomes of teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students as being motivation, trust, effort, and students' being ready to learn. The results of my study helped to explain the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

Establishing positive teacher-student relationships is encouraged, but teachers are often not given practices to support them when establishing teacher-student relationships are challenging with Title 1 students. Despite the known benefits of teacher-student relationships, teachers do not always have practices for establishing teacher-student relationships when it is challenging (Bayly & Bierman, 2022; Horn et al., 2021; Loomis et al., 2023; Post et al., 2020). Numerous studies have been conducted across the world to

investigate teacher practices and ways to improve the teacher-student relationships. It is my hope that this study will lead to a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives on the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students and inspire further research to increase and improve teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Teacher-student relationships are not just beneficial, they are also a crucial element in providing students with the connections they need to be successful developmentally and academically.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol Guide

Interviewee: _____
 Date: _____ Time: _____
 School: _____ Grade level: _____

Several studies provided data to show there is a gap between developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students and students who are not considered Title 1. Gaining an understanding of practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students will help to narrow the gap of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing early childhood teachers with information they might apply when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students and by providing administrators and professional development writers with the findings so they may better equip and support teachers when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. The results of this study may contain information that could benefit students, teachers, administration, and professional development writers. My goal is to explore practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students.

You meet the criteria as someone who has experiences of the practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. Your participation in this interview is important and voluntary. This means that I will respect your decision about whether you want to participate or do not participate. If you decide to participate now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal. I do not intend to inflict any harm. This audio only recorded interview is scheduled to last about 45 to 60 minutes.

Introduction and Background Information: Thank you for volunteering to share your insights and experiences concerning practices and challenges of developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students. I would like to begin by asking you some background questions to get to know you better.

A. Participant's Background

How long have you been teaching with Title 1 students? _____

What is your highest level of education? _____

B. Interview Questions

1. How are Title 1 students different from other students in your classroom who are not Title 1 students?
2. How do you define positive teacher-student relationships?
3. How would you define negative teacher-student relationships?

4. How would you describe the behaviors of Title 1 students when there is a negative teacher-student relationship?
5. What practices do you use in your classroom to promote positive teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students?
6. How would you describe your influence on your Title 1 students as a result of the teacher-student relationships established in your classroom?
7. As a result of your positive teacher-student relationship, how would you define the behaviors of your Title 1 students?
8. What challenges do you experience when developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students?
9. What specific professional development opportunities have you participated in that support positive teacher-student relationships?
10. What do you believe might assist you and other teachers in improving your relationships with Title 1 students?
11. Please share an example of a time when you attempted to establish a positive teacher-student relationship with a Title 1 student, but it did not work.
12. What did you do when you are unable to establish a positive teacher-student relationship with a Title 1 student?
13. Is there any additional information that you would like to share regarding developing teacher-student relationships with Title 1 students?

Possible follow up prompts that I will keep visible as I interview each participant:

What did you mean by.....?

Tell me more about.....

You mentioned.....

What do you mean by.....?

Please give me an example of when that.... worked/did not work.