



اسم مشتق من الذكوة وهي الجمرة الملتهبة والمراد
بالذكوات الربوات البيض الصغيرة الخيطة بمقام أمير
المؤمنين علي بن أبي طالب {عليه السلام}
شبهها لضيائها وتوهجها عند شروق الشمس عليها لما فيها
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من الدراري المضيئة

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السهلة وموضع خلوته الذكوات البيض

تُعَدُّ مجلة الذكوات البيض مجلة علمية رصينة ومعتمدة للتحقيقات العلمية.



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مَجَلَّةٌ عِلْمِيَّةٌ فِكْرِيَّةٌ فَصْلِيَّةٌ مُحْكَمَةٌ تَصْدُرُ عَنْ
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العدد (١٦) السنة الثالثة ربيع الأول ١٤٤٦ هـ - أيلول ٢٠٢٥ م

..... دليل المؤلف

- ١- أن يتسم البحث بالأصالة والجدة والقيمة العلمية والمعرفية الكبيرة وسلامة اللغة ودقة التوثيق.
- ٢- أن تحتوي الصفحة الأولى من البحث على:
أ. عنوان البحث باللغة العربية .
ب. اسم الباحث باللغة العربي، ودرجته العلمية وشهادته.
ت. بريد الباحث الإلكتروني.
ث. ملخصان: أحدهما باللغة العربية والآخر باللغة الإنكليزية.
ج. تدرج مفاتيح الكلمات باللغة العربية بعد الملخص العربي.
- ٣- أن يكون مطبوعاً على الحاسوب بنظام (office Word ٢٠٠٧ أو ٢٠١٠) وعلى قرص ليزري مدمج (CD) على شكل ملف واحد فقط (أي لا يُجزأ البحث بأكثر من ملف على القرص) وتُرَوَّد هيئة التحرير بثلاث نسخ ورقية وتوضع الرسوم أو الأشكال، إن وجدت، في مكانها من البحث، على أن تكون صالحة من الناحية الفنية للطباعة.
- ٤- أن لا يزيد عدد صفحات البحث على (٢٥) خمس وعشرين صفحة من الحجم (A4) .
٥. يلتزم الباحث في ترتيب وتنسيق المصادر على الصيغة APA
- ٦- أن يلتزم الباحث بدفع أجور النشر المحددة البالغة (٧٥.٠٠٠) خمسة وسبعين ألف دينار عراقي، أو ما يعادلها بالعملة الأجنبية.
- ٧- أن يكون البحث خالياً من الأخطاء اللغوية والنحوية والإملائية.
- ٨- أن يلتزم الباحث بالخطوط وأحجامها على النحو الآتي:
أ. اللغة العربية: نوع الخط (Arabic Simplified) وحجم الخط (١٤) للمتن.
ب. اللغة الإنكليزية: نوع الخط (Times New Roman) عناوين البحث (١٦) . والملخصات (١٢) أما فقرات البحث الأخرى، فبحجم (١٤) .
- ٩- أن تكون هوامش البحث بالنظام الإلكتروني (تعليقات ختامية) في نهاية البحث. بحجم ١٢.
- ١٠- تكون مسافة الحواشي الجانبية (٢,٥٤) سم، والمسافة بين الأسطر (١) .
- ١١- في حال استعمال برنامج مصحف المدينة للآيات القرآنية يتحمل الباحث ظهور هذه الآيات المباركة بالشكل الصحيح من عدمه، لذا يفضل النسخ من المصحف الإلكتروني المتوافر على شبكة الانترنت.
- ١٢- يبلغ الباحث بقرار صلاحية النشر أو عدمها في مدة لا تتجاوز شهرين من تاريخ وصوله إلى هيئة التحرير.
- ١٣- يلتزم الباحث بإجراء تعديلات اخضعين على بحثه وفق التقارير المرسلة إليه وموافاة المجلة بنسخة معدلة في مدة لا تتجاوز (١٥) خمسة عشر يوماً.
- ١٤- لا يحق للباحث المطالبة بمطالبات البحث كافة بعد مرور سنة من تاريخ النشر.
- ١٥- لا تعاد البحوث الى أصحابها سواء قبلت أم لم تقبل.
- ١٦- تكون مصادر البحث وهوامشه في نهاية البحث، مع كتابة معلومات المصدر عندما يرد لأول مرة.
- ١٧- يخضع البحث للتقويم السري من ثلاثة خبراء ليبيان صلاحيته للنشر.
- ١٨- يشترط على طلبة الدراسات العليا فصلاً عن الشروط السابقة جلب ما يثبت موافقة الأستاذ المشرف على البحث وفق النموذج المعتمد في المجلة.
- ١٩- يحصل الباحث على مسئل واحد لبحثه، ونسخة من المجلة، وإذا رغب في الحصول على نسخة أخرى فعليه شراؤها بسعر (١٥) ألف دينار.
- ٢٠- تعبر الأبحاث المنشورة في المجلة عن آراء أصحابها لا عن رأي المجلة.
- ٢١- ترسل البحوث إلى مقر المجلة - دائرة البحوث والدراسات في ديوان الوقف الشيعي بغداد - باب المعظم)
أو البريد الإلكتروني: (hus65in@Gmail.com) (off reserch@sed.gov.iq) بعد دفع الأجور في مقر المجلة
- ٢٢- لا تلزم المجلة بنشر البحوث التي تُخلُ بشرط من هذه الشروط .

مجلة علمية فكرية فصلية محكمة تصدر عن دائرة البحوث والدراسات في ديوان الوقت الشيعي

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**Investigating the Challenges
and Benefits of Teacher–Student Re-
lationship: A Case Study
of TEFL in Iraq**

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Abstract:

This study investigated the challenges and benefits of teacher-student relationship in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Iraq. The researcher inspected the role of the teacher-student relationship in achieving the educational outcomes taking into account the institutional limitations that may lower student engagement and motivation for learning the English language. The researcher adopted a descriptive qualitative survey method to collect data from a sample of 30 EFL teachers among whom 12 teachers were selected for semi-structured interviews based on the teacher-student relationship scale (STRS) scores. The findings showed that teachers who scored high on the survey emphasized empathy, open communication and personal connection to establish trust and motivation, whereas teachers with low scores depended on classroom structure, rule enforcement and external discipline to maintain classroom order. However, despite differing approaches, the two groups face identical challenges which include crowded classrooms, short time, student misbehavior and insufficient institutional support. Those findings called for the necessity of specific pedagogic professional development programs to train teachers on classroom diversity management and for institutional policies to minimize class size and to provide mental health support to protect Iraqi teachers of English from burnout. The research provides significant knowledge about EFL instruction that may help develop better educational policies to improve teacher-student relationship in Iraqi classrooms.

Key Words: Challenges, Benefits, Teacher-Student Relationship, Classroom Management, Student Motivation, EFL, Education

المستخلص:

بحثت هذه الدراسة تحديات وفوائد العلاقة بين المعلم والطالب في بغداد ضمن سياق تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

في العراق، ودرس الباحث تأثير هذه العلاقة على النتائج التعليمية، مع مراعاة القيود المؤسسية التي تؤثر على مشاركة الطلاب وتحفيزهم وتعلمهم للغة. استخدم الباحث نهج المسح الوصفي النوعي لجمع البيانات من عينة تألفت من ٣٠ معلمًا ومعلمة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، اختبر من بينهم ١٢ مشاركًا لإجراء مقابلات شبه منظمة بناءً على درجاتهم في مقياس العلاقة بين المعلم والطالب (STRS). أكد المعلمون الذين حصلوا على درجات عالية في الاستبيان على أهمية التعاطف والتواصل المفتوح والتواصل الشخصي لبناء الثقة والتحفيز، بينما

اعتمد المعلمون الذين حصلوا على درجات منخفضة على هيكل الفصل الدراسي وتطبيق القواعد والانضباط الخارجي للحفاظ على النظام الصفّي. ومع ذلك، ورغم اختلاف النهجين، تواجه المجموعتان تحديات متطابقة تشمل ازدحام الفصول الدراسية وقصر وقت الدرس وسوء سلوك الطلاب ونقص الدعم المؤسسي. وتشير نتائج البحث إلى ضرورة وجود برامج تطوير مهني متخصصة في التربية العلائقية لغرض تدريب المعلمين على إدارة التنوع الصفّي، ووضع سياسات مؤسسية تُقلّل من عدد الطلبة في الصف وتوفّر الدعم النفسي لحماية المعلمين من الإرهاق عند تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. يقدم البحث معرفة محدّدة بهذا الموضوع قد تساعد على تطوير سياسات أفضل لتحسين العلاقة بين المعلم والطالب في المدارس العراقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحديات، الفوائد، العلاقة بين المعلم والطالب، إدارة الصف، دافعية الطالب.

تقضي تحديات وفوائد العلاقة بين المدرّس والطالب: دراسة حالة تدريس اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية في العراق

1.1 Background

The English language serves as a lingua franca which functions as a main communication tool for people who speak different native languages, representing the most widely spoken language world-wide (Yen & Mohamad, 2020). The widespread use of English across business domains and educational and technological sectors has made its proficiency critical for global interactions and future opportunities. The non-English speaking countries such as Iraq dedicate extensive resources to develop and implement effective methods for teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Hamza, 2024). Language education institutions and their staff members work to develop language learning methods so as to create accessible and rewarding learning opportunities for their students (Abdulhameed & Louber, 2024).

The educational outcomes make significant use of the quality of teacher-student relationships because experts have traditionally regarded the relationship as fundamental for effective education. Such a relationship between students and teachers determine their academic progress while developing their social abilities and emotional growth (Ansari, et al. 2020). The foundation of a productive classroom environment depends on the teacher-student relationship because it creates learning environments that value and help students to understand their significance while motivating their educational development. Developmental and educational psychology studies confirm that the relationship provides students with their first learning environment that enables them to gain both cognitive and affective abilities (Roorda, et al., 2017).





The teacher–student relationship gains essential value in the Iraqi EFL context particularly in high schools of Baghdad so language acquisition happens mainly through interpersonal and social classroom interactions (Salman, 2024).

The teacher–student relationship describes the safe friendly bonds that the teachers create with their students in classrooms and enables other educational aspects to operate at their best level (Engels et al., 2021). According to Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck (2007) and Ruzek et al., (2016), the teacher–student relationship directly impacts the students' academic success expectations, self-concept, intelligence, beliefs and autonomy perception which together determine their language learning success and academic motivation. The student's success and persistence depend heavily on the teacher–student relationship quality in foreign language learning classrooms because anxiety and communicative comfort are essential (Wilson, et al, 2010).

The natural evolution of the teacher–student relationship in education is affected by external factors. Those factors include behavioral patterns, race relations, socioeconomic status (Wubbels et al., 2014). The culturally diverse nature of Baghdad makes developing and sustaining positive teacher–student relationship more complicated. Teachers face difficulties when handling diverse cultural expectations that frequently appear alongside post–conflict situations.

Educators need to monitor external influences on human interactions while changing their educational methods to create supportive learning environments. The EFL educational context requires a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and benefits of teacher–student relationship, as this directly affects the development of more effective teaching methods and improves learning outcomes (Thompson, 2018), as seen in Baghdad's high schools. To understand those educational dynamics in Baghdad's EFL classrooms, it is crucial to examine their specific cultural and educational context.

EFL instruction creates distinctive conditions for both benefits and challenges in developing positive teacher–student relation–

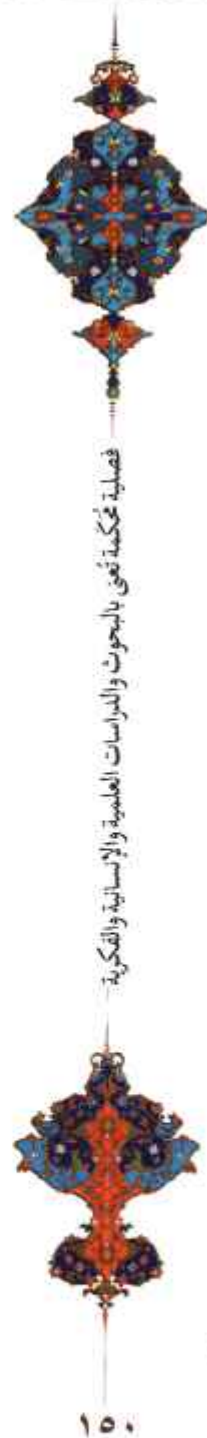
ship. According to the 2014 RAND report, Baghdad's schools maintained classroom sizes of between 30–40 students which led to teacher–student individualization difficulties because EFL requires continuous personalized feedback for language development (Vernez et al., 2014). Overcrowded classrooms resulted in increased teacher workloads and emotional exhaustion that demonstrate the high personal costs of relational teaching approaches in these demanding situations (Ghafar & Mohamedamin, 2023).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Being an educational supervisor, the researcher can affirm that the first and ongoing stages of education require developing positive teacher–student relationships as this relation directly affects student's motivation and engagement and thus resulted in good academic achievement (Roorda, et al. 2017). Students who do not develop good relationships with their teachers show decreased motivation alongside the behavioral problems which lead to poor academic performance especially in EFL learning environments where emotional security and active involvement and determination matter for successful language acquisition (Luz, 2015). Salman (2024) asserts that developing supportive and respectful teacher–student relationship is really essential for academic achievements in the Iraqi EFL context where the educational infrastructure faces problems such as overcrowded classrooms, untrained teachers, and students coming from different backgrounds.

The lack of institutional support and inadequate training prevent teachers from building effective connections with their students. The researcher explores the teacher–student relationship in Baghdad high schools by studying their advantages and disadvantages to understand their influence on the student language development. The study demonstrates the classroom behaviors and relational methods either promote academic engagement or create barriers to it within EFL learning environments.

The significance of the teacher–student relationship in education has been extensively studied worldwide but they remain inadequately supported by time, attention and institutional backing within the Iraqi educational framework (Ibrahim, et al, 2025). The





teachers spend their time on curriculum content instead of relationship development because they believe that the academic goals matter more than a relational investment (Frisby & Gaffney, 2015). The performance-based educational approach is useless to the students because it removes the motivational and emotional support which relationship-focused teaching methods provide. The teachers who manage bigger classes under strict schedules discover it to be so challenging to develop a relationship with the students in addition to fulfilling their official duties (Pianta et al., 2012).

The current research identifies a critical deficiency in understanding how the teacher-student relationship functions in foreign language acquisition environments of Iraq, despite all the growing research span about such relationships in education. The existing studies about education or Western educational contexts neglect to examine the specific behaviors and challenges along with interpersonal strategies that occur in EFL classroom settings (Wentzel, 2022). The diverse sociocultural and linguistic characteristics of students in Baghdad classrooms who speak the Arabic language make up a layer of complexity that most researches fail to consider. This research conducts a case study to investigate foreign language acquisition effects of teacher-student relationship in Baghdad to generate context-specific knowledge which can drive educational reforms and better teacher preparation, and develop supportive learning environments for Iraqi EFL classrooms.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The development of students relies heavily on relationships which directly affect their classroom engagement, motivation and academic achievement (Hughes et al., 2012; McHugh et al., 2013; Roorda et al., 2017). The teacher-student relationship demonstrates exceptional power in helping the students overcome linguistic anxiety and low self-confidence and cultural dissonance in EFL instruction (Jennings & Greenberg, 2019). This research aims at analyzing teacher perspectives about teacher-student relationship significance together with advantages and disadvantages and challenges within EFL teaching in Baghdad Iraq despite its scarcity in the existing scholarly research.

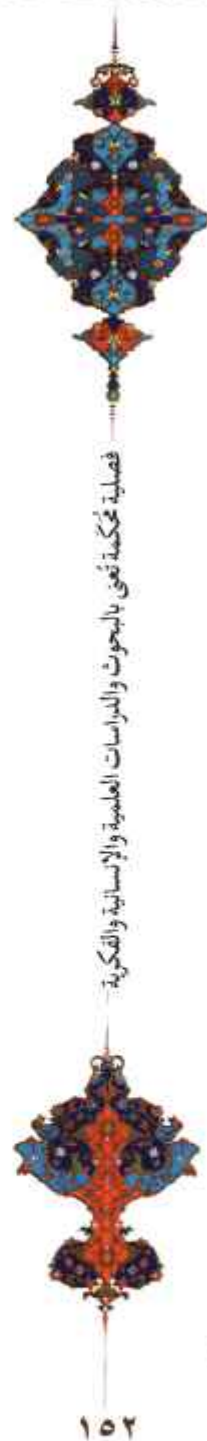
This research keeps up with the existing studies about the teacher-student relationship in Iraqi schools, addressing a fundamental aspect of foreign language acquisition. The research investigates the teachers who excel at building a positive relationship and those who continuously struggle to establish a strong one with their students.

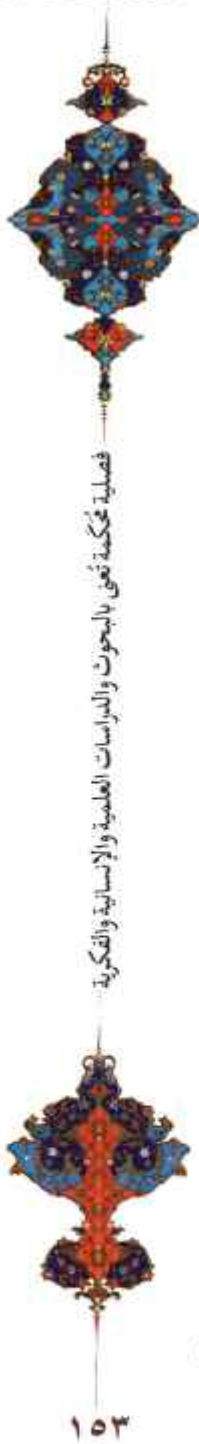
When the teachers build their relationships based on friendliness, trust and sincerity, these bonds create mutual understanding and respect leading to enjoyable classroom learning environments (Frisby & Gaffney, 2015). Language acquisition speed and depth becomes directly affected by the stronger interpersonal bonds in settings where continuous communication remains essential (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021). The research outcomes may guide practical methods for relationship development which shall enhance the quality of EFL instruction in comparable educational settings. The research findings would support policy reforms and teacher education programs as well as school-based initiatives that aim to develop stronger teachers-students relationships. Knowledge about successful teachers' relationship management under institutional limitations enables the creation of specific professional development approaches and support frameworks. The study supports context-based approaches because the relational strategies need to consider all local and cultural values together with student diversity and socio-political elements.

This study demonstrates how an educational framework needs to integrate academic demands with emotional intelligence and social inclusion through teacher's real-life experiences. The identification of relationship-building factors enables educators to support students through multiple intervention methods that address the latter's various needs based on socioeconomic status, and personal challenges, and learning variations. The study demonstrates how teacher-student relationship creates essential conditions for academic success and emotional resilience in the modern Iraqi EFL education system.

1.4 Research Questions

To guide this investigation, the study addresses the following





questions:

1. What do EFL teachers with low relationship survey scores perceive as successful strategies and approaches to build a positive teacher–student relationship?
2. What do EFL teachers with low relationship survey scores identify as challenges and barriers to build a positive teacher–student relationship?
3. What do EFL teachers with high relationship survey scores perceive as successful strategies and approaches to build a positive teacher–student relationship?
4. What do EFL teachers with high relationship survey scores identify as challenges or barriers to building positive teacher–student relationship?

These questions assess teachers on the successful strategies for building a positive relationship, together with the obstacles that prevent them while contrasting results from teachers with low and high relationship scores. By answering those questions, the research can achieve its goal to understand the teacher–student relationship in EFL classrooms of Baghdad that may support the educational practice and upcoming research.

2.1 Literature Review

2.2 Teacher–Student Relationship (Rapport)

Rapport refers to the emotional and interpersonal connection between teachers and students through mutual respect, trust and support (Frisby & Gaffney, 2015). The EFL classrooms of Baghdad require strong rapport to create a supportive learning environment because English that serves as a foreign language is being taught in classrooms with multiple social and cultural backgrounds. Thompson (2018) explains how teachers, who focus on student needs and interests, develop authentic relationships with their students who found respect for authority figures deeply rooted in. Students who experience teachers' support together with respect believe that these qualities demonstrate effective teaching (Wilson et al., 2010).

Research shows that rapport development depends on immediate behaviors through both spoken and non-verbal interactions

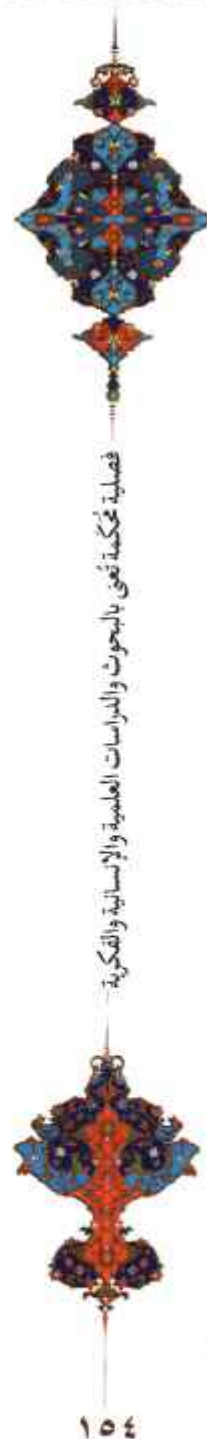
including name use, eye contact and praise (Wilson, et al., 2010; Frisby, et al., 2016). These behaviors serve as essential mechanisms to establish rapport in classrooms in Baghdad because they help students feel connected, despite the large class sizes and different backgrounds. According to Khammat (2022), effective teachers establish both accessibility and humor to teach Iraqi students who value the teacher relationship more than language abilities. The connection methods of teachers in Iraq work to overcome the foreign language barrier while teaching English in non-English-speaking environments.

Research identified the advantages of a strong teacher–student relationship and also identified important drawbacks that are related to relational work within resource–constrained educational environments typical to Iraq. Teachers endure emotional exhaustion and burnout because they have to perform emotional labor continuously to support students while handling academic requirements (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Teachers face role strain as they need to teach and to provide emotional support to students in classrooms that are overcrowded, this require excessive effort to build individualized relationships (Jennings & Greenberg, 2019). The institutional limitations of time constraints, along with large class sizes and teaching requirements, limit teachers from establishing meaningful student relationships (Roorda & Koomen, 2021).

Teachers serve as primary educational figures in the educational system (Friere, 1990 as cited in Hargreaves & Preece, 2020). The ones in Baghdad play dual roles as they transmit knowledge and serve as cultural facilitators to lead students toward academic achievements since English proficiency has become crucial for both educational and economic progress in the region (Sofi-Karim, 2015). A supportive classroom environment generates a positive learning environment that strengthens students' motivation and self-esteem, and thus promoting language learning achievement (Luz, 2015).

2.3 The Teacher–Student Relationship as Bidirectional and Dynamic

The connections between teachers and students evolve through





reciprocal effects that stem from student and teacher elements, and time-related changes (Engels et al., 2021). The student relationships in Baghdad will change after their transition from elementary to high school due to their encounter with larger classrooms and multiple teachers (Abdulhameed & Louber, 2024). The student-teacher relationship tend so deteriorate with time as Newberry (2010, as cited in Engels et al., 2021) states but Iraqi adolescent students experience additional hurdles because of puberty and peer pressure (Sofi-Karim, 2015). These connections play a vital supporting role for Iraqi teenagers because they require the teachers to navigate during social transformations, economic shifts, and cultural integration (Salman, 2024).

2.4 The Student Characteristics Influencing the Teacher Relationship

According to Koles, O'Connor and Collins (2013), student's characteristics affect the teacher-student relationship more than teacher's characteristics do. Student characteristics may largely determine the quality of relationships between students and teachers in EFL classrooms of Baghdad through significant effects too. Gender as one of the significant personal factors may affect the relationship type and quality as Split, et al. (2012) asserts that boys generally experienced more conflict and less closeness with teachers than girls. Relationship problems arise from classroom overcrowding and student disruptions, mainly because students who have persistent behavioral issues develop ongoing relational issues (Hamre & Pianta, 2001 in Engels et al., 2021).

Students of Baghdad expect their teachers to initiate contact because their cultural values support collectivist norms and high power distance, yet this stands in contrast to individualistic settings where proactive student engagement exists (Sofi-Karim, 2015). Withdrawn students face minimal attention from both their peers and educators (Newberry, 2008 as cited in Engels et al., 2021) while experiencing increased difficulty with social exclusion since Iraq has a diverse student body containing Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen. According to Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969 in Roorda et al., 2017), a supportive relationship between teachers and students boosts self-esteem and student engagement which stand vital for

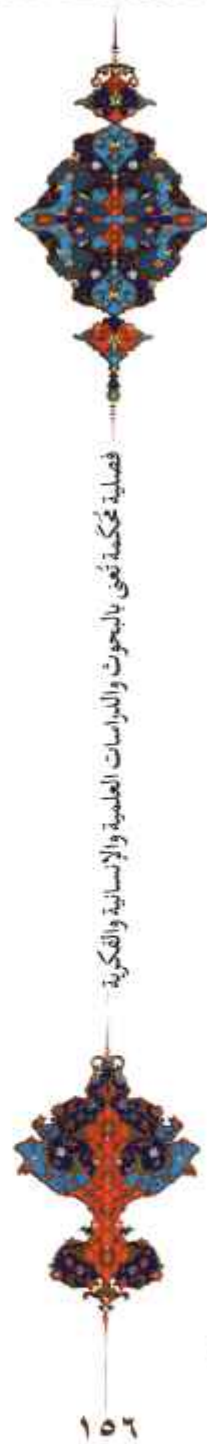
Iraqi students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

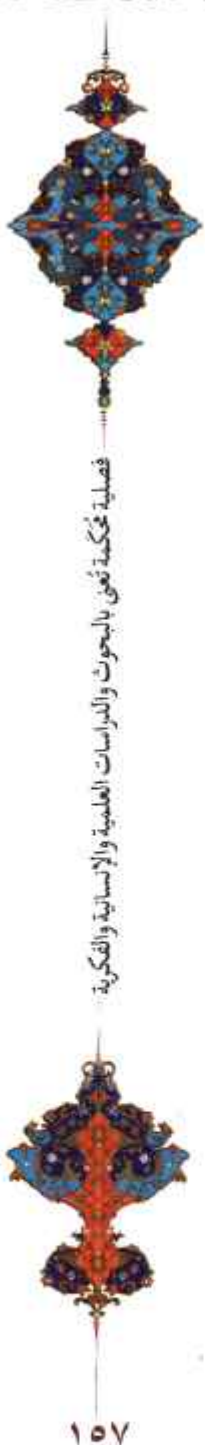
2.5 Teacher's Characteristics Influencing the Student Relationship

Some of the fundamental components for building a positive student relationship stem from teacher's characteristics that follow humanistic and constructivist principles (Wentzel, 2022). The ethics of care approach needs teachers to develop mastery of empathy alongside warmth and fairness (Engels et al., 2021) for handling diverse student needs in situations like those in Baghdad, and their varied expectations about authority. The Positive body language along with humor helps students to feel more at ease while studying new languages because it creates an optimistic classroom environment (Frisby et al., 2016; Wubbels et al., 2014). Students lose motivation due to sarcasm as an antagonistic form of humor because they remain sensitive to what they perceive as disrespect (Hargreaves & Preece, 2020).

Teachers must perform emotional labor when working with difficult students according to Tsouloupas et al. (2010). The development of student respect depends on teacher-initiated mutual actions yet large class sizes and administrative duties make this process more challenging (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2019). Critics advise against excessive emotional work because it might pull attention away from educational objectives (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2019) but research demonstrates that emotional and academic development go hand in hand to benefit students (Hargreaves & Preece, 2020).

The lack of proper professional development support in the Iraqi EFL context prevents teachers from developing an effective student relationship. According to Ibrahim and Kavlu (2024), most EFL teachers in Baghdad reported limited access to systematic training for relational pedagogy and socio-emotional learning. The lack of structured training programs made teachers uncertain about handling mixed classrooms and unable to meet student requirements. Teachers who received sporadic and informal support developed higher stress levels and disengagement, which weakened their capacity to deliver the necessary warmth and empathy required for building a positive student relationship.





According to (Gay, 2018), research shows that ongoing training which addresses specific cultural and contextual aspects leads to better teaching approaches and stronger student-teacher connections in EFL environments.

2.6 Challenges and Barriers to Building Relationships

2.6.1 Teacher's Behaviors

The quality of relationships classrooms depends heavily on how teachers behave. Some teachers do not place enough value on this relationship, and prefer academic delivery over rapport which results in disconnection (McHugh et al., 2013). Cultural differences among Kurdish and Arab teachers and students and gender dynamics make teaching more challenging (Gay, 2018). Conflict, often due to perceived bias or lack of effort, leads to creation of negative classroom environments which has long term negative effects on Iraqi students' relational capacities (Roorda et al., 2017). These barriers can be counteracted by respectful and engaged teacher's behaviors (Wubbels et al., 2014).

A study by Sakran et al. (2022) about Iraqi high school classroom practices found that structured classroom management approaches had a positive impact on EFL student motivation and engagement. Students who were taught by teachers who used clear rules, consistent consequences and positive reinforcement were able to trust their teachers and were less resistant to learning, especially in linguistically diverse classrooms. However, the study also noted that the strict management approaches that are commonly used in institutions due to overcrowding and institutional pressure can negatively affect communication and decrease relational warmth. These findings further reinforce the dual role of Iraqi EFL teachers as both disciplinarians and relational mentors while highlighting the need to balance structure and emotional support in relationship-building.

2.6.2 Student's Behaviors

The student's behaviors are influenced by their mood and cultural norms. These can impede the development of relationships (Ellerbrock et al., 2015). Students who are disruptive or unengaged can indicate to their teachers that they do not feel cared for which can

reduce their motivation (Spilt et al., 2011). Students want to see their teachers who are empathetic and supportive (Poulou, 2017), aggressive behaviors or clashes of personality make the dynamics more complicated (Frisby & Gaffney, 2015). Overcoming these barriers requires effective communication (Wubbels et al., 2014).

2.6.3 Time

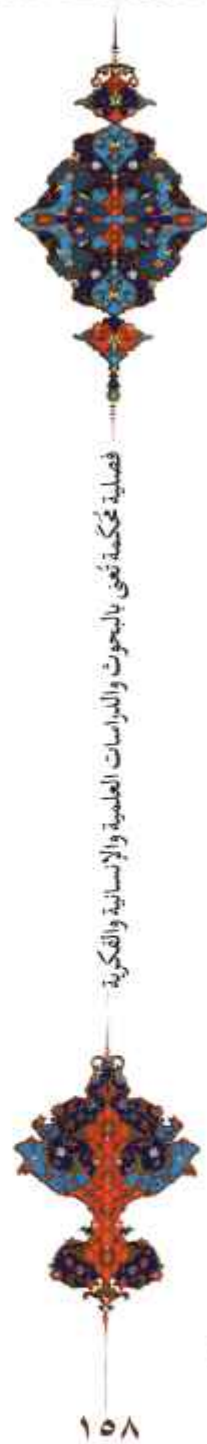
Time constraint is a significant challenge to educational environments because teachers are required to teach long hours with additionally large classes (Pianta et al., 2012). Students believe that time spent with teachers shows care and respect (Martin et al., 2006, as cited in Roorda et al., 2017), yet time that is allocated for relationship building is often limited by curricular demands (Riley, 2011, as cited in Hargreaves & Preece, 2020).

2.6.4 Other Challenges

The teaching stress, socio-economic factors such as poverty and students' traumatic experiences which may be common factors in post-conflict Iraq, may further hinder the process of building relationships. Negative school experiences tend to reinforce disengagement which increases the likelihood of absenteeism and dropout (Spilt et al., 2011). Thus, flexible and supportive relationships are needed to deal with these multiple challenges (Engels et al., 2021).

In Baghdad, it is important for teachers to understand their students by having personal conversations (Salman, 2024). When teachers practice two-way communication and active listening, they reduce stereotyping and increase student engagement (Tauber, 2007; Davis, 2006, as cited in Wentzel, 2022). Informal interactions, such as sharing humor, help create a closer relationship in collectivist cultures (Gee, 2010, as cited in Frisby et al., 2016). High expectations that are combined with empathy based on self-determination theory lead to improved student performance and resilience (Jong et al., 2012).

Despite the numerous studies about teacher-student relationship in general education, few studies have focused on the Iraqi EFL context especially in Baghdad. The majority of the literature is on Western or general settings and ignores the unique cultural, socio-





economic, and linguistic factors which affect EFL classrooms in Iraq. This gap is drastic because it ignores the effects of collectivism, power distance and post-conflict realities on teacher-student relationship in language learning.

The current research deals with this issue by investigating Iraqi teachers' perceptions. The researcher hopes that this research will provide contextualized findings that can be applied to improve TEFL in Baghdad.

3.1 Method

3.2 Design of the Study

This study explored how EFL teachers in the Iraqi EFL context of Baghdad view their relationship with students through qualitative survey which examined challenges and benefits. Check and Schutt (2012) describe survey research as obtaining information from sample participants through their reactions to questions (p. 160). Survey research enables researchers to implement different methods for participant selection and data acquisition and measurement techniques. The research design of surveys can employ either quantitative measurement approaches through survey items with numerical ratings or qualitative approaches by using open-ended questions or combine both methods (mixed methods). Surveys function as a main tool in social and psychological research because they remain the primary method for understanding human behavioral explanations (Singleton & Straits, 2009).

3.3 Participants of the Study

The research took place at high schools at Baghdad Al-rusafa-3 Directorate General of Education during the 2023-2024 academic year. The research population consisted of EFL teachers who work for selected educational institutions in Baghdad. The current study included 30 EFL male and female teachers who teach English in Baghdad, Iraq. Through this selection approach researchers could evaluate the relationship-building methods among different relationship profiles so as to understand the specific advantages and difficulties of teacher-student interaction. The Student-Teacher Relationship questionnaire by Pianta (2001) is administered to the teachers who then received rankings which in turn led to the selec-

tion of six male and six female teachers with high and low scores to represent the entire population.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

The research instruments used for this study are designed to gather data that is needed to answer the research questions.

3.4.1 Participation Consent Form

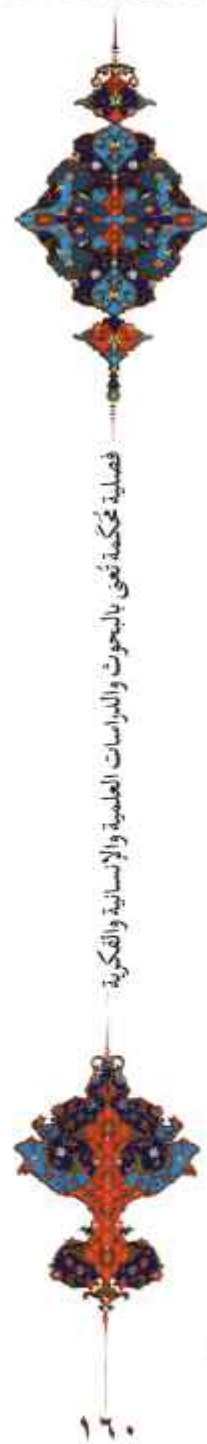
The researcher provided the teachers with an introduction to research procedures before starting the main phase. The participants understood the research process so they could choose whether to participate or withdraw. Through the consent form, the participants confirmed their willingness to join the research study.

3.4.2 Student-Teacher Relationship Questionnaires

The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) by Pianta (2001) is applied to evaluate Iraqi EFL teachers' views about their student relationships. The 28-item self-report instrument helps teachers to evaluate their perceptions of specific students through assessments of conflict and closeness and dependency levels. The STRS allows the researcher to evaluate the relationship quality at a general level while providing valuable data for analysis. The STRS was chosen because it applies to EFL situations and has demonstrated high reliability. The teachers assess their interactions with students using a Likert scale for quantitative evaluation of their relationships. According to Ogelman (2014), the STRS shows desirable reliability coefficients for Conflict (.86), Closeness (.80) and Dependency (.65). Several studies have validated this instrument which makes it appropriate for this research in Iraqi classrooms.

3.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

The researcher conducted certain semi-structured interviews with 12 out of 30 teachers who took part in the study to gain a deep understanding of their student-teacher relationship experiences. The researcher developed a set of interview questions which investigated participants' viewpoints together with their effective methods and difficulties in creating beneficial student-teacher connections. The interview procedure aimed to examine both positive aspects of strong teacher-student relationships such as student motivation and classroom participation, and also





the negative aspects like teacher burnout, classroom congestion, administrative demands and insufficient time for individual students in the EFL context. According to Privitera and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019) an interview consists of a series of questions directed to participants through which they provide verbal responses. The recorded verbal responses undergo transcription at a subsequent stage following their initial capture using recording devices. The interviewer can use semi-structured interviews to seek additional details or clarification from participants. The selection of twelve participants out of thirty enables the researchers to conduct extensive examinations of teaching professionals' relationship experiences with their students through detailed investigations. The limited participant count ensures manageable data analysis and maintains data quality.

3.4.4 Data Collection Procedure

To conduct the current study, the first step is identifying the target schools in Baghdad, Iraq. After identifying the intended schools, the researcher obtained the required permissions from the educational authorities and the supervisor of the education office to ensure compliance with all regulations and ethical standards. The study selected 30 EFL teachers from Baghdad Al-rusafa-3 Directorate General of Education schools based on convenience sampling since the researcher could access available and willing participants. The study protected its ethical principles through obtaining consent from all participants. The consent procedure made sure that teachers received full understanding of the research objectives and methods, and the participant rights to leave the study whenever they wanted without facing any negative effects.

The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale developed by Pianta (2001) served as the initial tool to be implemented in the study. The scale enabled the researcher to collect detailed information regarding the relationship between teachers and their students. The teachers received rankings based on their relationship scores. The ranking system became essential for choosing participants for the study following stages. The researcher selected six teachers with the highest and six teachers with the lowest relationship

scores from the ranked list for in-depth interviews. The researcher selected participants to explore diverse student-teacher relationship experiences and viewpoints across both positive and negative extremes. The interview questions were designed with a semi-structured format to enable flexible question asking while clarifying responses for obtaining deep and extensive data.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study was initiated by administering the student-teacher relationship questionnaire to assess the quality of relationships between teachers and their students. Based on the results, twelve teachers were chosen for interview; six with the highest scores and six with the lowest. To interpret the interview data, thematic analysis was employed, enabling the identification of common patterns and insights into the nature of teacher-student interactions.

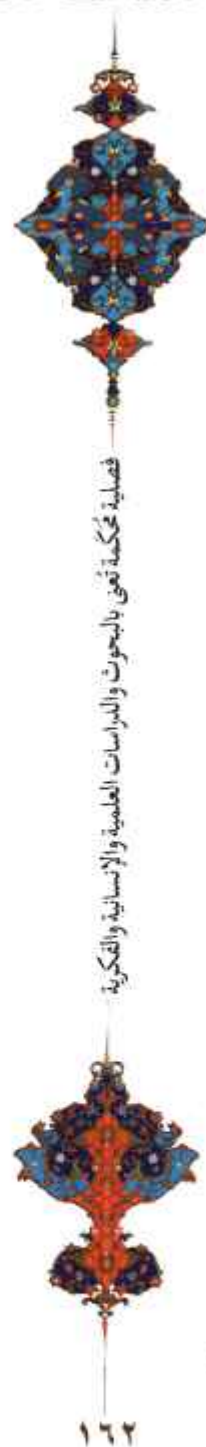
3.6 Results

As it was mentioned above, the researcher applied Pianta's (2001) Student-Teacher Relationships Scale (STRS) to evaluate the teacher-student relationship through closeness and conflict assessment after obtaining necessary approvals and participant selection. The primary descriptive results re abridged in Table 1.

Table 1 The Primary Results of Teacher Screening Survey

Participants	Closeness	Conflict	Participants	Closeness	Conflict
Teacher 1	34	10	Teacher 16	23	22
Teacher 2	28	12	Teacher 17	38	5
Teacher 3	30	15	Teacher 18	20	23
Teacher 4	35	8	Teacher 19	32	10
Teacher 5	25	18	Teacher 20	19	24
Teacher 6	22	20	Teacher 21	34	9
Teacher 7	33	9	Teacher 22	30	13
Teacher 8	27	14	Teacher 23	28	15
Teacher 9	31	11	Teacher 24	33	11
Teacher 10	29	13	Teacher 25	25	18
Teacher 11	36	7	Teacher 26	35	7
Teacher 12	24	19	Teacher 27	22	20
Teacher 13	26	17	Teacher 28	31	12
Teacher 14	37	6	Teacher 29	29	14
Teacher 15	21	21	Teacher 30	27	16

The table above shows the scores obtained by all the participants of the study measured by the given student-teacher relationship scale. Based on the results depicted in this table, the researcher selected 6 teachers with highest closeness score and lowest conflict one and 6 teachers with lowest closeness score and highest conflict





scores to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The related results of selecting 12 teachers based on score in the relationship questionnaire are shown in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 Participants with Highest Closeness Score and Lowest Conflict Score

Participants	Closeness	Conflict	Gender
Teacher 4	35	8	Female
Teacher 11	36	7	Male
Teacher 14	37	6	Male
Teacher 17	38	5	Female
Teacher 21	34	9	Female
Teacher 26	35	7	Male

Table 3 Participants with Lowest Closeness Score and Highest Conflict Score

Participants	Closeness	Conflict	Gender
Teacher 6	22	20	Male
Teacher 15	21	21	Female
Teacher 16	23	22	Male
Teacher 18	20	23	Female
Teacher 20	19	24	Female
Teacher 27	22	20	Male

Tables 2 and 3 show the participants selected based on their scores to participate in the interviews to address the research questions and get deeper insight into the teachers' attitudes towards successful strategies, approaches and challenges or barriers to building positive teacher-student relationships. The selected participants attended semi-structured interviews and expressed their perspectives toward the intended cost and benefits. Based on their given answers, the research questions are addressed as following.

3.6.1 Research Question 1: Strategies Teachers with Low Closeness and High Conflict

Perceive as Successful

The teachers who scored low on closeness and high on conflict reported multiple successful strategies to create a positive teacher-student relationship in their classroom environment. The teachers underlined the importance of setting clear rules during the first

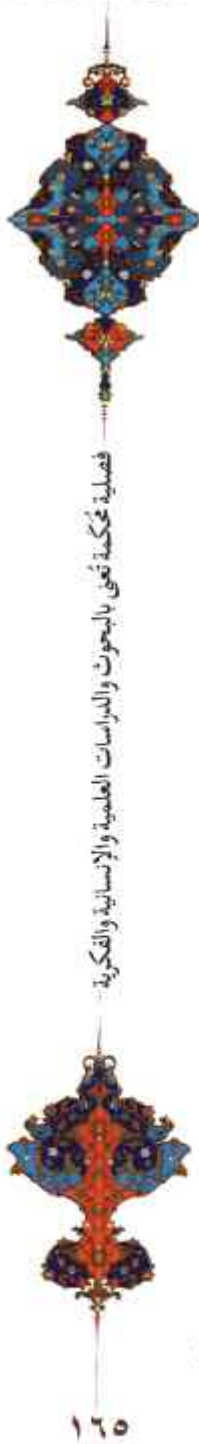
day to build an orderly classroom structure. The implementation of consistent rules and consequences proved to be essential for managing student anxiety while preventing misbehavior as Teacher 16 observed: "Students need consistency for knowing what to expect." Teacher 20 explained that students develop respect through fair discipline practices. Teachers employed restorative practices as positive discipline approaches to resolve conflicts effectively without intensifying them. These teachers emphasized that teachers require professional development training about relationship-building and classroom management because Teacher 18 attributes success to these educational workshops. The teachers who understood their students' backgrounds used suggestion boxes and surveys to gather feedback while showing genuine emotional support to build better relationships despite initial high conflict levels.

3.6.2 Research Question 2: Challenges Identified by Teachers with Low Closeness and

High Conflict

The teachers in this group encountered multiple obstacles to construct positive relationships. The main classroom management problems included the student disruptions along with disrespectful student behavior primarily found in vocational high schools. The classroom disruptions from just a few students disrupted the entire teaching process according to Teacher 15. Teacher 16 expressed the impossibility of connecting with every student due to the combination of overcrowded classrooms and time restrictions which are prevalent in the Iraqi educational environment. The student personal matters including family problems and economic difficulties made it harder for them to engage with their teachers. All teachers expressed identical concerns about limited resources and insufficient administrative support which resulted in teachers performing as «teaching robots» who focused solely on





results without relationship-building. Multiple obstacles created difficulties for building positive relationships between teachers and students.

3.6.2 Research Question 3: Strategies Teachers with High Closeness and Low Conflict

Perceive as Successful

Teachers who reported both high closeness and low conflict in their relationships emphasized creating personal bonds with students and showing emotional support as essential elements of successful relationships. Teachers prioritized understanding students' personal backgrounds as Teacher 4 explained that learning about students makes them feel important. The teachers agreed that actual care and empathy along with active listening created trust and respect in their relationship. The teachers recognized open communication and constructive feedback as essential together with creating an inviting classroom atmosphere which promotes student participation. The bonds between students and teachers strengthened through consistent rules and fairness in supportive environments and positive reinforcement for their accomplishments. The positive classroom environment according to Teacher 14 creates student safety while Teacher 4 confirms that positive reinforcement enhances student confidence and teacher-student relationship. They asserted that their implemented strategies match the principles for creating a supportive classroom environment.

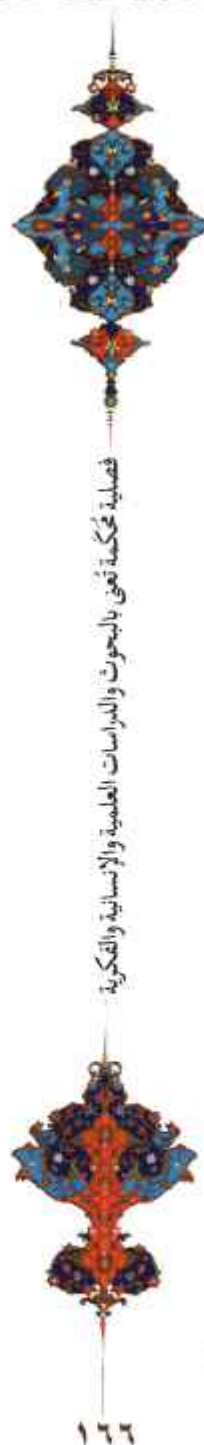
3.6.4 Research Question 4: Challenges Identified by Teachers with High Closeness and Low Conflict

According to the responses to the questions in this group, it could be concluded that the effective teachers even encountered various obstacles. The teachers faced ongoing problems with short periods and overcrowded classrooms which restricted their ability to develop relationships despite their proven success. Teacher 17 highlighted the difficulty of balancing students who excel academically

with those who need educational assistance in the classroom. According to Teacher 21, inappropriate parental involvement stemming from overprotective attitudes leads to major behavioral problems as well as relationship damage. The students' personal problems together with their socioeconomic conditions made the educational environment more complicated. The administrative requirement to complete the curriculum under restricted timeframes forced the teachers to shift their attention from building relationships to content delivery as claimed by Teacher 17 who expressed frustration about insufficient time for relationship development.

3.7 Discussion

Both teacher groups adopted clear rules and emotional support and consistency as core strategies yet they dedicated their efforts differently. Teacher 18 explained that «clear rules create order» as the high-conflict group focused on structure because they lacked training in relational pedagogy which can hinder the development of academic success of students and class room achievements of teachers (Ibrahim & Kavlu, 2024). The high-closeness group taught students about themselves as valuable people as it is claimed by Teacher 4 which matches Baghdad's collectivist culture where students anticipate teacher-initiated rapport. The two groups encountered shared challenges including crowded classrooms and time limitations that intensified teacher burnout particularly for teachers with high conflict who described themselves as «teaching robots». The research evidence matches Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) because consistent modeling builds trust and Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) shows that emotional bonds strengthen engagement. Professional development programs for classroom management and SEL pedagogy together with institutional mental health support systems should be implemented to reduce emotional strain. The educational institutions need to de-





velop programs that enable teachers to collaborate while providing cultural training to handle the diverse needs of students across Iraq's multifaceted social environment.

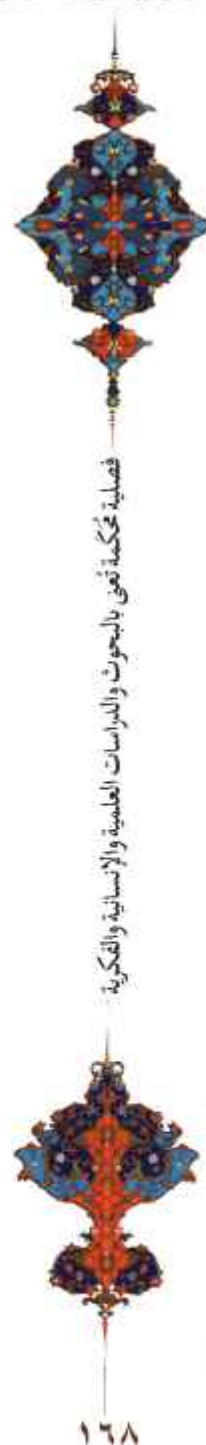
3.8 Final Remarks

The research used Pianta's (2001) a Student-Teacher Relationship Scale to study the Iraqi EFL context but the results have limited generalizability because of the small sample size and potential self-report bias. The study conducted in Baghdad Al-rusafa-3 Directorate General of Education showed the local problems of overcrowding but its results can be applied to other EFL settings. Future research should use the student reports to provide a balance with teachers' reports and to understand the effect of cultural expectations on perceptions of rapport. The use of interventions such as SEL programs and management training as recommended by Teacher 18 would improve the relational strategies. Future researches need to examine how cultural expectations of assertiveness in male students affect conflict levels in order to develop specific strategies. Schools should focus on reducing classroom sizes and implementing digital tools for student feedback and cultural training programs to address collectivist norms. Wellness programs such as peer support groups should be established to fight teacher burnout while building stronger classroom relationships.

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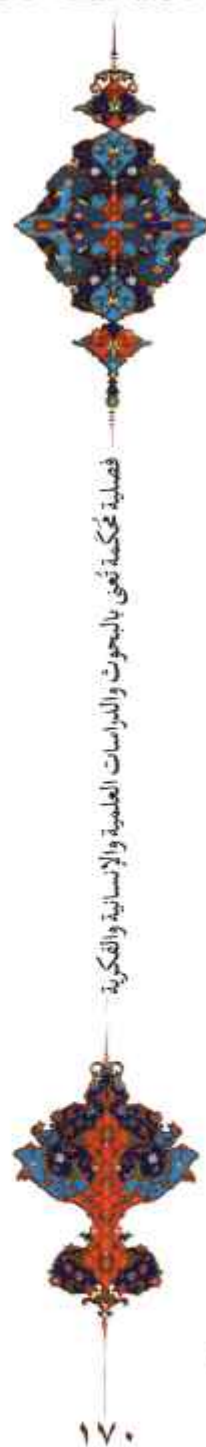
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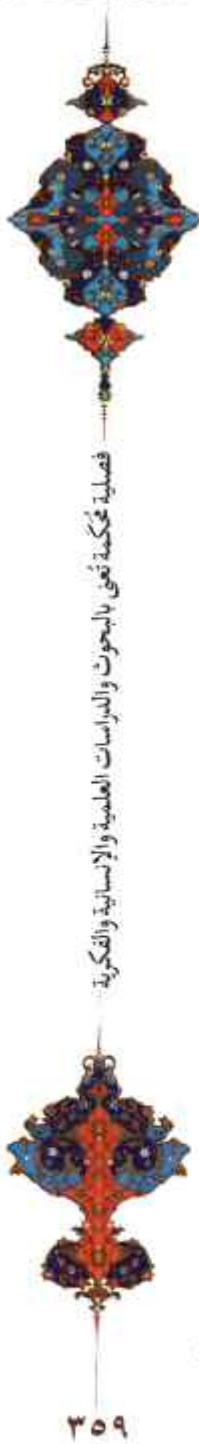
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