Research Article

Research into Teachers' (Dis)Respect for Learners: A Cross-Cultural Study of English Language Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions

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A safe learning context begins with teachers-students respectful interaction. This qualitative study drawing on the premises of grounded theory (GT) examined native and nonnative English language teachers' and learners' ($n = 114$) perceptions of teachers' (dis)respect for learners. Content analysis of focus groups and online interviews revealed three overarching themes: (1) teachers' interpersonal characteristics, (2) teachers' insightfulness, and (3) teachers' occupational attributes. Overall, 14 subthemes emerged. An important finding was that *politeness*, *learners' self-esteem*, and *care* were the most recurrent subthemes, respectively, raised by all four groups of nonnative teachers (NNTs), nonnative learners (NNLs), native teachers (NTs), and native learners (NLs). Moreover, *politeness*, *care*, *learners' self-esteem*, *dedication*, and *interest* were the five culture-general components of teachers' (dis)respect for learners because they were mentioned by both natives and nonnatives. Conversely, other subthemes could be considered as culture-specific components because they were raised by either natives (*fairness*, *encouragement*, *appreciativeness*, *kindness*, *punctuality*, and *learners' freedom*) or nonnatives (*helpfulness*, *patience*, and *learners' individuality*). Furthermore, the three above-mentioned themes were common to all participants. Therefore, given this *diversity within universality*, we proposed a cross-cultural model of teachers' (dis)respect. The pedagogical implications are discussed.

1. Introduction

Reviewing the literature on teaching and learning in academic contexts indicates that effective teaching that leads to effective learning is an ultimate (if not *the* ultimate) goal of education: Fernandes ([1]; p. 1) notes, "Most educators would agree that the single most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher." Although factors such as a well-designed curriculum, parents, and school climate are all important, it is the dynamic relationship between a teacher and his/her students that plays a crucial role in student learning. In students' academic and nonacademic development, the role of the teacher is also influential [2–5].

Through history, equity and good cause are reverberated enthusiastically, yet, in our times, what we hear are requests for respect [6]. On the other hand, defining the construct of disrespect, Honneth [7] states that, in the self-descriptions of

people considering themselves as those who were inappropriately treated by others, "the moral categories that play a dominant role are those-such as "insult" or "humiliation"-that refer to forms of disrespect, that is, to the denial of recognition" (p. 131). Respect, equality of treatment, and fairness are the desired components of everyday life [8]. Violating these norms of conduct might evoke perceptions of disrespect [9]. Batelaan [10] points out that a safe learning context begins with teachers-students and students-students respectful interaction. However, like other fundamental constructs in the social sciences, the meaning of (dis)respect continues to be controversial [11].

Shwalb and Shwalb [12] claim that respect is an issue that theorists and researchers have neglected; it is also an ideal topic "for both cross-cultural and mainstream developmental studies" (p. 1). For English learners, learning a new language intensifies the need for a teacher and classroom

atmosphere that fosters respect and discourages disrespect. What is required, then, is an understanding of how English teachers and learners conceptualize (dis)respect.

Given the theoretical and empirically illustrated significance of (dis)respect [13], it is surprising that only a few lines of research studies [14–16] have investigated the affective consequences of (dis)respect. Each of these studies has found entirely predictable influences indicating that respectful treatment fostered positive emotions (e.g., pride, cheerfulness) and reduced negative emotions in comparison with disrespectful treatment. Therefore, the research on (dis)respect is scarce and inadequate. The present study was an initial attempt to broaden the scope of (dis)respect research. To this end, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What are native English language teachers' and learners' perceptions of teachers' (dis)respect for learners?

RQ2: What are nonnative English language teachers' and learners' perceptions of teachers' (dis)respect for learners?

2. Literature Review

Whereas a large body of research has been accumulated on the student-teacher relationship (e.g., [17]), the actual construct of (dis)respect has received scant attention. A considerable amount of literature has demonstrated that healthy interpersonal relationships have significant effects on personality development and, consequently, learners' educational success. The psychological theories of personality development of Adler [18], Fromm [19], Rogers [20], and Maslow [21] all recognize the significance of social relationships to human development.

Telli and Brok [22] reiterate that the literature steadily supports the premise that high-quality teacher-student interpersonal relationships are a key factor in effective teaching. A general assumption of this research is that, in human relationships, respect is very important and respect within the student-teacher relationship is crucial for students' success: Lightfoot ([23]; p. 180) maintained, "Piaget returns repeatedly to the importance of the social relationship to the formation of mutual respect." Therefore, since in the student-teacher interpersonal relationship both teachers and learners play pivotal roles, we have intended to explore both teachers' and learners' perceptions in this study.

The literature on respect illustrates a wide range of conceptually similar terms such as consideration, positive regard, and care. Overall, the literature on the concept of respect "implies having a disposition to act appropriately towards others with observance of basic ethical principles (e.g., fairness, truthfulness, consideration of others' interests and feelings, etc.)" ([1], p. 36). Specific definitions of respect are outlined in Table 1.

Early research on the influences of respect (termed *positive regard*) within the teacher-students relationship illustrated positive associations between students' scores on achievement tests and teachers' level of interpersonal

functioning including positive regard or respect [27]. Huo et al. [28] have proposed the most recent model of respect, which is "one of the best available theoretically articulated models of respect" ([29], p. 509). They deem that respect has been variously characterized as "reflecting individuals' status in the group, the degree to which they are liked by the group, and how fairly they are treated in interactions with group members. These different conceptions are integrated in the dual pathway model of respect" (p. 200). The researchers tested the model's prediction that fair treatment from one's group members shapes his/her attitudes towards the group and self through two distinct pathways: status and inclusion. Huo et al. [28] conceptualized status as "the individual's perceptions of his or her standing or worth as a group member (i.e., perceived status)" and inclusion as "individuals' perceptions of the degree to which the group feels warmly towards them (i.e., perceived liking)" (p. 201).

Miller et al. [30] investigated how teachers' self-efficacy may influence students' perceptions towards two dimensions of the instructional environment, that is, perceived teacher respect and perceived teaching competence. They collected the data at two time periods from 427 students and 51 teachers. They used items from a scale that was developed by Murdock et al. [31] to assess perceived teacher respect. Miller et al. [30] in "a series of multi-level models found that teaching self-efficacy and course level were significantly associated with students' perceived teacher competence and perceived teacher respect as well as teachers' ratings of student characteristics" (p. 260).

In 1997, Ellis attempted to measure high school students' perceptions of teacher respect and its association with success in school. He defined student success as "having few absences, a low incidence of discipline referrals, and a high grade point average" (p. iii). Employing survey design, Ellis [32] found that teachers' respect is important to students; "perceived respect from teachers can be reliably measured by the Perception of Teacher Respect Survey, and students' perceptions of teacher respect is positively correlated with academic achievement and negatively correlated with student absenteeism and discipline referrals" (p. iv). However, Ellis's study suffered from two major drawbacks, which have been overcome in the current study. Firstly, he did not take into account teachers' perceptions. Secondly, the sample did not include any students other than Americans.

In 2005, Fernandes investigated the association between high school students' perceptions of teacher respect and the outcomes of academic achievement, discipline problems, and attendance. High school students' perceptions were examined through a self-report questionnaire entitled "the Perception of Teacher Respect Survey (PTRS)." Students' academic records and self-report assessments were employed to analyze the outcome variables including grade point average, discipline problems, and absences. Fernandes [1] found that "students' perceptions of teacher respect are positively correlated with academic achievement and negatively correlated with absenteeism and discipline problems. Furthermore, students who perceived high levels of teacher respect had higher academic achievement and fewer absences and discipline problems" (p. viii). Unlike Fernandes,

TABLE 1: Definitions of respect within the psychological and educational literature.

Author	Definition
Rogers [20]	An abiding trust and acceptance of the other person, even a prizing of the other person as worthy and valuable (p. 121)
Lickona [24]	Showing regard for the worth of someone or something. It includes respect for self, respect for the rights and dignity of all persons, and respect for the environment that sustains life (p. 67)
Underwood-Baggett [25]	Affirming and honoring the other person as a human being based on the concepts of caring, power with, and engagement (p. 8)
Deiro [26]	Honoring students' position and abilities, and seeing them as worthy of esteem; showing regard for students' basic human right to expression and believing in their growing abilities to manage their own lives successfully (p. 61)

we utilized focus groups and interviews in this study to add depth and apply rigor to the *(dis)respect* literature.

The current study concentrates on (dis)respect in an educational context, that is, teachers' (dis)respect for learners. Indeed, most studies reviewed above utilized questionnaires as their major data collection method, with almost no studies using either semistructured focus group discussions or online interviews that we have used in this study (Hinton [33]; p. 146), explaining the relation between "culture and everyday understanding" states, "We are born, are brought up and live in a culture. Much of what we know, and indeed who we are, comes from being immersed in culture." He also notes that those customs and beliefs "define and structure the everyday lives of the people in that culture. And these beliefs are passed on to each new generation and evolve within the community" (p. 146). Therefore, the motivation for the cross-cultural aspect of this study is to provide the literature with a more profound understanding of the underexplored construct of (dis)respect by taking into account both native and nonnative teachers' and learners' perceptions.

3. Method

This study was designed in a qualitative framework drawing on the premises of grounded theory (GT), a research methodology in which data is collected inductively and qualitatively. In GT, recurrent codes and subthemes could be extracted and grouped into various themes, which may form the basis of a new theory [34].

3.1. Participants. In this study, our participants were native ($n = 54$) and nonnative ($n = 60$) English language teachers and learners who were selected based on convenience sampling that involves the participants being drawn on the basis of their accessibility. Native learners were students studying English at college/university or high school, and native teachers were teaching English in the same contexts. Nonnative participants consisted of students studying English at university or private language institutes and teachers teaching English in the same educational contexts (Tables 2 and 3).

The researchers conducted face-to-face semistructured focus group discussions with Iranian participants and online interviews with other native and nonnative participants. Eleven teachers and twelve learners were invited to participate in focus group discussions; however, three teachers

TABLE 2: Participants' nationalities.

	<i>f</i>	%
Native	UK	22.22
	Australia	22.22
	USA	20.37
	Canada	18.51
	Ireland	9.25
	New Zealand	7.40
	Total	100
Nonnative	Iran	26.66
	Russia	18.33
	China	18.33
	South Korea	10
	Afghanistan	10
	Pakistan	8.33
	Saudi Arabia	8.33
	Total	100

and four learners declined to participate due to illness, being busy at the time, or some other personal problems. Therefore, sixteen Iranian teachers ($n = 8$) and learners ($n = 8$) participated in our focus group interviews. The researchers ran two four-member focus groups with Iranian teachers and two four-member focus groups with Iranian learners in Iran. All learners were high-intermediate or advanced English learners. Out of four focus group sessions, two were held at a private language institute in Iran; the other two sessions were held at two universities in Iran. No one else was present at focus group sessions besides the participants and the researcher. Regarding online interviews, the researchers contacted 335 participants via e-mail and social networks of LinkedIn, Google+, WhatsApp, and so forth, only 98 of whom responded, that is, the response rate of 29.25%. Overall, 114 teachers and learners participated in this study.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis. In this study, we conducted semistructured focus group interviews with Iranian participants and online interviews with other native and nonnative participants to extract the components of teachers' (dis)respect for learners. Initially, the researchers formulated five open-ended questions and piloted them with two teachers and two learners. Having removed one double-barreled question, they finalized four questions (Appendix) asking participants what showed teachers' (dis)respect for learners. Regarding focus groups, as Dornyei ([35]; p. 144) noted, "This is obviously an economical way to gather a

TABLE 3: Demographic characteristics of participants.

		N	%	Gender		Mean age	Mean years of teaching/learning experience	Educational context	
				Male	Female			University	School/institute
Native	Teachers	32	28.07	14	11	42.35	15.66	15	10
	Learners	22	19.29	15	14	22.06	11.23	22	7
Nonnative	Teachers	30	26.31	20	10	46.66	14.8	10	20
	Learners	30	26.31	15	15	24.8	9.4	15	15
	Total	114	100	64	50			62	52

relatively large amount of qualitative data and therefore focus groups are used for a variety of purposes in many different fields.” For the purposes of this study, we conducted semistructured focus groups because “just like with one-to-one interviews, the semi-structured type of focus group is the most common format” ([35], p. 144).

All focus group interviews were conducted in English, each lasting approximately one hour. All focus group discussions were conducted in three phases, carefully following the guidelines proposed by Dornyei [35]: (a) the introductory phase, (b) the actual discussion, and (c) the concluding phase. In the introductory phase, the researcher, who functioned as a moderator, “welcomes the participants, outlines the purpose of the discussion and sets the parameters of the interview in terms of length and confidentiality” ([35], p. 145). In addition, in this introductory phase, participants were informed of the purpose of recording their answers and the fact that there would be no right or wrong answers. Further, all participants were informed that this study was being carried out as a part of the second researcher’s Ph. D. dissertation. In the actual discussion, the researcher first asked each participant about their age and years of teaching/learning experience. Then he asked everyone the open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of teachers’ (dis)respect for learners. Initially, the researcher addressed each question to the individual participants asking them to discuss their responses. Then all participants were invited to share their responses in open discussions with others, agreeing or disagreeing with each other. Finally, in the concluding phase, the researcher asked the participants if there were any further questions or comments, trying to “include a short winding down phase and some positive feedback so that nobody leaves the session being dissatisfied with themselves or with the social image they may have projected” ([35], p. 146). In this study, the second researcher, a Ph. D. candidate of applied linguistics with over 15 years of English teaching experience, conducted all focus group interviews with Iranian teachers separately from those with Iranian learners. At the time, the second researcher taught English courses at B.A. level at university; he also taught general English at private language institutes.

Since non-Iranian teachers and learners came from various cultural backgrounds, conducting focus group discussions or one-on-one interviews was not feasible. The same open-ended questions were sent to non-Iranian natives and nonnatives, who were further inquired about their gender, age, years of teaching/learning experience, and educational context. Every attempt was made to enhance the response rate of these participants. To this end, sometimes we had to resend

the same e-mail to the same participants a couple of times reminding them that we were in urgent need of their responses for the purpose of our data collection for this study.

Further, it should be noted that, having collected and analyzed the qualitative data from 114 native and nonnative teachers and learners, the researchers came to the conclusion that they should stop collecting further data “because fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties,” a point which is called “saturation” ([34], p. 269).

It is noteworthy that the transcripts of the audio recordings of the focus group interviews were not returned to the participants for corrections, additions, or any form of modifications for two reasons. First, the audio recordings were clear enough to be transcribed precisely. Second, as Mero-Jaffe ([36]; p. 244) points out, “transference of transcripts to interviewees raises methodological problems, ethical problems, and problems of research credibility.” The fact that the disadvantages of this procedure overcome its advantages has been emphasized by Hagens et al. [37]. In addition, Forbat and Henderson [38] and Hall [39] reported the phenomenon of the very low response rate on the part of interviewees.

Finally, in collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data, ethical considerations were adopted. For example, the participants were fully informed about the aims of the study and the fact that the outcomes of this research would be utilized only for research purposes. All the participant teachers and learners had given their consent to be interviewed online or to attend the focus group sessions and all Iranian participants were aware that the sessions were audio-recorded. Furthermore, they were assured that all the data amassed would be kept private and confidential. They were also reassured that their identities would not be revealed. As we have four groups of participants, that is, nonnative teachers (NNTs), nonnative learners (NNLs), native teachers (NTs), and native learners (NLs), we will refer to them as NNT 1, NL 2, and so forth.

In order to answer the posed research questions qualitatively, all the audio recordings of focus group discussions were transcribed using Microsoft Word. Then all the transcripts and non-Iranian participants’ responses to online interviews were analyzed using MAXQDA 2018 to find any recurrent themes and patterns. The data were analyzed utilizing the coding pattern suggested by Strauss and Corbin [40] consisting of three coding stages: open, axial, and selective. In the open coding stage, the data were perused thoroughly in order to specify participants’ preliminary codes. This procedure was conducted through setting codes and themes, occasionally by employing in vivo codes (i.e., the participants’ exact words as codes). In the axial coding

stage, the relations between particular themes and sub-themes were taken into consideration, identifying and categorizing codes in accordance with a proper fit. By analyzing further data obtained from interviews, the codes and themes were modified and reinforced through constant comparative method [41]. In the final stage of selective coding, the major categories were linked to other pertinent subcategories, referring to core categories as themes and minor ones as subthemes. Employing joint probability of agreement, the two researchers coded the participants' statements independently. Then they met to compare the extracted codes and align their coding patterns in an iterative procedure. The results are presented and discussed below.

4. Results and Discussion

In this study, we explored what native and nonnative teachers' and learners' perceptions are towards teachers' (dis)respect for learners. As revealed by the thematic content analysis of 442 coded statements obtained from focus group discussions and online interviews with the four groups of participants, that is, NNTs, NNLs, NTs, and NLs, three overarching themes emerged: (1) teachers' interpersonal characteristics, (2) teachers' insightfulness, and (3) teachers' occupational attributes, with the first theme being the most recurrent followed by the second and third ones (Table 4). Altogether, 14 subthemes (Table 5) arose from the data with *politeness* being the most frequent and *appreciativeness* the least frequent ones. It is worth noting that in this study we have explored both respect and disrespect; however, for further readability, we have employed only positive terms to name the subthemes, for example, *politeness* not (*im*) *politeness*.

4.1. Teachers' Interpersonal Characteristics. Regarding the first most recurrent theme, two subthemes were commonly pointed out by all four groups: (1) *politeness* and (2) *care*. In fact, the majority of our participants considered (*im*) *politeness* as a sign of teachers' (dis)respect. These participants brought up various manifestations of impoliteness such as shouting at learners and insulting them [7]. This subtheme is represented in the four following extracts.

4.1.1. Extract 1 (NNT 5). Well, we'd better smile while answering their questions. We also need to have good eye contact with them while explaining the lesson.

4.1.2. Extract 2 (NL 2). In my opinion, insulting learners in class is the greatest sign of teachers' disrespect. I mean shouting at us, err making fun of us in front of the whole class, or roasting us for whatsoever reason they may have.

4.1.3. Extract 3 (NNL 3). I don't expect my teachers to blame me for each and every mistake I make in class. He can remind me later of the correct answers. Also, they shouldn't criticize us for failing a previous term or getting a low grade.

4.1.4. Extract 4 (NT 1). It is better that we teachers do not interrupt learners too often when they are speaking, especially if they gonna express their emotions about sb or sth or during a frank exchange of views.

This finding is in tandem with what Lo and Howard [42] noted, "the term 'politeness' in fact designates a wide range of behaviors whose production and construal is often only partially shared culture-internally, whose meaning is always emergent within a locally unfolding text-trajectory."

The second most recurrent subtheme that was mentioned by all four groups was *care*. The following is an exemplar comment.

4.1.5. Extract 5 (NNL 2). Well, the first thing that comes to my mind is how much the teacher cares about his learners. Actually, a caring teacher is a respectful one. They ought to get to know us and our needs and problems pretty well.

Additionally, other participants felt that a respectful teacher is a genuinely caring teacher who "always actively listens to his students' part of the story trying to understand what he or she means by checking in with them later" (NT 2), "pays full attention to students' comments" (NNT 29), and "gives learners a warm greeting each session" (NL 18). These behavioral traits are in tandem with the teachers' behaviors that were deemed as caring by more than 75% of participants in a study by Tosolt [43]. It seems that a caring student-teacher relationship has an immense value for both native and non-native participants. This finding parallels what Kottler and Zehm [44] regarded as *compassionate empathy* or teachers' caring about students as a condition between students and teachers. Furthermore, both Tomlinson [45] and Lu [46] viewed the need for affirmation or care as one of the needs that motivates students to learn. The concept of *care* is also one of the eight elements of Webster [47] definition of teacher respect for students and one of the four key concepts of respect proposed by Van Ness [48] called *respect as caring relationship*.

Concerning teachers' interpersonal characteristics, two subthemes were extracted only from nonnatives' focus group discussions: *helpfulness* and *patience*. NNTs and NNLs generally described a respectful teacher as helpful and patient, a person who gives "corrections" and "explanations" whenever learners need them. The two following extracts are representative of these findings.

4.1.6. Extract 6 (NNT 7). To me, what shows a teacher's respect is his being ready to help learners whenever they need it. For example, he should give them necessary corrections when they make mistakes, and provide them with the right answers.

4.1.7. Extract 7 (NNL 5). A respectful teacher should be patient enough with his or her students. I mean, err, he ought to be always willing to listen to us, correct us, and give us plenty of explanations about the grammatical points.

The concepts of *help* and *patience* are two of the eight elements of Webster's [47] definition of teacher respect for students; moreover, Esposito [49] mentioned patience and

TABLE 4: Themes and subthemes pertaining to participants' perceptions of teachers' (dis)respect.

Themes/subthemes	Weighted percentage by theme/subtheme			
	Nonnative		Native	
	Teachers	Learners	Teachers	Learners
Teachers' interpersonal characteristics	51.06	56.10	48.06	51.06
Politeness	54.07	60.08	40.08	45.08
Care	23.88	20.87	22.80	20.81
Helpfulness	22.05	—	—	—
Patience	—	19.05	—	—
Fairness	—	—	19.05	—
Encouragement	—	—	18.07	—
Appreciativeness	—	—	—	19.04
Kindness	—	—	—	15.07
Teachers' insightfulness of	38.22	34.18	36.22	38.22
Learners' self-esteem	60.23	65.18	55.20	100
Learners' individuality	39.77	34.82	—	—
Learners' freedom	—	—	44.80	—
Teachers' occupational attributes	10.72	9.72	15.72	10.72
Dedication	100	—	68.45	—
Interest	—	100	—	64.89
Punctuality	—	—	31.55	35.11

TABLE 5: Emerging subthemes of teachers' (dis)respect for learners.

Subthemes	%
Politeness	98
Learners' self-esteem	87
Care	75
Dedication	70
Learners' freedom	70
Helpfulness	50
Encouragement	50
Kindness	50
Learners' individuality	50
Patience	50
Interest	50
Punctuality	45
Fairness	40
Appreciativeness	40

teacher's willingness to help learners as important aspects of respect. *Help* is also one of the four categories of Ellis [32] model for respect called *Help Me*, one of the four key concepts of respect proposed by Van Ness [48] called *respect as supportive help*, and one of the preferred teachers' interpersonal behaviors found by Yu and Chen [50]. The finding of this study that *helpfulness* and *patience* were pointed out solely by nonnatives might be explained by the fact that both teachers and learners lived in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. In such contexts, both mainstream education system and English language teaching at private language institutes are mainly teacher-centered with a focus on forms [51] rather than focus on form [51]. Therefore, it seems that as the primary attention is devoted to the teaching and learning of linguistic form, both NNTs and NNLs expect a respectful teacher to be helpful and patient vis-à-vis their linguistic problems and needs.

Further, the two subthemes of *fairness* and *encouragement* were referred to only by NTs and *appreciativeness* and *kindness* only by NLs. NTs generally described a respectful

teacher as a person who “ensures fairness and equality to all his students” (NT 15). In the following extract, NT 3 displays his attitudes towards a respectful teacher highlighting some components of teachers' fairness.

4.1.8. Extract 8. Actually, a respectful teacher treats learners fairly. He should guarantee this fairness in all respects such as the amount of attention he gives them as well as his evaluation and grading. He should also avoid favoritism and discrimination by gender in his classes.

Having reviewed literature regarding features of effective teachers, Stronge [52] argues, “Students associate respect with fairness and expect teachers to treat them as people” (p. 16). Fairness is also included in Pomeroy's [53], Webster's [47], and Fernandes' [1] models of respect.

Another distinguishing subtheme pointed out by only NTs was *encouragement*. The following is representative of this finding.

4.1.9. Extract 9 (NT 5). I think effective teachers communicate their respect for learners by praising and encouraging their students. They should inspire students to cooperate with each other to do the tasks and solve the problems.

Encouragement has also been included in Ellis' [32] and Van Ness' [48] models of respect. Wong ([54]; p. 187) states, “the expression, frequency, and importance of encouragement” might vary across diverse cultures referring to some evidence “suggesting that encouragement might be relatively more important to the success” of some non-Western cultures. This contrasts with our finding that *encouragement* was pointed out by only NTs rather than nonnatives.

On the other hand, NLs typically characterized a respectful teacher by asserting that “teachers should appreciate the effort learners put into their work” (NL 4). In the following extract, NL 5 expresses his attitude towards a respectful teacher.

4.1.10. *Extract 10.* Personally speaking, I would take offence if my teacher doesn't thank me for something good I've done such as my correct answers, my punctuality, and so on. I suppose teachers' respect incorporates their heartfelt gratitude for us.

This finding is in line with Van Ness' [48] model of respect comprising four key concepts, one of which is *intentional appreciation*; however, in contrast to his finding that "teachers placed greater importance on the theme *respect as intentional appreciation*," in our study, only NLs have cited teachers' appreciation of learners.

Kindness was the least frequent characteristic of a respectful teacher reported by NLs. In fact, NLs deemed that teachers' affective sensitivity, friendliness, and considerateness are essential features of a respectful teacher. For instance, NL 21 put it this way, "To me, respect means my teacher fully sympathizes with me." Further, NL 6 said, "The teacher ought to treat us cordially and show regard for and be thoughtful of our feelings." This finding is consistent with Van Ness' ([48]; p. 177) conclusion that "displays of care and kindness also cultivated respect and engendered affection in the hearts of students." Apparently, teachers who are genuinely kind to their students and seek ways to display close affinity with learners through respectful interpersonal relationships might be more apt to form a relationship characterized by trust, affection, and ultimately respect.

4.2. *Teachers' Insightfulness.* Concerning the second most recurrent theme, *learners' self-esteem* was commonly pointed out by all four groups. In fact, valuing learners' sense of self-esteem was deemed to be a significant feature of a respectful teacher. Maslow [21] also emphasized self-esteem by including it in his *hierarchy of human needs*. Our participants raised some critical elements of self-esteem. For instance, one NT referred to self-respect, which aligns with Roland and Foxx's ([55]; p. 247) submission that "not only is self-respect important in understanding self-esteem, but that it also uniquely contributes to individual functioning."

4.2.1. *Extract 11 (NT 8).* A respectful teacher should be conscious of their students' self-worth and self-respect. This could help learners function much better in class.

In addition, other participants asserted that teachers' (dis)respect includes teachers' insightfulness of *learners' self-esteem* by underlining, inter alia, "recognizing and accepting learners' strengths" (NNT 4), "helping learners gain a sense of belonging" (NNL 10), and "helping learners develop a sense of autonomy and power" (NL 3). Both Webster [47] and Ellis [32] underscored the developing of students' self-esteem as a crucial element of respect and its relation to students' academic performance.

Another salient subtheme was teachers' insightfulness of *learners' individuality* mentioned merely by NNTs and NNLs. In fact, being perceptive about learners' sense of individuality was deemed to be a key feature of a respectful teacher. The following are exemplar comments by NNT 15 and NNL 6, respectively.

4.2.2. *Extract 12.* A respectful teacher is one who behaves towards his/her learners as individuals taking into account that learners' self-confidence is of great educational value. They never treat learners like babies especially those at higher levels of language proficiency.

4.2.3. *Extract 13.* Teachers should show in one way or another that their students' individual qualities are important to them. They should consider each student's style and personality type and treat him accordingly.

While NNT 15 refers to "learners' self-confidence" and not treating learners like babies, NNL 6 states that learners' "individual qualities" as well as their "style and personality type" are of importance. Overall, this subtheme is in tandem with two elements of respect encapsulated in Webster's [47] definition of respect, that is, *understanding* and *treating students as unique individuals* and one of Ellis' [32] categories of respect, that is, *See Me*. In general, the significance of recognizing and valuing learners' individual differences (IDs) in relation to effective learning is underscored by scholars such as Dornyei and Ryan [56].

Regarding insightfulness, only NTs reported on the close tie between *learners' freedom* and teachers' (dis)respect for learners. This theme was also included in Underwood-Baggett's [25] definition of respect. For example, NT 16 declared, "Teachers are supposed not to treat learners like a prisoner; they should give them plenty of freedom and independence." In addition to "independence," NTs raised other key components of *learners' freedom* that they considered pivotal to learners' understanding of teachers' respectful interpersonal communications: "not frequently interrupting learners while speaking" (NT 6), "acknowledging and valuing learners' voice and agency" (NT 31), and "allowing students to share their opinions and make suggestions" (NT 29). This emphasis on learners' voice and agency in education is in line with findings by Jääskelä et al. [57] and Eteläpelto et al. [58].

4.3. *Teachers' Occupational Attributes.* Regarding this least recurrent theme, whereas NNTs and NTs pointed out teachers' *dedication* to their job, NNLs and NLs referred to teachers' *interest* in their career. Indeed, these two occupational attributes are consistent with the notion of *work engagement* explored by Han et al. [59] and Schaufeli and Bakker [60]. Two major components of *dedication* were addressed by our participant teachers, namely, "hard work" and "time."

4.3.1. *Extract 14 (NNT 1).* Respectful teachers are dedicated ones. Well, I mean, they are always willing to put hard work and effort into their teaching. They never stop teaching passionately.

4.3.2. *Extract 15 (NT 4).* We, teachers, should devote enough time to show learners what is right and what is wrong. Further, we need to spend a great deal of time planning, ahead of the class, what and how to teach.

Regarding teachers' *interest*, our participant learners perceived a respectful teacher to be a person who, *inter alia*, "shows interest in the subject matter he is teaching" (NNL 16) and "has immense enthusiasm about how best he/she can prepare the teaching content" (NL 15), which is aligned with Schiefele et al.'s [61] scale of *interest*.

Finally, it seems that native teachers and learners are concerned with teachers' *punctuality* more than nonnatives do and they would consider teachers' tardiness as a sign of teachers' disrespect for learners. Indeed, *punctuality* was mentioned solely by native participants. Extract 16 is illustrative of this subtheme.

4.3.3. *Extract 16 (NL 20)*. Teachers are expected to show up to class on time. Many things may be overlooked, but being late consistently is not acceptable. To me, tardiness damages the reputation of the school, and would be seen as disrespectful to students.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The significance of positive student-teacher relationships for learning has been underscored by research on effective teaching practices, and its enhanced learning outcomes have been underlined. Batelaan [10] points out that a safe learning context begins with teachers-students and students-students respectful interaction. In this study, we investigated the underresearched construct of (dis)respect cross-culturally, examining native and nonnative English language teachers' and learners' perceptions of teachers' (dis)respect for learners.

As revealed by the content analysis of the focus groups and online interviews, three overarching themes emerged: (1) teachers' interpersonal characteristics, (2) teachers' insightfulness, and (3) teachers' occupational attributes, with the first theme being the most recurrent followed by the second and third ones. Overall, 14 subthemes emerged. An important finding of this study was that the three subthemes of *politeness*, *learners' self-esteem*, and *care* were the most recurrent, respectively, which were pointed out by all four groups: NTs, NNTs, NLs, and NNLs. Concerning teachers' interpersonal characteristics, two subthemes were extracted only from nonnatives' focus group discussions: *helpfulness* and *patience*. Further, regarding this theme, the two subthemes of *fairness* and *encouragement* were referred to only by NTs and *appreciativeness* and *kindness* only by NLs. Concerning teachers' insightfulness, while *learners' individuality* was mentioned by NNTs and NNLs, NTs reported on the close tie between *learners' freedom* and teachers' (dis)respect for learners. Finally, regarding teachers' occupational attributes, whereas NNTs and NTs pointed out teachers' *dedication* to their job, NNLs and NLs referred to teachers' *interest* in their career; furthermore, NTs and NLs raised the notion of *punctuality* as a token of teachers' (dis)respect for learners.

Therefore, it seems that *politeness*, *care*, *learners' self-esteem*, *dedication*, and *interest* are the five culture-general components of teachers' (dis)respect for learners because

they are mentioned by both natives and nonnatives. Conversely, other extracted subthemes could be considered as culture-specific components for they are raised by either natives (*fairness*, *encouragement*, *appreciativeness*, *kindness*, *punctuality*, and *learners' freedom*) or nonnatives (*helpfulness*, *patience*, and *learners' individuality*). This divergence of perceptions might be mainly attributed to the different sociocultural milieus in which natives and nonnatives were born, raised, and educated [33]. Furthermore, the three major themes of teachers' interpersonal characteristics, teachers' insightfulness, and teachers' occupational attributes are common to all four groups of NNTs, NNLs, NTs, and NLs. Hence, given this *diversity within universality*, we have proposed a comprehensive, cross-cultural model of teachers' (dis)respect for learners.

An important pedagogical implication is that teacher educators use culture-specific features of a (dis)respectful teacher to raise teachers' awareness of learners' expectations of teachers' (dis)respect. Teachers from English speaking world (ESW) contexts and EFL teachers could undergo training to get familiarized with components of teachers' (dis)respect for learners raised by natives and nonnatives, respectively. Furthermore, in international educational contexts, employing culture-general components of teachers' (dis)respect for learners, teachers' awareness should be heightened about how other native and nonnative teachers perceive (dis)respectful teachers. This could ensure a high degree of uniformity among teachers in the way they behave towards their native and nonnative learners, which might in turn result in more harmonious and healthier student-teacher relationship and an environment conducive to more effective learning. Additionally, in such cross-cultural educational contexts, learners' awareness should also be fostered about how other native and nonnative learners perceive (dis)respectful teachers to be. This could enhance learners' mutual cooperation with each other to reconcile themselves to other learners' different perceptions so that they might study in a more supportive and friendly learning environment.

Additionally, an atmosphere of respect within the educational contexts requires national and international policies as well as local and global leadership that recognizes and reinforces respectful behaviors and discourages disrespectful ones. Teachers and principals need to make collaborative efforts to further an environment of respect, for each other and for learners. They are to model these respectful behaviors and decline to endure disrespect for others. Consequently, educational programs reinforcing positive student-teacher relationships could assist in fostering positive behavior on the part of both teachers and learners and developing respect within these relationships.

In conclusion, since we conducted this research study qualitatively, the limitations of qualitative research will be applicable to this study. First, the researcher's presence during data collection, which is often inevitable, can influence the subjects' responses. In addition, the present study was limited to semistructured focus group sessions and online interviews. Other types of qualitative methods such as observation notes, diaries, and ethnographies might be used

by other researchers. Finally, this study was further restricted to 114 English language teachers and learners. Larger samples from other disciplines might help researchers reach more rigorous results.

Appendix

Focus Group and Interview Questions

- (1) How do you understand the concept of (dis)respect?
- (2) Can you define (dis)respect in the context of ELT?
- (3) How do you perceive English language teachers' (dis)respect for learners in the classroom?
- (4) What do you think are the components of teachers' (dis)respect for learners?

Data Availability

The qualitative data used to support the findings of this study have not been made available due to confidentiality reasons. However, authors will do their best to make them available upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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