HIGH-ACHIEVING MĀORI STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR BEST AND WORST TEACHERS

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored high-achieving Māori students' perceptions of their best and worst secondary school teachers. Participants (*N* = 96) were Year 12 or 13 students at English-medium secondary schools in Aotearoa who had attained certificate endorsement at Level 1 or 2 in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Findings showed that Māori students' best teachers had high expectations for their achievement. They spent class time teaching students and discussing their learning, whereas students' worst teachers had low expectations and restricted their access to high grades in NCEA. A key finding from this study was that although positive teacher–student relationships were important, they needed to be accompanied by effective teaching practices. A teacher who had a positive relationship with Māori students but did not teach them well was not considered their "best" teacher.

Keywords

best teachers, Māori student success, NCEA, secondary school, teacher–student relationships, worst teachers

Introduction

Achieving academic success at school is a fundamental goal of education. It leads to increased access and choice in post-secondary education and higher-level job opportunities (Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992). Focusing on Māori student success is critical given the ongoing inequalities in Aotearoa schools, resulting in lower achievement outcomes for Māori (Education Counts, 2021a). The education system in Aotearoa has a long history of failing to meet the educational needs of Māori students, who are often subjected to lower teacher expectations and discrimination (Alton-Lee, 2003; Turner et al., 2015). Schools in Aotearoa also stand down, suspend and exclude or expel Māori students at higher rates

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than any other ethnic group (Education Counts, 2021b).

For students in Aotearoa, the main pathway to university is through Level 3 of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) and University Entrance (UE). There are three levels of NCEA, and students generally complete one level per year in their final three years of secondary school. Students need a minimum number of credits to pass each level. However, to access limited-entry university programmes (e.g. medical and health sciences or engineering) and to cope with the demands of academic study, students need to achieve more than the minimum number of credits (Madjar et al., 2010).

Despite improvements in NCEA attainment over the past decade, overall achievement levels for Māori students continue to lag behind those of Asian and Pākehā students. In 2021, only 58% of Māori achieved NCEA Level 3, compared with 73% of Asian and 72% of Pākehā students. Results for UE were even lower: only 32% of Māori achieved this qualification compared with 63% of Asian and 57% of Pākehā students (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2021). Research has shown that quality teachers and effective teaching significantly influence student achievement (Hattie, 2009). Therefore, for Māori students to achieve the qualifications necessary to attend university, it is critical to investigate the teacher factors that support or do not support their success.

Teacher–student relationships

Students who have a positive relationship with a teacher are more likely to succeed at school than those who do not (Engels et al., 2021; Pianta & Allen, 2008; Pianta et al., 2012). According to Hattie (2009), the effect of teacher–student relationships on achievement is $d = 0.72$, a large, positive effect. In classes where relationships between teachers and students are positive, students are more engaged, have fewer behavioural issues, respect their peers and have higher achievement outcomes (Hattie, 2009). However, not all students have positive relationships with their teachers. Brinkworth et al. (2018) found that teacher–student relationships "may be positive, negative, neither, or both" (p. 2). Thus, teachers and students could relate positively in some situations, negatively in others or have concurrent positive and negative feelings. High-achieving students are less likely to need emotional support from teachers because their success sustains them (Capern & Hammond, 2014). Therefore, the absence of a positive teacher–student relationship does not necessarily indicate high levels of conflict, hostility or low achievement.

The attributes of excellent teachers

Previous research studies have explored the characteristics and qualities of excellent teachers. Personal attributes include enthusiasm, innovation, organisation, flexibility, commitment, support (Pendergast, 2002), helpfulness (Pariser, 2011), fairness, a sense of humour (Muller et al., 1999), positivity (Hill & Hawk, 2000) and caring (Bishop, 2010; Pariser, 2011; Pendergast, 2002). Professional attributes include effective classroom management, motivating and engaging students with exciting work (Muller et al., 1999), and reflectiveness as a practitioner (Bishop, 2010). This overview of teacher attributes indicates that excellence cannot be reduced to a single factor and may reflect an individual student's wants and needs.

Student perceptions of effective teaching and teachers

In the research about effective teaching at secondary school, students wanted teachers who knew their subject, gave clear explanations and monitored student understanding. Whitney et al. (2005) asked secondary school students, "What is good teaching, and how do we know it when we see it?" (p. 30). They found that good teaching included positive affect, a sense of humour, a caring attitude, enthusiasm and passion for teaching. Teachers did not overload students with homework or assignments; they provided feedback, marked work quickly, managed the classroom effectively, were well-prepared, were organised, and provided interesting and varied lessons. They also understood their learners' lives outside school and designed relevant curricula.

In an Aotearoa study, Horsley (2009) investigated the factors that had facilitated students' success in the Scholarship examinations. Students chose "teacher" as the factor that had the greatest influence on their success, ahead of their ability, parents or peers. Effective teachers possessed expertise in the subject material and provided students with knowledge or skills they could not access without support. For example, Scholarship level studies require an in-depth understanding of the examination process. Consequently, effective teachers provided specialist content knowledge and taught strategies for answering advanced questions, followed by specific feedback to help students learn and improve. They also offered out-of-class support, had high expectations for

student success, and had positive interactions and relationships.

Effective teachers of Māori students

Few research studies have explored high-achieving Māori secondary school students' perspectives of an excellent teacher or what they want or do not want from their teachers. The leading research project in Aotearoa focused on teacher attributes and behaviour and the association with student achievement was Te Kotahitanga (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2003). The researchers interviewed teachers, principals, students and whānau to discover why Māori students were not achieving at school. Students reported that their relationships with teachers were negative. Teachers had low expectations and held deficit beliefs about students and their families. From the student narratives, the researchers developed a profile of six characteristics and attributes of effective teachers of Māori students. These were Manaakitanga—caring for students as Māori; Mana Motuhake—high expectations for student achievement; Ngā Whakapiringatanga—creating a secure, well-managed learning environment; Wānanga—engaging in effective learning interactions with Māori students; Ako—using a range of teaching strategies; and Kotahitanga—using student progress to inform future teaching practice (Bishop & Berryman, 2009, pp. 30–31). It is important to note that the Māori students in Te Kotahitanga were described as "engaged" or "disengaged" rather than high achieving. Therefore, their findings about effective teachers may not apply to high-achieving Māori students.

Bevan-Brown (2005) similarly found that effective teachers for gifted Māori students provided a culturally responsive environment and supported and respected Māori culture. Teachers also incorporated cultural knowledge, content and values into teaching programmes, helped Māori students to extend their unique abilities, and provided students with opportunities to use preferred learning methods.

Taken together, the research on effective teachers for high-achieving students has concluded that instructional teaching ability and expert subject knowledge were essential. Personal characteristics such as enthusiasm and caring were also significant. For Māori students, effective teaching encompassed the factors valued by students of other ethnicities but also included positive connections, taking an interest in students' lives and instituting culturally sustaining practices.

The current study

This study utilised open-ended questionnaires to explore Māori students' perceptions of their best and worst secondary school teachers. It was part of a larger research project investigating the factors contributing to student success (Adams, 2018). The study's main objective was to learn from high-achieving Māori students about the teaching practices and dispositions most conducive to their success. The research question that guided this study was: How do high-achieving Māori students define an ideal and non-ideal secondary school teacher?

Prior research about Māori students and ethnic minorities concentrates on poor educational outcomes (Fletcher et al., 2009; Lock & Gibson, 2008). Consequently, a shift of focus to Māori high achievers will provide valuable data for whānau, teachers and school leaders about the teaching and learning practices that have been most effective for these students. It is essential to identify what teachers can do to enable Māori students to reach their educational potential and obtain the necessary qualifications to transition smoothly to tertiary education or the workforce.

Researchers' positionality

The three authors of this study are all former teachers with enduring connections to school communities. Two of us are Māori (one is Pākehā), and our research focuses on strengths-based examinations of Māori student success in education. We are all social psychologists who explore how school contexts (including teacher practices and pedagogies) impact the behaviour, thinking, identities and academic persistence of Māori students.

Method

Participants

All student participants in the study self-identified as Māori (*N* = 96). Students were in Year 12 or 13 at English-medium secondary schools, were aged 16–19 years and had attained Level 1 or 2 in NCEA with a Merit or Excellence endorsement.

Procedures

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC; Reference No. 015102). Participation in the research was voluntary. As the questionnaires were anonymous, submission or completion of the questionnaire indicated consent. Students completed the questionnaires online via a link to Qualtrics (99% of students) or on paper. The

students responded to the following questions about their best and worst teachers:

1. Please describe your **best** teacher. What does s/he do and say, and how does s/he act or behave? How does s/he teach? How does s/he relate to their students?
2. Describe your **worst** teacher. What does s/he do and say, and how does s/he act or behave? How does s/he teach? How does s/he relate to their students?

Data analysis

All questionnaire data were analysed thematically using the steps outlined in Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, which involves "identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). Thematic analysis is a flexible method of analysis that suits research questions, such as those in the current study, related to people's experiences or perceptions. The six phases of thematic analysis are "(1) Familiarisation with the data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing the themes; (5) Defining and naming themes; (6) Producing the report" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). The final themes and sub-themes are displayed in Figure 1.

Results

This section reports the thematically analysed data from the students' online questionnaires. The first theme portrays teacher actions and practices that relate to student learning. The second theme describes teachers' professional attributes, and the third theme, relational practices, explains how teachers connect with and treat their students. Cultural responsiveness and respect are included as relational practices because these aspects underpin a positive teacher–student connection for Māori.

Answered questions and explained the work

Students' best teachers helped them to understand what they were learning and gave clear explanations. They used examples and analogies, pointed out obstacles, and responded to students' questions. One student's teacher "makes really helpful diagrams and uses things we are good at to describe the concept we are trying to learn". Another said, "He has a way of teaching things simply, which makes it easy to understand." Participants expected teachers to be highly skilled and knowledgeable in helping students attain high grades. For example, "[Him] having solid knowledge about the topic and being able to answer any question that we ask makes me confident in my learning." These "best teacher" practices contrasted with those of students' worst teachers.

Students' worst teachers avoided or ignored their questions and instructed students to find answers themselves: "I feel like he doesn't listen to us … when we ask him a question in class, he will start to talk over us and will say something like, 'We've already talked about this.'" Students also complained that their worst teacher's explanations were inadequate. Instead of explaining concepts, their teachers fed them answers or did the work for them. One student explained:

> When asking for help with a specific question, they tend to do it for me instead of helping me to do it. When I move on to the next question, I am still lost because they just did it for me; they didn't actually help.

These extracts highlight that the students were not simply looking for answers but wanted their teachers' help so they could apply the knowledge to further learning.
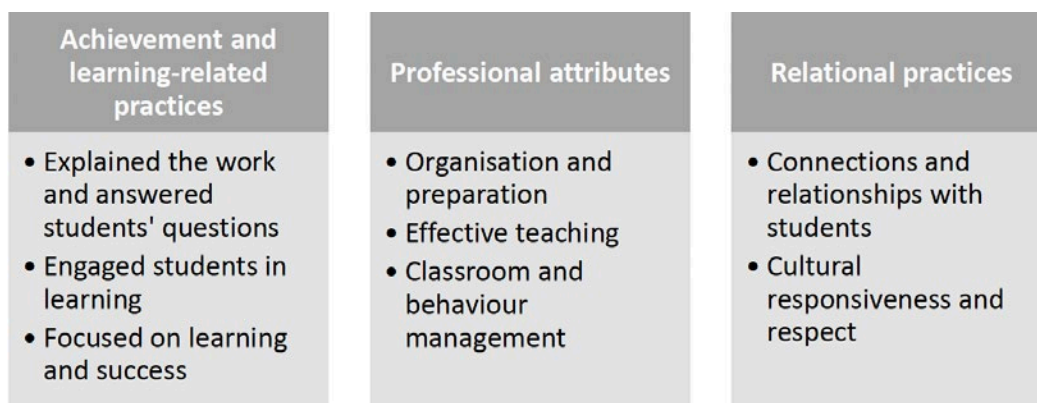

Achievement and learning-related practices	Professional attributes	Relational practices
• Explained the work and answered students' questions • Engaged students in learning • Focused on learning and success	• Organisation and preparation • Effective teaching • Classroom and behaviour management	• Connections and relationships with students • Cultural responsiveness and respect

FIGURE 1 Themes and sub-themes of best and worst teachers for Māori students

Engaged students in learning

Students' best teachers included variety in each class, with quizzes, competitions, hands-on practical activities, discussions, online tasks and videos. They found ways to make lessons fun and interactive even when the content was complex. For example, "No two lessons are the same, which makes me excited to go to class and learn." The students' best teachers were enthusiastic, were excited and loved teaching. One student said, "My best teacher is so passionate about what she teaches, which excites her and makes her happy … she loves it so much that she wants you to love it, too."

Along with variety in their lessons, students wanted opportunities to interact with their teachers and peers. They did not like classes in which teachers spent whole lessons talking, reading from textbooks, or limited student participation or collaboration. For example, "He doesn't interact much with his students or make learning fun; it is the same each day with no variation…" Students' worst teachers seemed bored and appeared to dislike teaching. One student said, "He teaches only because it's his job. I feel he has no passion or love … He acts as if he has to be there." Students emphasised that a mix of activities, teacher enthusiasm and face-to-face class interactions contributed to their engagement. Effective teachers also focused on student learning and success.

Focused on student learning and success

Best teachers had high expectations for students and believed they could achieve:

> This teacher always says that Excellence [the top grade in NCEA] should and can be achieved by anyone who wants it, which strongly encourages me to continue to have a good work ethic and strive for Excellence in all subjects.

Best teachers also provided extensive help to students during and outside of classes. One student said, "Before exams, he holds tutorials twice a week, which we can go to and ask him questions … Throughout the year, we can see him before/after class or during study periods if we need any help."

In contrast, students' worst teachers appeared unmotivated to help them succeed. For example, "[He] doesn't care about our grades or if we are learning." Other teachers communicated low expectations and limited students' learning opportunities by only teaching to an Achieved level, the lowest passing grade in NCEA: "He rushes the topic and says we have to do homework if we want to get higher than an Achieved because he only teaches Achieved." Similarly, another student said, "He teaches students the least amount of work to do in order to just scrape an Achieved." Limiting students' opportunities to learn was also a gatekeeping mechanism. Students reported that some teachers only allowed selected students a chance to gain credits or to resubmit assessment tasks. For example, "If he thinks you're incapable, then he won't offer you a re-sub or re-sit opportunity." Teaching decisions have a flow-on effect; students who only attain Achievement credits are unlikely to attain the rank score needed to access limited-entry university courses like medicine or engineering.

Effective teaching

Students expected their teachers to be subject experts and to teach in ways that helped them achieve high grades. One student said, "This teacher knows the subject well … She makes sure not to move on to the next topic before each student has a good understanding." Another student said, "My best teacher is unbelievably knowledgeable about his subject and is willing to sacrifice time to ensure we succeed." The best teachers knew their students' needs and took time to ensure they were learning and understanding the content.

Students were critical of teachers who appeared to have limited knowledge, made errors or relied heavily on textbooks and other resources: "He frequently makes mistakes in his working … Several times, [he has] needed to ask either a student or another teacher for assistance in solving a problem." Other students complained that their worst teachers did not teach them: "He didn't teach … He set pages in textbooks we were meant to do, and that was that." Students viewed teaching as a deliberate learning act involving both the teacher and student(s). Therefore, teachers needed to share their knowledge in interactions with students for teaching to occur.

Organisation and preparation

The best teachers were well prepared for each class and planned clearly structured lessons: "He is well-organised, and at the beginning of each topic, he gives us booklets that include all the notes and formulas [sic] we need to know to pass with Excellence." In contrast, student participants said their worst teachers regularly arrived late, were unprepared to teach and delivered poorly planned lessons. For example, "[She is] not on time, not organised, doesn't give accurate feedback." Another common complaint was teachers

who misplaced student work or took too long to mark it. One student said, "[They] lost my work and found it a week later, then marked it another week after [that]." These extracts indicate that actions that affected student learning and success influenced whether a teacher received a best or worst rating.

Connections and relationships with students

Students appreciated teachers who were interested in their lives and made a sincere effort to know them. They described their best teachers as welcoming, caring, easy to talk to and likable:

> She is like a mother, aunty, sister, and leader all in one. While she is kind and patient, she also has set expectations and boundaries. She is staunch, but at the same time, she cares. I know I can always trust her … She gets to know all her students and their strengths and weaknesses ... She understands and accepts all her students.

Student participants described their worst teachers as intimidating, unfriendly and uncaring. These teachers did not seem to like students or enjoy their company. For example, "She is mean to students. [She] does not seem to like what she does." Another student said their worst teachers "made little effort to get to know students. This, therefore, made them unapproachable and often hard to communicate with." When teachers were not interested in knowing their students beyond teaching academic content, it was challenging to build positive relationships.

One group of students were conflicted about their worst teacher. Relationally, their worst teacher was described as nice, friendly, kind or lovely, but contrasting with these feelings was the belief that their worst teachers taught poorly. Alongside positive personal attributes, participants described their worst teachers as disorganised, ineffective at managing behaviour, unable to teach, lacking subject knowledge and lazy. One student commented, "He cannot get his knowledge across in his teaching … He is an extremely friendly person but a horrible teacher …" Furthermore, several students reported that they loved their worst teachers, signifying that an emotional connection could occur separately from an academic relationship. For example, "Altogether a nice and friendly teacher who is terrible at teaching, I love her anyway but am probably going to fail this subject." These quotes highlight that a teacher's positive relational characteristics do not necessarily equate to being an effective teacher.

Cultural responsiveness and respect

Culturally responsive teachers included references to student culture in lessons so that new concepts were relevant to their interests and experiences. For example, "She is completely understanding of the different social and cultural backgrounds that the students come from, and encourages us to try and incorporate these aspects of our lives into our schoolwork." Another student said, "He always relates things to us and our own experiences in order for us to understand things better, and it definitely does work."

Students reported mutual respect with their best teacher, who listened to them and spoke kindly: "[She] respects us and, in turn, earns our respect." Students valued teachers knowing and pronouncing their names correctly. However, they expressed annoyance and frustration about teachers who "pronounce names wrong without apology" and "try to tell me I'm saying my name wrong". Students also reported that teachers embarrassed or humiliated them in front of other people or made jokes at their expense. One student said their worst teacher "talks down to students generally … [and] tells them they will get nowhere in life". Another said, "She expects us to respect her even though she does not respect us."

Discussion

This research explored high-achieving Māori students' perceptions of their best or worst teachers. The following sections discuss the themes identified in the results.

Answered questions and explained the work

Students valued teachers who responded to questions and gave helpful explanations, as it helped them advance their knowledge and understanding. These teacher actions are positively associated with student satisfaction and achievement (Hines et al., 1985). Help-seeking behaviour is also positively related to academic achievement and should be encouraged, but it relies on teachers' willingness to listen to and support students. Therefore, if teachers are unreceptive to questions, they could further limit student progress.

Existing research by Lilley (2008) found that Māori students sought answers to questions from people they trusted. More often, this was peers and whānau members rather than teachers. Furthermore, Webber et al.'s (2016) study about academic counselling found that Māori students preferred teachers approaching them and privately offering support instead of asking questions. Together, these studies indicate the

need for teachers to build trusting relationships, allow students to choose who they work with and initiate regular discussions about their learning in ways that students can relate to.

Engaged students in learning

Participants identified the importance of teacher passion and enthusiasm, as these relate to student engagement, behaviour (Kunter, 2013) and achievement (Keller et al., 2013). Teacher passion and enthusiasm create a positive cycle that leads students to become more engaged. As a result of high student engagement, teachers are motivated to be enthusiastic and provide exciting and engaging experiences for their students (Stenlund, 1995).

Focused on learning and academic success

Nearly a quarter of students in the current study reported that their worst teachers did not focus on learning and success. Although all students achieved highly in NCEA, it was evident that some had done so despite low teacher expectations. Prior secondary school research has found that teachers have lower expectations for Māori than all other ethnic groups (Bishop et al., 2003; Turner et al., 2015). It is troubling that some teachers may limit students' opportunities to access and achieve higher grades by only teaching Achieved-level content in NCEA. Research is scarce about students not being taught Excellence-level NCEA material. However, one study by Rawlins (2008) reported that:

> the teaching and learning of the units of mathematical content were structured around the assessment criteria for the assessment standards, starting with material consistent with the "Achieve" [sic] level criteria and progressing through to Merit and Excellence level material. In many instances, however, Excellence material was not actively taught: the responsibility to master Excellence material was often being left up to the individual student. (p. 108)

Promisingly, many students in the current study also commented that their best teacher did focus on learning and achievement. They encountered positive and high expectations, which may have been enough to prevent low expectations from negatively affecting their achievement.

Effective teaching

Qualified, knowledgeable teachers are essential to support academic success, and prior research has demonstrated a relationship between teacher knowledge and student achievement (Sadler et al., 2013). However, several students in the study referred to teachers not teaching when their lessons involved completing worksheets or doing problems out of textbooks. In reviewing how teachers influence classroom content, Brophy (1982) reported that teachers who relied heavily on books and other materials were not teaching. The resource materials they were using were "doing the teaching (and the teachers were) mostly coordinating and monitoring" (Brophy, 1982, p. 5). Students were happy to complete worksheets for homework but wanted their classes in school time to focus on learning from their teachers and working with their peers.

Organisation and preparation

When teachers are punctual and teach carefully planned lessons, they demonstrate that they take teaching and learning seriously and maintain high professional standards (Murphy et al., 1982). On the other hand, disorganised teachers do not model high standards, and could be perceived as lacking commitment (Foote et al., 2000). Students in the current study were concerned that their worst teachers' disorganisation could negatively affect their achievement. Teachers were regularly late to class, wasted time on unrelated activities and lost student work.

Scant research at the secondary school level has investigated students' perspectives of teacher disorganisation. Research at the tertiary level refers to disorganisation as one type of teacher misbehaviour (Kearney et al., 1991). Arriving late, not preparing lessons and wasting learning time are described as indolence. Although less damaging than public humiliation, indolence can demotivate students (Vallade & Myers, 2014). Furthermore, it may decrease student attendance, lower achievement and increase behaviour management problems (Kearney et al., 1991). As these studies referred to higher education, the transferability of these adverse effects to secondary school classrooms is a recommendation for future research.

Connections and relationships with students

Some of the current study's comments about teacher–student relationships suggest that a positive connection with teachers might be less critical for high-achieving Māori students. This result aligns with existing research (Capern & Hammond, 2014) that found that high-achieving students are less likely to need emotional support from teachers because their success sustains them. Furthermore,

students valued teacher behaviours that supported their learning more than socio-emotional relationships (Capern & Hammond, 2014). For senior students, reliance on teachers for academic rather than emotional support may be due to the focus on a high-stakes qualification in the final years of secondary school. However, some students equally valued emotional connections and wanted teachers to make a genuine effort to get to know them. Other studies (McHugh et al., 2013; Siegle et al., 2014) have reported that gifted and high-achieving students benefited from teacher–student relationships that were both socio-emotional and achievement focused. Therefore, relationships in which teachers demonstrate care for students through focusing on their learning and academic outcomes appear to be most beneficial for high-achieving Māori students.

An unexpected finding in the study was that some students reported a positive relationship with their worst teacher. Despite referring to these teachers as kind or friendly, they were students' worst teachers due to their poor subject knowledge or teaching ability. Only one existing study with a similar finding was located. Students in Hawk et al. (2002) reported that they had teachers they did not respect (as teachers) because they did not help them learn. This finding shows that a teacher–student relationship must be accompanied by effective teaching to benefit student learning and achievement.

Cultural responsiveness and respect

The current study had limited references to culturally responsive or sustaining practices, but students were appreciative when teachers included references to their culture, which were relevant to their lives. Several students reported that teachers were unable (or unwilling) to pronounce their Māori names correctly. This is a common finding in existing research with Māori, Indigenous and minoritised peoples internationally (Berryman & Eley, 2017; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Sembiante et al., 2018). Many teachers in Aotearoa lack knowledge of basic Māori vowel sounds (Awanui, 2014) or do not seem to consider te reo Māori important enough to use correctly (de Bres, 2010). Māori students' names may reflect significant events, whenua or tūpuna. Therefore, when teachers mispronounce tūpuna names, it is both disrespectful to the child and an attack on the mana of the ancestor (Mead, 1996). Conversely, a teacher who makes an effort to learn and pronounce Māori names correctly has taken a critical step towards building a positive and respectful relationship with Māori students (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2020; Tito, 2008).

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This cross-sectional study focused on students' perceptions of their teachers at one point during the final two years of secondary school. Future research could include a longitudinal study of students' perceptions of teachers over their entire secondary school education to see whether their perceptions changed during their school journey. This study defined student success in relation to Merit and Excellence endorsement in NCEA. Leadership, cultural and performing arts, service, and sports are other types of success that could be explored in future research studies. Finally, a limitation of qualitative research is its non-generalisability (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Although the study included 96 Māori students from a range of different schools in both urban and rural settings across Aotearoa, qualitative findings cannot be generalised to the broader population of high-achieving Māori secondary school students.

Conclusion

This qualitative study utilised an open-ended online survey to explore high-achieving Māori students' perceptions of their best and worst teachers and the behaviours and attributes necessary for academic success. Findings revealed that the best teachers for Māori students contributed to their academic success and socio-emotional well-being through high-quality teaching practices and academically caring relationships. However, a teacher who only had a positive relationship with students and did not teach them effectively was not their best teacher. The idea that teacher–student relationships are less critical for high-achieving Māori students contrasts with the theory put forward by Bishop and colleagues (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2003; Bishop et al., 2014) and Pianta and Allen (2008) that teacher–student relationships are the most important factors in a student's education. Although there were indications in this study that students enjoyed positive relationships with teachers, academic success could occur with or without a positive relationship. Yet, success was less likely if effective teaching was absent.

These findings indicate the need for further research into teacher–student relationships for high-achieving students in the secondary school context. An implication for practice, however, is not for teachers to avoid forming relationships

with students but that the teacher–student relationship focuses on academic care for student learning and achievement. Despite recent improvements in Māori student achievement, disparities between Māori and non-Māori in Aotearoa persist. As the past and present have shown us, ignoring the needs of Māori will continue to perpetuate educational inequalities and maintain the status quo. For education to be of the most value to Māori, teachers must develop and uphold practices and behaviours that enable students to succeed.

Glossary

ako	learn and teach
Aotearoa	the Māori name for New Zealand (Land of the long white cloud)
kotahitanga	unity and collective action
mana	status, influence, or spiritual power
manaakitanga	hospitality, kindness, generosity
mana motuhake	autonomy, independence, authority
Māori	Indigenous people of Aotearoa
ngā whakapiringatanga	a secure, well-managed environment
Pākehā	non-Māori of British or European descent
te reo Māori	the Māori language
tūpuna	ancestors
wānanga	Māori houses of higher learning
whānau	family
whenua	land; placenta. Māori are tangata whenua of Aotearoa, which means born of the whenua (the placenta) and the land of their ancestors.

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