

# The teacher's pet phenomenon 25 years on

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**Abstract** The teacher's pet phenomenon is widely recognised and negatively viewed by students and teachers. Teachers that favour selected students adversely affect the emotional climate in the classroom, as well as the social development and academic achievements of students. Despite the indicated consequences, the phenomenon is surprisingly rarely studied. Analysis of data gathered from 2164 students and 138 teachers showed that respondents perceived the phenomenon as widespread at each stage of education. Students assessed the phenomenon more negatively than teachers, although this evaluation was modified by respondents' views on two hypothetical types of pets, i.e., pet-leader versus pet-rejected. Teachers perceived the phenomenon negatively in the subgroup that described pets using attributes that are characteristic of leaders, and less negatively in the subgroup that described pets using attributes characteristic of rejected students. This pattern was reversed among students. The similarity between these findings and the results of previous studies suggest that the phenomenon is universal in temporal and spatial terms, and the differences in its reception discovered in various groups of respondents can be described through an inverted, U-shaped function.

**Keywords** Teacher's pet phenomenon · Special treatment · Teacher–student relationship · Favouritism

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## 1 Introduction

In the mid-1990s, Elisha Babad and his collaborators (Tal and Babad 1989, 1990; Babad and Ezer 1993; Babad 1995, 1998) published a series of articles concerning the interesting phenomenon of the teacher's pet. Explaining this concept, Babad (2009) states, "it is a phenomenon of a special emotional relationship (often a love relationship) between the teacher and a particular student (or two) in the classroom" (p. 106). Pets are students favoured by teachers because they have actual and/or alleged characteristics that are highly valued by teachers, but not necessarily by classmates. Because of their special relationship with the teacher, pets can be rejected by their peers (Babad 1995, 1998).

To the best knowledge of the paper's author, since then, only three new empirical articles dealing with the issue have been published (Chiu et al. 2013; Lu et al. 2015; Opoku-Amankwa 2009). This insubstantial increase in the knowledge of the teachers' pet phenomenon is intriguing considering the empirical evidence clearly indicating that the phenomenon is common—depending on the surveyed sample, it was recognised as 49% (Babad 1995), 80% (Tal and Babad 1990), and even 90% of respondents (Tal and Babad 1989)—and the consequences of favouring particular children by teachers are extremely important for the social development and academic achievements of students in the classrooms in which teachers' pets are found (Babad 1995; Chiu et al. 2013; Lu et al. 2015).

## 2 Psychological and academic costs of the teacher's pet phenomenon

Students' attitudes towards teachers are more negative in classrooms with pets than in no-pet classrooms (Babad 1998, 2009). In classrooms with pets, an average of 61–76% of students expressed the desire to continue their education with their teacher in the following academic year, whereas in no-pet classrooms, it was as many as 83%. On the other hand, as many as 91% of pets wanted to continue their education with the unfair teacher, compared to 61% of non-favoured students (Tal and Babad 1990). According to Babad, "negative classroom climate, lower morale, and particularly negative reactions to the teacher and a desire not to continue with the teacher next year can be considered as expressing some form of student irritation, speculatively even anger" (1995, p. 372), the source of which is the favouritism of pets.

### 2.1 Social status of the teacher's pet—pets rejected versus pets leaders and assessment of the phenomenon among students and teachers

The psychological costs of the phenomenon should be considered, taking into account the social position of a teacher's pet in the classroom. Special relations with selected students are accepted if the pet holds a leader position in the classroom (Babad 1995). In this situation, children do not experience emotional dissonance: they accept the pet and feel equally positive emotions towards the pet as well as the

teacher. In contrast, favouritism can cause irritation if the pet is a student who, in the classmates' opinion, is given special treatment due to compliance and flattery (Babad 1998, 2009). The opposite pattern of results was recorded for teachers who significantly prefer pets rejected by peers due to their submissiveness and flattery, than pets functioning as a leader in the classroom (Babad 1998, 2009).

Similar results were obtained by Chiu et al. (2013). Using structural equation modelling, the authors evaluated relationships between variables: teacher arbitrary, teacher's pet phenomenon, classroom conflicts, and students' self-adjustment. The teacher's pet phenomenon had direct influence on classroom conflict and a student's self-adjustment—the more the phenomenon existed, the higher the classroom conflict and the poorer the student's self-adjustment. Moreover, the pet phenomenon and classroom conflict mediate the relationship between a teacher's authority and a student's self-adjustment.

Moreover, the popularity of the teacher's pet affected the relationship between variables. In the model developed for the unpopular-pet student group, non-pet student group, and the popular-pet student group, the standardised path coefficients between teacher's pet phenomenon and classroom conflict were: 0.46, 0.41 and 0.15; between classroom conflict and a student's self-adjustment: 0.10,  $-0.39$ , and  $-0.57$ , and between the teacher's pet phenomenon and a student's self-adjustment: 0.69,  $-0.48$ , and 0.01. According to the authors, "If pet students are popular with other students, they do not cause classroom conflict" (p. 10), and "If teacher's pet students are popular with other students, classroom conflict can be reduced; this relationship was seldom explored by previous studies" (p. 10).

## 2.2 Students' and teachers' attitudes to leaders and best students versus pets

The social position of pets in the classroom should be analysed in comparison to other types or roles of students, i.e., leader and best student (Tal and Babad 1989, 1990; Babad and Ezer 1993; Babad 2009; Lu et al. 2015). Due to real or imputed features, such as denunciation, fawning, egoism versus responsibility, peacefulness, and kindness, pets are perceived in a more or less favourable way by peers and teachers.

An opposed pattern of results was revealed in the case of leaders who are attributed such features as intelligence, charisma, and pugnacity. Considering the indicated attributes, teachers, as compared to students, stay at a distance assuming that such leaders can lead other students in challenging the teacher's authority. Finally, due to characteristics such as diligence, liability, and excellent achievement, best students are perceived in a more uniform, positive way. Contact with best students are equally satisfying for teachers and students. In both cases, the above-mentioned attributes simplify the implementation of their own goals—professional and academic ones among teachers and peers respectively.

The matter is more complicated in the case of students playing a dual role in the classroom, especially pets, who at the same time are leaders because they possess features such as charisma and high academic achievement. In such case, their position in relationships with peers and teachers should be analogous to the position

of students-leaders (Babad 1995, 1998; Chiu et al. 2013; Lu et al. 2015). In contrast, pets who are not characterised by features typical for leaders and best students should more likely be rejected by their peers than teachers.

Teachers' favouring of students who possess lower social or academic position than leaders or best students could arouse strong resistance among the rest of students and, as a consequence, could be a source of negative educational effects discussed in the "Psychological and academic costs of the teacher's pet phenomenon" section.

### 2.3 Potential moderators of the teacher's pet phenomenon

Some factors related to students can significantly affect the level of prevalence and/or recognition of the teacher's pet phenomenon. In addition to the previously discussed pet status (pet-leader vs. pet-rejected), it seems that other important moderators include: students' sex, their academic status, the level of education, and the class profile.

In choosing their pets, teachers preferred girls and students who obtained good, although not the best results in objective assessment tests (Tal and Babad 1990; Babad 1995). Regarding the level of education factor, it seems that due to the more rigid structure of classes and fewer direct teachers' contacts with students, the phenomenon should be less frequent in senior high school than in elementary or junior high school (Brophy and Good 1974; Good and Brophy 2008).

Regarding the last factor, the number of direct teacher-student contacts marked by favouring selected children should be greater in the case of the science/technology class profile due to more abstract learning material, e.g., relating to the theory of probability and demanding greater teacher input to explain it (Hattie 2009), than in the case of the social/humanities profile. On the other hand, a more flexible structure of classes in history, literacy, etc., compared to chemistry or physics (Good and Brophy 2008), is likely to make the rate of recognition of the teacher's pet phenomenon higher in the social/humanities class profile than in the science/technology profile.

In the case of potential moderators related to teachers, Tal and Babad (1990) argue that their demographic and social characteristics such as age, professional experience, ethnic origin, and the educational background of parents, are not significant predictors of having pets.

Similar results in a related domain of research were reported by Cooper and Hazelrigg (1988). Based on the meta-analyses, the authors showed the size of interpersonal expectancies effects, and therefore the effects of differential treatment of high versus low-expectancy students by teachers were also not modified significantly by such factors as age, sex, professional experience, place of residence, and socio-economic status of observers.

On the other hand, as seniority increases, the risk of burnout syndrome among teachers also increases. Some of its symptoms (Schaufeli et al. 2009), e.g., avoiding contact with others, cynical and blaming attitudes to children, the inability to listen to others, higher cognitive rigidity, and resistance to changes, can exacerbate the teacher's tendency to favour students having features that facilitate their work, e.g.,

peaceful, subordinated students or good learners, which basically means students who demonstrate attributes typical of pets (Babad 1995, 1998, 2009). Moreover, burnout syndrome appears more often among subjects with a higher level of dogmatism and authoritarianism—the features correlated with the teacher's tendency to favour particular students (Palmer and Spaid 1996; Schaufeli and Buunk 2004).

Indeed, Tal and Babad (1990) discovered that authoritarian teachers tended to favour pets, giving them inflated grades for reading in relation to the results of objective tests. No similar effect was reported in a group of objective teachers and mathematics grades.

Similarly, in the study by Chiu et al. (2013), the authoritarian attitude of teachers was positively correlated with the teacher's pet phenomenon and classroom conflicts. Furthermore, the first of the indicated paths was modified by the teacher's pet's status—as it grew stronger, the relationship between variables in the path grew weaker.

### 3 Goals of the study

Taking into account the above-mentioned findings, the conducted exploratory study had the following purposes: (1) an attempt to replicate the existing study results, especially the analyses conducted by Tal and Babad (1989, 1990), and thus verify the range of temporal and spatial universality of the phenomenon, i.e., whether it will repeat itself after 25 years in an educational environment other than an Israeli one, in a study conducted with a sample similar in terms of quantity to original samples; (2) an attempt to assess the extent to which students' and teachers' attitude to the phenomenon is modified by the pet's social position occupied in the classroom, and (3) an attempt to extend the existing findings, taking into consideration the influence of background variables connected with the student (sex; school type: junior high school vs. high school; class profile: social/humanities vs. science/technology) and the teacher (sex; workplace: junior high school vs. high school; professional experience: small vs. considerable) on the evaluation of the teacher's pet phenomenon.

## 4 Method

### 4.1 Subjects

The study was conducted in 46 junior high school (63.1%) and 27 senior high school<sup>1</sup> classrooms (36.9%) located in the industrialised region of southern Poland. The participants included 2164 students (1215 girls) and their teachers ( $n = 138$ ;

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<sup>1</sup> Junior and senior high school in Poland is equivalent of junior and senior high school in the USA educational system. Three-year junior high schools are attended by students who are aged mostly from 13 to 15, whereas senior high schools, which last another three years, are attended by students aged mostly from 15–18.

102 women). The average age of the students was 15.650 years ( $SD = 1.535$ ); 63.9% of them attended junior high school and 35.4% high school. All junior high school students were in classrooms with a general profile, whereas high school students were in classrooms with a social studies/humanities profile (37.8%) or a science/technology profile<sup>2</sup> (56.3%).

Regarding the teachers, 63.8% of them worked in junior high school and 29.7% in high school; their average age was 41.900 years ( $SD = 9.218$ ) and their professional experience amounted to 17.100 years ( $SD = 9.546$ ). All the teachers had a background in higher education and teaching credentials.

## 4.2 Instrument

Respondents completed a questionnaire on the teacher's pet phenomenon developed by Tal and Babad (1989). The instrument was translated into Polish in compliance with the procedure for research tools adaptation (i.e., the process of direct and back-translation by judges; see Maxwell 1996; Harkness 2003), and then tested in pilot studies (two classrooms of junior high school and high school; 112 students and 4 teachers).

In the pilot study, it was checked to see whether the items included in the adapted questionnaire were understood by respondents and which of them posed the greatest problems. For this purpose, it was evaluated which items were the source of the largest number of missing values. The questionnaire items generated a negligible number of missing values (all below 2%).

There were also interviews conducted with 10 randomly selected students and all teachers. Respondents were asked to indicate items, which, in their opinion, were more difficult and incomprehensible than the others. Based on the interviews, the two last items of the questionnaire were modified by adding four graphic scales to the existing two. In the original version of the instrument (Tal and Babad 1989, "Appendix"), the same graphic scales served to evaluate a social distance between the teacher and classmates with regard to three student types (pet, leader, and best student). Thanks to adding four scales and instructions, a social distance between the indicated types of students and the teacher was evaluated independently. According to respondents, the implemented change had a positive influence on the level of comprehension of the indicated questionnaire items.

In its final version, the adapted questionnaire consisted of four parts (cf. "Appendix"). The first part included characteristics data. In the second part, respondents were asked to provide their own definition of the "teacher's pet", along with its evaluation, and to indicate the typical characteristics of teachers' pets and

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<sup>2</sup> High school educational profiles such as social studies/humanities or science/technology in Poland prepare students for college programmes related to social sciences/humanities and science/technology, respectively. Therefore, curricula intended for students choosing the first profile contains more classes in social sciences and humanities than the science and technology oriented one (e.g., four history classes and one physics class per week), whereas curricula intended for students who choose the other profile contains more science and technology classes, with a minimised number of classes related to social sciences and humanities (e.g., four mathematics classes and one history class per week). On the other hand, primary schools and junior high schools offer only a general profile (with relatively equal number of science and humanities related subjects) aimed at preparing students for high school programmes.

estimate how many teachers had pets. Finally, they were asked to indicate three features that best describe three hypothetical categories of students, i.e., pet, best student, and leader (queen/king of the class).

Part three included 21 statements concerning teachers' pets and their position in the classroom, which were evaluated using the 4-point ordinal scale (1 for "strongly agree" and 4 for "strongly disagree"). Afterwards, respondents were asked to indicate whether there were teachers' pets in the classroom in which they studied/worked, both currently and in the past. In the case of an affirmative answer, they were asked to identify the class. The fourth part consisted of six 8-point ordinal scales (1 for "very close" and 8 for "strongly rejected"), based on which a social distance between the best student, leader, and pet, and the teacher and classmates was evaluated.

### 4.3 Procedure

When arranging the study, the investigators sent official letters to the headmasters with a request to conduct a short survey in one classroom of randomly chosen junior high schools and high schools. The letter provided information that the study concerned "the determinants and consequences of the prestige of students in the classroom" and ensured that "the collected data shall be treated confidentially and used for scientific purposes".

Upon permission, the investigators conducted a survey in a randomly chosen classroom. The questionnaire was completed individually (teacher) or in a group (students). Taking into consideration the sensitive nature of issues addressed in the questionnaire, the study among students was arranged without the participation of the teacher who, during his/her absence in the classroom, completed the questionnaire in the teachers' lounge.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Overview of data analysis plan

The data gathered from the teacher's pet questionnaire were analysed and discussed in four steps analogous to those proposed by Tal and Babad (1989) in the original paper. Therefore, in the first step, open-ended definitions were presented that were proposed by students and teachers. Moreover, respondents' attitudes towards the teacher's pet phenomenon and their appraisals concerning its frequency were compared.

In the second step, the subjects' opinions about three types of students, i.e., pets, leaders, and best students, and their roles in relations with teachers were analysed. In the third step, the evaluations of respondents' social distance towards pets, leaders, and best students were presented. Subsequently, based on the assumed criteria, two theoretical subtypes of the pet, i.e., pet-leader versus pet-rejected, were distinguished and it was checked whether the proposed classification, as expected, modifies the way students and teachers evaluate the distance from pets. Finally, in

the fourth step, the teacher's pet phenomenon was analysed comprehensively taking into consideration the data gathered by means of 21 questionnaire items focused on pets; behaviour in the classroom and their relations with the teacher and other students.

## 5.2 Open-ended description

The open-ended descriptions of pets (B1 item) were analysed by three judges using coding categories proposed by Tal and Babad (1989), i.e. (1) pets' attributes, (2) pets' behaviour toward teachers, (3) teachers' behaviour toward pets, and (4) pets' relations with classmates (Krippendorff's alpha for the coding categories, respectively: .888, .934, .932, and .825). The descriptions were divided into positive and negative within each category, placing the 1/-1 value upon them (Krippendorff's alpha, respectively: .898, .855, .886, and .775).

In total, the respondents presented 2841 open-ended descriptions. Of these descriptions, 60.5% were negative and 39.5% were positive. Most respondents described the teacher's pet phenomenon in terms of the teacher's behaviour (51.1%), of which 71.3% were negative and focused on an unfair and preferential teachers' treatment (e.g., inflating pets' grades) and the rest (28.7%) concerned normative positive teachers' behaviour (e.g., providing support in learning).

The second largest category was the pets' behaviour toward teachers (26.2%), of which 62.0% were negative and concerned ingratiation, manipulating the teacher, taking advantage of one's special position to promote particular interests, etc., and the rest (38.0%) were positive and focused on supporting teachers in lessons, giving them help in administrative work, etc.

Further categories of descriptions concerned pets' attributes and relations with classmates (respectively: 19.6 and 3.0%). Within the former category, 72.8% descriptions were positive and focused on cognitive and social characteristics, e.g., interest in studies, responsibility, good manners, etc., and others (27.2%) concerned negative characteristics, e.g., egoism, ingratiation, etc. In the case of the latter, 82.6% descriptions were negative and concerned unfriendly interactions of pets with their classmates, and others (17.4%) were positive and focused on providing help, being polite to classmates, etc.

Of all open-ended descriptions, 2677 (94.2%) responses were generated by students and 164 (5.8%) were proposed by teachers. Descriptions presented by students were mainly negative (62.7%), in contrast to teachers' responses, most of which were positive (74.3%),  $\chi^2(1) = 89.113$ ;  $p < .001$ . Defining the phenomenon, students focused on teachers' behaviours (52.4%), pets' behaviours (26.7%), their attributes (18.0%), and their relationship with classmates (2.9%). Teachers, on the other hand, associated the phenomenon with pets' attributes (46.3%), teachers' behaviour towards pets (30.5%), pets' behaviour towards teachers (18.9%), and classmates (4.3%).

Two categories of responses were contrasted. When describing the relationships between pets and teachers and classmates, students focused mainly on negative behaviours (respectively: 64.1 and 87.3% of descriptions), and teachers on positive behaviours (respectively: 87.0 and 71.4% of descriptions),  $\chi^2(1) = 33.117$ ;

$p < .001$  for pets' behaviour towards teachers and  $\chi^2(1) = 15.424$ ;  $p < .001$  for pets' relationships with classmates.

### 5.3 Positive versus negative pets' characterisations

The attitude of respondents towards the teacher's pet phenomenon was estimated by adding up the notes attributed to responses in terms of the four coding categories for open-ended descriptions (B1 item). Teachers created more positive definitions ( $M = .154$ ;  $SD = .299$ ) than students ( $M = -.078$ ;  $SD = .291$ ),  $t(2307) = 8.800$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Cohen's  $d = .796$ . Descriptions were not differentiated by variables: seniority (teachers), class profile (students), and the type of school. More positive phenomena were proposed by boys ( $M = -.058$ ;  $SD = .287$ ) than girls ( $M = -.092$ ;  $SD = .296$ ),  $t(2056.470) = 2.709$ ;  $p < .01$ ; Cohen's  $d = .116$ . No similar differences were observed among teachers.

The attitude towards the phenomenon was also measured directly. Respondents were asked to consider whether it was positive, negative, or both positive and negative (B2 item). Again, in comparison to students ( $M = -341$ ;  $SD = .688$ ), teachers' evaluations ( $M = .189$ ;  $SD = .784$ ) were more positive,  $t(137.695) = 7.453$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Cohen's  $d = .764$ . Teachers' estimates were not differentiated by contextual variables. In contrast, the children's evaluations were higher among junior high school ( $M = -.298$ ;  $SD = .714$ ) than high school students ( $M = -.419$ ;  $SD = .636$ ),  $t(1746.472) = 4.048$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Cohen's  $d = .176$ ; and among boys ( $M = -.237$ ;  $SD = .726$ ) than girls ( $M = -.418$ ;  $SD = .648$ ),  $t(1875.040) = 5.918$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Cohen's  $d = .265$ .

Finally, the consistency of respondents' attitudes towards the phenomenon, both directly and indirectly, was evaluated. The evaluations of open-ended descriptions (B1 item) were positively related to the evaluations of the term (B2 item),  $r = .420$ ;  $p < .001$ ; the discovered relationship was nearly twice as strong among teachers ( $r = .620$ ;  $p < .001$ ) compared to students ( $r = .388$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

### 5.4 Prevalence of the teacher's pet phenomenon

Respondents' beliefs about the prevalence of the teacher's pet phenomenon at school were evaluated by means of two questions. One question was: "How many teachers have pets, in your opinion?" (B4 item), and the second was: "Try to remember whether there are in your class, or were in previous years, students you consider a teacher's pet" (B8 item). In case of the affirmative response, they were asked to indicate which class it was.

Considering the first question, the evaluations of teachers ( $M = 3.360$ ;  $SD = .937$ ) and students ( $M = 3.220$ ;  $SD = 1.019$ ) were similar,  $t(2271) = 1.479$ ;  $p$  ns. The responses were not differentiated by contextual variables.

In the case of the second question, the majority of respondents agreed there currently is/was a pet (66.1% for teachers and 85.2% for students) in the classroom. The phenomenon was observed for all grades. Contextual variables did not affect teachers' responses. Among students, more girls than boys declared experiencing the phenomenon (59.3 vs. 40.7%) and more boys than girls indicated lack of such

experience (60.1 vs. 39.9%),  $\chi^2(1) = 41.216$ ;  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, a greater number of students in scientific profile classes as compared to humanistic profile classes declared the lack of experiences related to the phenomenon (66.8 vs. 33.2%); a similar difference did not occur in a group of students who experienced the phenomenon (49.6 vs. 50.4%);  $\chi^2(1) = 18.295$ ;  $p < .001$ .

## 5.5 Opinions about pets, leaders, and best students

### 5.5.1 Traits of pet versus leader and good student

One open-ended question (B3 item) asked subjects to describe the attributes of a student who is the teacher's pet. In all, 6703 descriptions were coded by the three judges who assigned 1/−1 value for positive/negative characteristics (Krippendorff's alpha = .921). Of these, 61.6% were positive (e.g., helpful), 37.2% were negative (e.g., conceited), and 1.2% was ambiguous (e.g., sits in the front row).

Respondents differed in how they perceived the features of the teacher's pet. Again the descriptions of teachers ( $M = .777$ ;  $SD = .519$ ) were more positive than of students ( $M = .106$ ;  $SD = .792$ ),  $t(149.828) = 13.289$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Cohen's  $d = .860$ . Pets were described more positively by teachers with less job seniority ( $M = .906$ ;  $SD = .332$ ) than those with more job seniority ( $M = .733$ ;  $SD = .552$ ),  $t(98.992) = 2.055$ ;  $p = .043$ ; Cohen's  $d = .348$ .

Moreover, subjects were asked to provide any three typical attributes of pets in contrast to the attributes specific for the student who has the role of class leader and best student (B5 item). Responses were coded by three judges who assigned 1/−1 value for positive/negative characteristics (Krippendorff's alpha = .905). In the case of the teacher's pet, out of 5995 attributes, 53.3% were positive (e.g., intelligent), 45.1% were negative (e.g., flatterer), and 1.6% was ambiguous (e.g., quiet).

In contrast to a pet, a student as a class leader was described with 5884 attributes (79.7% were positive, 19.4% were negative, and 0.9% were ambiguous; Krippendorff's alpha = .909), and the best student with 6321 attributes (95.8% were positive, 2.8% were negative, and 1.4% were ambiguous [B5 item]; Krippendorff's alpha = .948). The positive attributes of a leader concerned, e.g., intelligence, charisma, etc.; negative, e.g., aggressiveness, bossiness, etc., and ambiguous, e.g., having friends in senior classes, physical build. In contrast, the positive features of the best student concerned, e.g., diligence, responsibility, etc., negative, e.g., being a swot or shy, etc., and ambiguous, e.g., physical build, having few friends, etc.

A two (between-subject factor; respondents: teachers vs. students)  $\times$  3 (within-subject factor; type of students: teacher's pet vs. best student vs. leader) mixed-model ANOVA was used to compare the appraisal of attributes appropriate in the respondent's opinion for the distinguished types of students (B5 item). The appraisal was influenced by the type of the student, Greenhouse-Geisser corrected  $F(1.772, 3644.677) = 102.785$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .048$ . The least positive note was given to a pet ( $M = .059$ ;  $SD = .807$ ), and more positive one to the best student ( $M = .930$ ;  $SD = .272$ ) and the leader ( $M = .590$ ;  $SD = .662$ ). Teachers tended to assign more

positive attributes to students ( $M = .852$ ;  $SD = .365$ ) than students did ( $M = .511$ ;  $SD = .577$ ),  $F(1, 2057) = 83.474$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .039$ .

The analysis also revealed an important effect of interaction, Greenhouse-Geisser corrected  $F(1.772, 3644.677) = 47.246$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .022$ . The average appraisals of attributes in all comparative groups are shown in Fig. 1.

It can be observed that the teacher's pet was characterised less positively by students ( $M = .015$ ;  $SD = .799$ ) than teachers ( $M = .784$ ;  $SD = .556$ ),  $F(1, 2057) = 104.375$ ;  $p < .001$ . The leader and the best student was assigned more complex attributes, although the discovered differences were still significant—students and teachers respectively for the leader  $M = .590$ ;  $SD = .662$  versus  $M = .784$ ;  $SD = .447$ ,  $F(1, 2057) = 9.675$ ;  $p < .001$  and for the best student  $M = .927$ ;  $SD = .272$  versus  $M = .986$ ;  $SD = .092$ ,  $F(1, 2057) = 5.318$ ;  $p < .05$ .

Teachers perceived the leader and the pet in a very similar way, apparently identifying the indicated types of students (respectively  $M = .784$ ;  $SD = .556$  vs.  $M = .784$ ;  $SD = .447$ ),  $F(1, 2057) < 1$ . The leader and the pet were described in a different way by students. Unlike the leader, the pet was assigned radically less favourable attributes (respectively  $M = .590$ ;  $SD = .662$  vs.  $M = .015$ ;  $SD = .799$ ),  $F(1, 2057) = 743.235$ ;  $p < .001$ .

The effect of the student's type was modified by teachers' professional experience. More positive attributes were assigned to the pet by respondents with relatively less ( $M = .939$ ;  $SD = .256$ ) than greater ( $M = .731$ ;  $SD = .615$ ) job seniority,  $F(1109) = 3.523$ ;  $p = .063$ . No similar differences were noticed in the case of the leader and best student,  $F_s < 1$ .

### 5.5.2 Students who change teachers' decisions

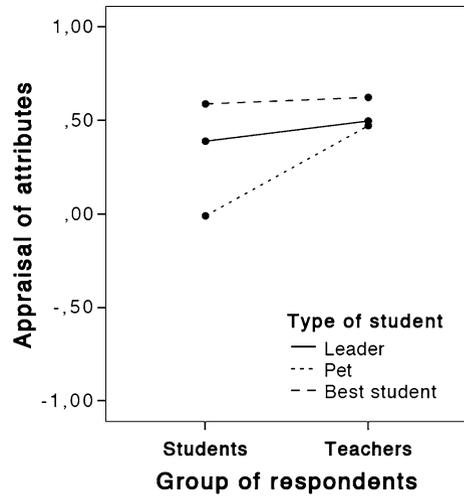
The respondents were asked to indicate a group of students, i.e., pets, leaders, or best students, whose representatives are most often sent to the teacher to influence his/her disadvantageous decisions concerning the aversive consequences of students' misbehaviour occurring at school (B7 item). Students agreed that the best candidate for a mediator is a pet (61.3%), followed by the leader (25.4%), and the best student (11.5%). Teachers' responses were distributed evenly; 36.7% indicated the pet, 32.0% best student, and 32.0% leader. In turn, almost 64.0% of students indicated the pet, 25.5% leader, and 10.5% best student.

The discovered difference was significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 63.649$ ;  $p < .001$ . The choice of pet vs. leader or best student as a mediator was not modified by contextual variables.

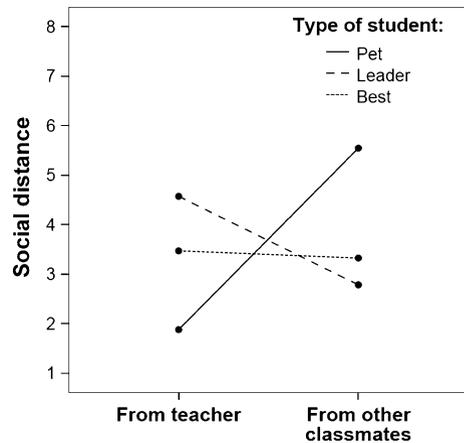
## 5.6 Social distance towards the pet, leader, and best student

Respondents were asked to appraise a social distance between the pet, leader, best student, and teachers/peers (C1-C3/D1-D3 items). A 3 (type of students: pets vs. leaders vs. best students)  $\times$  2 (rejected by teacher vs. students) ANOVA with repeated measures on both factors was used to evaluate the scope of pets', leaders', and best students' rejection by teachers and classmates. The obtained results (cf. Figure 2) proved to be surprisingly compliant with the results described over

**Fig. 1** Appraisal of attributes assigned to three types of students (teacher's pet, leader and best student) by students and teachers



**Fig. 2** Social distance attributed to pet, leader and best student by teacher and students



25 years ago by Tal and Babad (1989) in the first empirical article addressing the teacher's pet phenomenon.

The analysis revealed the main effect of the rejection factor,  $F(1, 2241) = 509.688; p < .001; \eta^2 = .185$  ( $M = 3.306$ ;  $SD = .994$  for teachers versus  $M = 3.884$ ;  $SD = 1.089$  for students) and the types of students, Greenhouse-Geisser corrected  $F(1.960, 4392.410) = 64.853; p < .001; \eta^2 = .028$  ( $M = 3.712$ ;  $SD = 1.183$  for pet versus  $M = 3.677$ ;  $SD = 1.278$  for leader versus  $M = 3.397$ ;  $SD = 1.042$  for best student).

A significant effect of the interaction between the two factors once again confirmed the accuracy of the theoretical model of the teacher's pet phenomenon (Tal and Babad 1990; Babad 1995; Chiu et al. 2013), Greenhouse-Geisser corrected  $F(1.724; 3862.931) = 2840.861; p < .001; \eta^2 = .559$ . Leaders were perceived as closer to peers ( $M = 2.783$ ;  $SD = 1.799$ ) than teachers ( $M = 4.571$ ;  $SD = 1.705$ ),

$F(1, 2241) = 1235.266$ ;  $p < .001$ . In contrast, pets were evaluated as closer to teachers ( $M = 1.878$ ;  $SD = 1.562$ ) than to classmates ( $M = 5.545$ ;  $SD = 2.036$ ),  $F(1, 2241) = 4042.787$ ;  $p < .001$ . Finally, the best students were perceived as equally close to teachers ( $M = 3.470$ ;  $SD = 1.278$ ) and students ( $M = 3.325$ ;  $SD = 1.515$ ), although a discovered difference was still significant,  $F(1, 2241) = 13.400$ ;  $p < .001$ . The described results were not modified by the contextual variables.

### 5.6.1 Two subgroups of pets: social distance towards pet-leader versus pet-rejected

Based on the analysis of open-ended descriptions of the teacher's pet (B1 item), attributes assigned to a pet (B3 item) and attributes assigned to a pet in contrast to a leader and best student (B5 item)—two groups of students who had special relationship with teachers and classmates—were distinguished, i.e.: (1) pet-leader and (2) pet-rejected by peers.

The following criteria applied: if the attributes concerned only positive statements, of which at least one concerned the cognitive functioning (smart, creative, etc.), and another *one* social functioning (nice, charismatic, etc.), then the three judges found these characteristics related to a pet-leader. In other cases, it was assumed that the attributes concerned a pet-rejected (Krippendorff's alpha = .927, .920, and .959 for B1, B3, and B5 items, respectively).

The reasonableness of the adopted method of distinguishing subgroups was tested in two stages. First, it was checked whether it diversified the view of teacher's pet term (B2 item). In all cases, more positive evaluations were discovered in respondents assigning pets' attributes specific for pet-leader than pet-rejected (for distinction derived from definitions proposed in B1 item:  $M = .053$ ;  $SD = .733$  versus  $M = -.337$ ;  $SD = .694$ ,  $t(2120) = 4775$ ;  $p < .01$ ; Cohen's  $d = .546$ ; for distinction derived from attributes proposed in B3 item:  $M = .133$ ;  $SD = .663$  versus  $M = -.397$ ;  $SD = .680$ ,  $t(448.366) = 13.179$ ;  $p < .01$ ; Cohen's  $d = .789$ ; and B5 item:  $M = .108$ ;  $SD = .697$  versus  $M = -.365$ ;  $SD = .690$ ,  $t(288.249) = 9.759$ ;  $p < .01$ ; Cohen's  $d = .682$ ).

Second, the consistency of respondents' opinions on the characteristic features of the pet-leader and pet-rejected was evaluated. For this purpose, (1) the content of open-ended descriptions of the teacher's pet phenomenon (B1 item), (2) attributes specific for a teacher's pet (B3 item), and (3) attributes of teacher's pet as opposed to features specific for leader and best student (B5 item) were correlated. As expected, significant relationships were discovered between (1) and (2),  $r = .323$ , (1) and (3),  $r = .328$ , and (2) and (3),  $r = .670$ ; all  $p < .001$ .

Bearing in mind the results of the previous investigations (Babad 1995; Babad and Ezer 1993; Chiu et al. 2013; Lu et al. 2015), it was assumed that a pet should be more rejected by peers characterising pets in terms of attributes specific for leaders as opposed to rejected students. This tendency should be reversed or disappear in the group of teachers. As expected, a series of three, 2 (between-subject factor: attributes specific for pet-leader vs. pet-rejected)  $\times$  2 (within-subject factor: being rejected by teacher vs. peers) mixed-model ANOVA revealed a consistent pattern of results. The descriptive statistics calculated for all comparative groups are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Teachers' and students' social distance toward pets, leaders and best students modified by attributes specific for pets-leader vs. pets-rejected

Social distance	Attributes specific for																	
	Pets-leader <sup>a</sup>			Pets-rejected <sup>a</sup>			Pets-leader <sup>b</sup>			Pets-rejected <sup>b</sup>			Pets-leader <sup>c</sup>			Pets-rejected <sup>c</sup>		
	M	SD	t	M	SD	t	M	SD	t	M	SD	t	M	SD	t	M	SD	t
From teacher	2.250	1.918	1.825	1.512	1.512	2.350*	1.976	1.480	1.480	1.837	1.555	1.474	1.909	1.364	1.847	1.576	1.576	.576
From other classmates	5.338	2.128	5.565	2.128	2.128	.943	4.926	1.856	1.856	5.676	2.040	6.111**	5.063	1.760	5.063	1.760	1.760	4.057**

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$ <sup>a</sup> Attributes distinguished on the basis of an analysis of the content of the definition of the teacher's pet phenomenon term (Item B1)<sup>b</sup> Attributes distinguished on the basis of an analysis of characteristics attributed to the teacher's pet (Item B3)<sup>c</sup> Attributes distinguished on the basis of an analysis of characteristics attributed to the teacher's pet in contrast to the leader and best student (Item B5)

Indeed, in each of the three analyses, the appraisals of a social distance were lower for students (vs. higher for teachers) describing pets using attributes specific for leaders rather than for pet-rejected; for the effects of the interaction of the factor of rejection and the opinion concerning attributes distinguished based on B1, B3, and B5 items, respectively:  $F(1, 2100) = 4.129$ ;  $p < .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .002$ ;  $F(1, 2122) = 28.946$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .013$ ;  $F(1, 2139) = 11.156$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .005$ .

### 5.7 Teacher's pet in the classroom

There were 21 questionnaire items (B6a–B6u items; Cronbach's alpha = .736; in a teachers' and students' subgroup alpha = .725 and .732, respectively) concerned: academic achievements and social behaviour of pets at school, pets' relationships with peers and teachers, and the consequences of the occurrence of the teacher's pet phenomenon in the classroom. Differences in responses provided by students and teachers were evaluated using the t-test for independent samples. Afterwards, it was checked to see which of them were modified by contextual variables included in the study and respondents' attitudes towards pet-leader versus pet-rejected.

Significant differences were discovered in the case of 15 statements. Descriptive statistics in the compared groups, the results of t-tests and Cohen's-d measures are presented in Table 2.

Taking into consideration teachers' attitudes towards pets, students more frequently agreed that "pets receive preferential treatment" (B6a) than teachers and expressed less approval for the statement: "when a teacher feels special affection from a student, he/she returns affection" (B6m). Assessing the awareness of the occurrence of the phenomenon in the classroom, there was more consensus among the former agreed that "students know if the teacher has a pet" (B6b) and less that "teachers are not aware of their giving preferential treatment to some students" (B6h).

Justifying a special relationship between pets and teachers, students to a lesser degree approved of the statements that "pets deserve special treatment because they contribute to the class more than other students" (B6e) and that "a pet can make a good impression—better than other students" (B6o). Furthermore, they agreed more frequently than teachers that "pets flatter the teachers" (B6f).

Consistent differences were also discovered for items concerning students' attitudes towards pets and teachers having pets. Students agreed less than teachers that "a pet is liked by his/her classmates" (B6p) and to a greater degree agreed that "a pet is rejected by his/her classmates" (B6i). Analogically, students to a lesser degree than teachers approved of the statement that "students show understanding about a teacher's special affection for certain individuals" (B6n) and agreed that "students are angry at teachers who show preferential treatment" (B6q).

The last group of items concerned the social behaviours of pets. Students agreed more than teachers that "pets allow themselves to behave differently from other students" (B6r), and that "pets obtain from the teacher 'goods and benefits' for themselves" (B6t). In addition, students expressed less approval than teachers for the statements: "pets help weaker students in class" (B6u) and "pets obtain from the teacher 'goods and benefits' for the entire class" (B6s).

**Table 2** Students and teachers appraisals of B6 part of teacher's pet phenomenon questionnaire

Item	Students		Teachers		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Cohen's-d
	M	SD	M	SD			
B6a	3.552	.738	2.692	.861	11.148***	2298	1.154
B6b	3.381	.770	3.086	.833	4.193***	2295	.375
B6c	2.071	.866	2.039	.725	.472	149.405	.040
B6d	2.512	.961	2.436	.805	.314	146.700	.086
B6e	1.608	.901	1.953	.861	4.433***	2288	.368
B6f	3.469	.820	2.508	.901	11.829***	2294	1.164
B6g	3.350	.858	3.341	.798	.114	2291	.011
B6h	2.419	.991	2.558	.749	2.003*	154.559	.142
B6i	2.578	.864	2.358	.815	2.838**	2285	.255
B6j	2.041	.960	2.085	.829	.559	149.496	.049
B6k	2.067	.977	2.126	.809	.778	148.921	.066
B6l	2.439	.919	2.551	.774	1.556	146.513	.132
B6m	2.778	.869	2.926	.638	2.494*	157.998	.175
B6n	2.485	.906	2.337	.704	2.244*	150.699	.156
B6o	2.504	1.020	2.701	.733	2.892*	159.329	.199
B6p	2.316	.862	2.512	.711	2.960**	146.174	.222
B6q	3.220	.886	2.899	.779	4.498***	149.049	.364
B6r	3.078	.917	2.496	.772	7.035***	2280	.638
B6s	2.216	1.010	2.589	.816	4.960***	152.800	.370
B6t	3.184	.918	2.777	.731	6.025***	151.825	.448
B6u	2.026	.907	2.596	.718	6.900**	2260	.635

\* .05; \*\* .01; \*\*\*.001

These differences were modified by opinions about attributes specific for pet-leader versus pet-rejected, distinguished on the basis of open-ended descriptions of the teacher's pet phenomenon (B1 item; four interaction effects), attributions made to pets (B3 item; two interaction effects), and respondents' gender (one interaction effect). As expected, it turned out that for the statements: B6o, B6p, and B6u, the discovered differences (i.e., teachers > students) were maintained in the subgroups describing pets using attributes typical of rejected students and were reversed among those describing pets using attributes specific for leaders, respectively:  $F(1,1882) = 4.396$ ;  $p < .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .002$ ,  $F(1,1882) = 7.702$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .004$ , and  $F(1, 1907) = 4.238$ ;  $p < .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .002$ .

Analogically, for the statements: B6a, B6f, and B6i, the indicated differences (i.e., teachers < students) did not change in subgroups characterising pets using attributes specific for rejected students and was reversed among those characterising pets using attributes specific for leaders, respectively:  $F(1, 1907) = 9.033$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .005$ ,  $F(1,1882) = 8.897$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .005$ , and  $F(1,1882) = 3.784$ ;  $p = .052$ ;  $\eta^2 = .002$ .

With reference to the gender variable, a discovered difference (i.e., teachers < students) for the B6a statement was maintained among women and disappeared among men,  $F(1, 1989) = 7.485$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .004$ .

## 6 Discussion of results

Taking into consideration the first goal of the conducted research, i.e., the attempt to verify the range of temporal and spatial versatility of the teacher's pet phenomenon, the obtained results, as expected, strikingly resembled the results presented by Tal and Babad (1989, 1990). In the light of the subjects' declarations, the teacher's pet phenomenon occurs in most classrooms, at all levels of education. It is perceived as negative, especially by students, and associated with unfair and preferential treatment of pets by teachers and pets' behaviour towards teachers. In contrast, teachers much more frequently focused on the positive attributes of pets and teachers' attitudes towards pets.

Furthermore, subjects specifically characterised and evaluated three hypothetical types of students, i.e., pet, leader, and best student. Teachers perceived the leader and pet positively, as opposed to students, who described the pet in unfavourable terms. In contrast, the best student was characterised in an equally favourable way by teachers and students.

The subjects differed in beliefs about the attempts to mask, rationalise, and diminish the occurrence of the phenomenon in the school environment. Compared to students, teachers were more convinced that the preferential treatment of pets is not seen by classmates. In turn, students were more convinced that the indicated practices are consciously applied by teachers.

To justify the preferential treatment of selected students, teachers overestimated the argument that pets deserve special treatment because of exceptional traits or behaviours, e.g., helping classmates. Disagreeing with this approach, students overestimated the argument that the real reason for favouring pets is their flattery. Compared to teachers, students viewed the phenomenon in a less favourable light, emphasising the fact that pets are rejected by peers and unfair teachers make them angry.

Tal and Babad (1989, 1990) presented similar results. They showed that the majority of students and teachers in Israeli primary schools and high schools described the teacher's pet phenomenon in a negative light, and the former had more extreme opinions than the latter. The respondents claimed that the phenomenon is widespread and occurs at all levels of education.

Strikingly consistent results were observed with respect to the problem of social distance between respondents and pets, leaders, and best students. In the Tal and Babad study, "pets were perceived as very close to the teachers and remote from (or rejected by) the other students; the best students were perceived as moderately close to both teachers and students; and leaders were perceived as remote from teachers and very close to other students" (1989, p. 107).

In both studies, teachers overestimated their own ability to mask special relations with pets, while at the same time underestimating students' awareness of the

preferential treatment of selected children in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers presented a more positive attitude towards the phenomenon and its consequences. Differences discovered in the evaluations suggest that respondents have different models of pets consistent with their roles in school.

Creating an image of a pet, teachers clearly focused on the qualities that make working with students easier/more pleasant and justified the affection and preferential treatment directed at them. Moreover, teachers might have diminished the importance of qualities and behaviours that would suggest pets' manipulative tendencies for the purpose of obtaining preferential benefits. In contrast, students might have focused more on the negative aspects of the phenomenon, i.e., preferential treatment of pets by teachers on the one hand, with the egoistic behaviours of pets on the other. This explains the hostile attitudes of students towards teachers having pets and towards the pets themselves.

The second goal of the study was the attempt to verify whether the pet's social position occupied in the classroom can be considered a significant moderator of students' and teachers' attitude to the teacher's pet phenomenon. Again, as expected, the subjects' perception of the phenomenon was modified by their opinions about the characteristics specific for the two distinguished subgroups of pets, i.e., pet-leader versus pet-rejected. Pets were rejected more by teachers than students if the characteristics concerned the pet-leaders. If the characteristics concerned pet-rejected, the discovered pattern was reversed—peers had a greater social distance towards the indicated group of students than teachers.

It follows from the studies conducted by Lu et al. (2015) that unpopular pets, as opposed to popular pets, present more antisocial behaviours, which can influence the general attitude and specific evaluations of students/teachers concerning various aspects of the phenomenon. Similarly, Chiu et al. (2013) showed that the status of pets is a significant predictor of conflicts observed in the classroom. In classrooms with an unpopular pet, compared to classrooms with a popular pet, the relationship between the presented variables was three times less intense. Hence, it can be assumed that the teacher's pet phenomenon is accepted by students as long as the pet has a leader's attributes as opposed to having qualities specific to a student rejected by classmates.

The last goal of the study was to attempt to check the influence of background variables that are different from the ones in the original work (Tal and Babad 1989), i.e., type of school (junior high school vs. high school), profile of the classroom attended by the student (humanistic vs. scientific), the respondents' gender, and also indirectly by comparing the findings of the original study with the obtained results—time (mid-2010s vs. 1980s), place (Poland vs. Israel) and culture (specific for post-communist countries of South-East Europe vs. Jewish).

In this study, the attitude towards the phenomenon was modified by the type of school and the respondents' gender. More positive evaluations were expressed by junior high school students and girls than high school students and boys. In turn, opinions concerning the scope of the occurrence of the phenomenon varied by class profile and again by the gender of respondents. Students in humanistic classes and girls declared more frequent experiences connected with the phenomenon than boys and students in scientific classes. Finally, compared to teachers, students more often

agreed that pets receive preferential treatment in the classroom; an indicated difference was particularly notable among female respondents and tended to disappear among men. The discussed results suggest that women/girls are more sensitive and have a more positive attitude to the practice of favouring pets by a teacher.

Moreover, in contrast to Tal and Babad's study (1989), teachers with more seniority presented a less critical approach towards the policy of favouring selected children. Paradoxically, the descriptions of pets more consistent with the ones presented by students were provided by teachers that had a longer experience of teaching in the classroom rather than those with a shorter experience. It cannot be ruled out that the discovered differences were accidental. On the other hand, the attitudes of different groups of respondents towards the teacher's pet phenomenon can be satisfactorily described by means of a curvilinear dependence.

Given the unpleasant personal experiences with pets or the fact that they are still fresh in teachers' and students' memory, the analysed phenomenon could be perceived in the least positive way by students and teachers in training. In contrast, trainee teachers feeling insecure in their new socio-professional role may always take advantage of unfailingly kind and hard-working pets. In return, such experiences can arouse teachers' sympathy for pets and, in consequence, alleviate evaluation of the phenomenon. Finally, teachers with more seniority due to their more extensive professional experience, which makes them more aware of the negative implications of preferential treatment of students (classroom conflicts, lower student morale, etc.; cf. Tal and Babad 1990; Babad 1998; Chiu et al. 2013; Lu et al. 2015), see the practice of favouring pets negatively.

## 7 Conclusions

The striking similarity of studies conducted for over three decades in different parts of the world allows one to assume that the teacher's pet phenomenon is relatively universal in temporal and spatial terms, especially in reference to the appraisal of its mass character and negative consequences. In turn, discovered differences concerning attitudes of teachers with more vs. less seniority with reference to the preferential treatment of pets suggest that certain aspects of the phenomenon may be specific only for the contemporary population of students/teachers attending/working in schooling Poland.

Of course, it is difficult to make a decision, based on one replication study, to what extent the observed similarities and differences are random and to what extent they can be explained in the light of various socio-psychological mechanisms, e.g., prejudices, discrimination, an educational self-fulfilling prophecy, etc., (Silberman 1969; Jussim et al. 2000; Nelson 2006; Babad 2009; Rubie-Davies 2015).

In addition, the conducted investigation has limitations specific for correlational studies—based on the collected data it is impossible to clearly establish whether the pets' behaviour in the classroom is a cause or rather a result of differential treatment they experience from teachers and classmates, and in consequence, the prevailing socio-emotional climate in the classroom, level of students' academic achievement,

number of recorded interpersonal conflicts, etc. (Babad 1995; Chiu et al. 2013). Similar doubts are related to the functions played by pets in the peer group and interpretation of their behaviour by interaction partners.

Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that other confounders, which were not taken into account during the study, could affect the assessment of the teacher's pet phenomenon, either directly or by significant interaction with the analysed predictors. In terms of the teachers, the possible candidates seem to be various personality factors, e.g., authoritarianism and dogmatism mentioned earlier, the need for cognitive closure, type of religiosity, i.e., variables correlating with stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination tendencies (Jussim et al. 2000; Nelson 2006; Saroglou 2002). In terms of the students, the possible candidates include habitual attributions of other people's behaviours and social role played in the peer group, etc. (Babad 1998, 2009; Chiu et al. 2013; Lu et al. 2015).

Finally, the criteria of pets' subgroups extraction, although theoretically justified (Babad 1995; Chiu et al. 2013), were established arbitrarily. Therefore, using alternative ones might provide a different picture of the teacher's pet phenomenon.

Regardless of these limitations that are worth considering while designing further studies, the obtained results suggest that the questionnaire developed by Tal and Babad (1989) allows one to diagnose and describe the nature of the teacher's pet phenomenon in a relatively accurate and reliable manner. Accordingly, the scarcity of works that apply this instrument is surprising. The author of this article hopes that systematically conducted studies will allow one to distinguish variables of a universal character with reference to the phenomenon and socio-cultural moderators affecting the scope and consequences of its occurrence in the future. Undoubtedly, one of the most interesting factors is the role fulfilled by the pet in the classroom—that of pet-leader or pet-rejected, based on their personality traits and attitudes presented in relation to classmates and teachers. Other non-random modifiers have yet to be identified.

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#### **Compliance with ethical standards**

**Conflict of interests** The author declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## **Appendix teacher's pet questionnaire**

*Note* This is a free translation of questionnaire written and filled out in Polish. TPQ in the original version was developed and published in: Tal and Babad (1989). The „teacher's pet” phenomenon as viewed by Israeli teachers and students. *The Elementary School Journal*, 90, 96–108.

## A. Personal details

For teachers: age, sex, previous education, teaching experience, type of school

For students: age, class profile, sex, type of school

B1. The "Teacher's pet" term describes a special relationship between a teacher and a student. Could you explain this term in your own words? (open-ended)

B2. How do you evaluate this term? Circle one answer (positive, negative, both positive and negative)

B3. What features, in your opinion, does the student who is a teacher's favourite have? Name these features (open-ended).

B4. How many teachers, in your opinion, have their own pets? Circle one answer (all, most of them, less than half, few, almost none).

B5. In the table below there are three types of students. Provide three features typical for each of these students

Good student	Teacher's pet	Leader (king or queen of the class)
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3

B6. Evaluate each of the following statements by circling one answer (1—strongly agree; 2—rather agree; 3—rather disagree, 4—strongly disagree).

- a. Pets receive preferential treatment
- b. Students know if the teacher has a pet
- c. Every student wants to be a pet
- d. Teachers who have pets try to hide this fact from other students
- e. Pets deserve special treatment because they contribute to the class more than other students
- f. Pets flatter the teachers
- g. Some students are better at learning than teachers' pets.
- h. Teachers are not aware of their giving preferential treatment to some students
- i. A pet is rejected by his/her classmates
- j. Pets' questions are better and more interesting than those asked by other students
- k. Pets' answers are better and more interesting than those provided by other students
- l. Other students are jealous and envious towards pets
- m. When a teacher feels special affection from a student, he/she returns affection
- n. Students show understanding about teacher's special affection for certain individuals

- o. A pet can make a good impression—better than other students
- p. A pet is liked by his/her classmates
- q. Students are angry at teachers who show preferential treatment
- r. Pets allow themselves to behave differently from other students
- s. Pets obtain ‘goods and benefits’ for the entire class from the teacher
- t. Pets obtain ‘goods and benefits’ for themselves from the teacher
- u. Pets help weaker students in class

B7. When teacher decides to punish the whole class, who would be the most suitable person delegated by the students to influence on the decision of the teacher? Circle one answer (leader, good student, pet)

B8. Try to remember if now or in previous years there were any students in your class whom you considered as a pet? Circle one answer (yes, no). If you circle „yes”—in what grade was it? (open-ended)

C. In this part of the questionnaire you are request to place three types of students (G—good student, L—leader, P—pet) on the scale representing a continuum from a close relationship with a teacher to a rejection by a teacher. If a particular type of student is placed on the right side of the scale this means that he/she is rejected by a teacher.

c1. Place the letter „G”, which stands for a good student, on the scale

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Very close to teacher |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | rejected by teacher

c2. Place the letter „L”, which stands for a leader, on the scale

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Very close to teacher |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | rejected by teacher

c3. Place the letter „P”, which stands for a pet, on the scale

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Very close to teacher |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | rejected by teacher

D. Again place three types of students (G, L, P) on scales representing closeness or rejection by other students in the classroom.

d1. Place the letter „G”, which stands for a good student, on the scale

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Very close to students         | rejected by students

d2. Place the letter „L”, which stands for a leader, on the scale

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Very close to students         | rejected by students

d3. Place the letter „P”, which stands for a pet, on the scale

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Very close to students         | rejected by students

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