

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Factors Influencing Teachers' Intentions to Provide Emotional Support to Students: Insights From the Theory of Planned Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Quality affective teacher–student relationships promote student engagement, achievement, and psychosocial adjustment. However, little is known about the factors influencing teachers' willingness to provide emotional support (ES), defined here as the teacher's behaviors that lead students to perceive him or her as warm, friendly, encouraging—that is, behaviors aimed at building quality affective relationships with students. The current cross-sectional study explored these factors and their underlying beliefs through the prism of the theory of planned behavior. Analysis of 238 primary and secondary school teachers' responses to a questionnaire on teacher–student ES revealed that teachers' cognitive and experiential attitudes, descriptive norm and perceived behavioral control in terms of ability and autonomy were significant determinants of teachers' intention to provide ES. They also identified key beliefs that underpin these determinants. In particular, they pointed to positive consequences of ES on teacher–student relationships, on teachers' enjoyment of work, on teachers' sense of usefulness, and on students' well-being. They also pointed to beliefs about those who do (teachers convinced of the benefits of affective teacher–student relationships) or do not (teachers who do not want to do more than they already do) provide ES. At last, they pointed to factors that facilitate the provision of ES as considering ES as part of the job, having time, or receiving training in providing ES. These results suggest that a combination of training highlighting the importance of positive student–teacher relationships and steps to redefine teachers' work priorities could increase teachers' willingness to provide ES.

1 | Introduction

The affective quality of teacher–student relationships, that is, one dimension of the relationships characterized by “the emotional quality of interactions between teachers and students as well as teachers' and students' feelings and beliefs about each other and their mutual relationship” (Pianta et al. 2003; Roorda et al. 2017) is a key predictor of student engagement, achievement, and psychosocial adjustment (Cornelius-White 2007;

Davis 2003; Emslander et al. 2025; Lei et al. 2016, 2018; Quin 2017; Roorda et al. 2011, 2017). This affective dimension of the relationships is more strongly associated with students' outcomes than instructional dimension of the relationship (Cornelius-White 2007; Skinner and Belmont 1993; Tao et al. 2022).

In light of these benefits, several programs have been developed to enhance the affective teacher–student relationship

Summary

- Teachers are more inclined to provide emotional support (ES) to students when they believe it brings them personal benefits—such as improved job satisfaction, better relationships with students, and an increased sense of usefulness—suggesting that training should help teachers become aware of the benefits of ES for students and themselves.
- Teachers' intention to provide ES increases when they see it as part of their job and feel competent and autonomous in this area; accordingly training programs should therefore help teachers to see ES as a fundamental teaching responsibility, and to reinforce their relational self-efficacy through practical training (e.g., role-playing, video feedback).
- Teachers are more likely to provide ES when they feel they have sufficient time and resources to do so, highlighting the need for interventions that combine individual training with organizational changes to promote a cultural shift in how the relational dimension of teaching is valued.

(Borremans et al. 2024; Koenen et al. 2021; Poling et al. 2022), while others address the teacher–student relationship more broadly, with the affective component as one focus among others (Cook et al. 2018; Driscoll and Pianta 2010; Jennings et al. 2017; Kincade et al. 2020).

Yet, teachers vary greatly in their willingness to build affective teacher–student relationships (Virat 2019). It is therefore important to find ways of improving it. As Robinson puts it about teacher–student relationship in general (Robinson 2022, 2062): “If we want to know how to improve (teacher–student relationships), we need to understand what motivates teachers to cultivate positive relationships with students” by identifying “a set of inter-related beliefs that energize, direct, and sustain teachers' efforts to build relationships with their students.” The current study's aim was to deepen our understanding of what favors or hinders teachers' intention to provide emotional support (ES)—defined here as teacher behaviors that lead students to perceive him or her as warm, friendly, encouraging (see below). To this end, we conducted a quantitative analysis of teachers' responses to a questionnaire on ES, drawn up in light of the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen 1985, 1991, 2020), to clarify which TPB constructs predict teachers' intention to provide ES, and also derive a hierarchy of key beliefs to act on to promote ES.

1.1 | Emotional Support as Behavior Aimed at Building Quality Affective Teacher–Student Relationship

Various terms have been used to characterize teacher behaviors aimed at building quality affective relationships with students, including *sensitive behavior* (Spilt et al. 2012), *helpful/friendly and understanding behavior* (Wubbels and Brekelmans 2005), *affective behavior* (Roorda et al. 2017), and *emotional support* (Federici and Skaalvik 2014). These concepts converge on the idea of teacher behaviors perceived by students as communicating warmth and empathy.

In this study, we use the term *emotional support* (ES), understood at a dyadic level—that is, as teacher behaviors directed toward individual student—distinguishing it from other relational behaviors that favor other aspects of relationships. Drawing on House's typology (House 1981), ES refers to actions by teachers that lead students to consider they are cared for and loved (Lei et al. 2018; Malecki and Demaray 2003). It contrasts with teacher instrumental support (Federici and Skaalvik 2014) which refers to teacher behaviors that contribute to students' perception that the teacher is helping them learn (Patrick et al. 2011).

The concept of ES refers to both specific ES and general ES: teachers may express ES at specific moments (e.g., when a student has a problem in class) and more generally, even when students are not feeling any particular stress (Federici and Skaalvik 2014). We focus here on *general ES*, referring to the teacher's behaviors that lead students to perceive him or her as “warm, friendly, encouraging” (Federici and Skaalvik 2014, 22), that is, an integral part of teacher–student relationships and not just a one-off behavior (Lei et al. 2018). From this perspective, ES is equivalent to behaviors aimed at building quality affective relationships with students.

1.2 | The Theory of Planned Behavior: A Framework for Understanding Teachers' Intention to Provide ES

According to the TPB (Ajzen 1985, 1991, 2020), the most immediate predictor of a planned behavior is the *intention* to perform it. This intention is itself predicted by three main determinants, each of which has two components. The first determinant is *attitude* toward the behavior. It consists of a *cognitive attitude*—which refers to the consequences of performing the behavior (i.e., costs/benefits)—and an *experiential attitude*—which refers to its experience (i.e., pleasantness of the behavior). The second determinant is the *subjective social norm* associated with performing the behavior. It includes *descriptive norm*—which refers to people who do or do not perform the behavior—and *injunctive norm*—which refers to the expectations other people may have. The third determinant is *perceived behavioral control* (PBC). It includes *PBC-ability*—which refers to one's perceived ability to perform the behavior—and *PBC-autonomy*—which refers to how autonomous one feels in this regard. This determinant also affects the concretization of intention into behavior.

Each of these determinants is underpinned by a set of underlying beliefs. These beliefs vary according to their perceived probability or *strength*, and to their perceived value, or *power*. More specifically, one's attitude results from one's beliefs about the various outcomes of the behavior, which vary in terms of probability (strength) and in terms of desirability (power). One's social subjective norm comes from one's beliefs about who performs the behavior and expects the behavior to be performed, which vary in terms of both probability (strength) and how much the person is motivated to comply with these social referents (power). PBC emerges from beliefs about personal and external factors of varying probability (strength) that can more or less facilitate/impede behavioral endorsement (power).

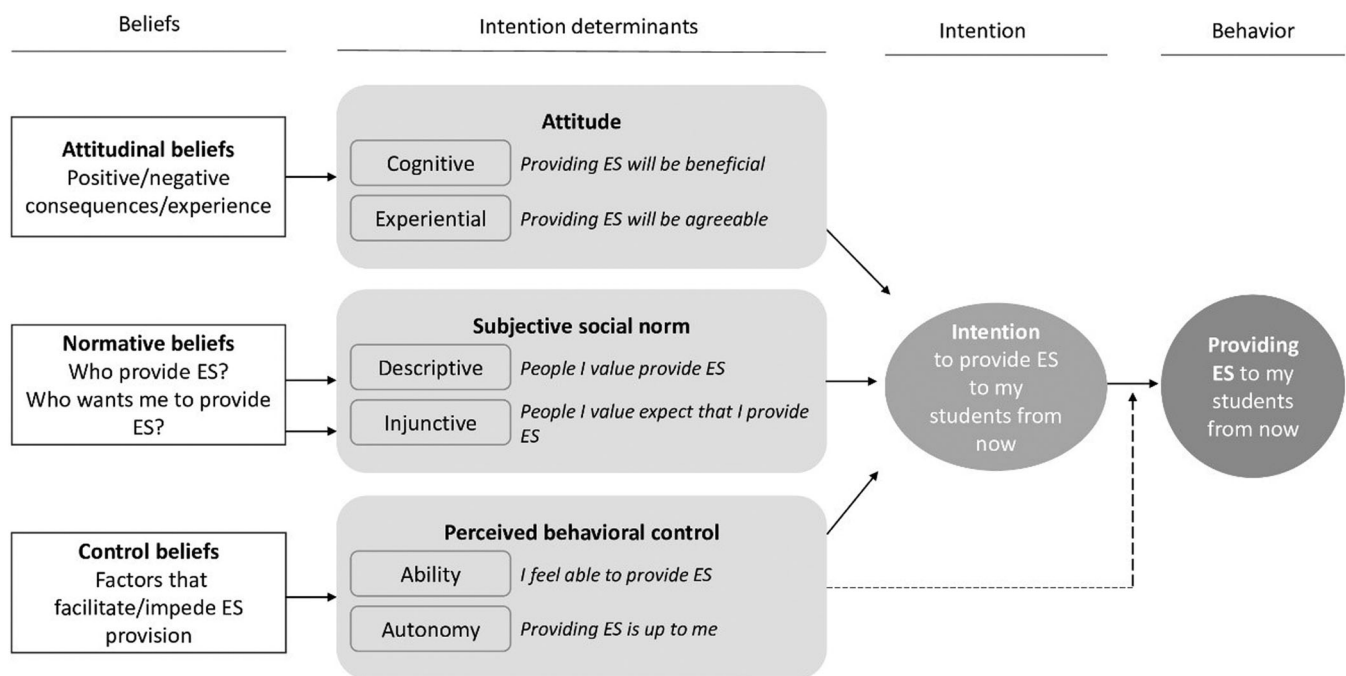


FIGURE 1 | Theoretical model predicting teachers' ES and teachers' intention to provide ES. Behavior is not considered in this study.

Because beliefs vary across contexts and individuals, the theory assumes that contextual and individual influences are captured by variation at the belief level and do not need to be added to the model.

The TPB can be applied to any planned behavior in any population and in any context. Studies in numerous fields have shown the TPB to have impressive predictive power. Armitage and Conner's (2001) meta-analysis of 185 independent studies using the TPB found that attitude, subjective norm, and PBC collectively explained 39% of the variance in intention and 27% of the variance in behaviors. TPB determinants proved useful in understanding teachers' individualized support in primary schools, helping to explain 77% of the variance in intention and 36% of the variance in behavior (Knauder and Koschmieder 2019). Although the TPB has never before been applied to teacher–student ES, it provides a valuable framework as suggested by the framework for motivating teacher–student relationships (Robinson 2022), which mobilizes elements similar to TPB. As illustrated in Figure 1, the more teachers believe that providing ES is beneficial and enjoyable (attitude), that many people provide ES and expect them to provide it (subjective social norm), and that they are both able and autonomous to provide ES, the more they should intend to provide ES. These determinants of intention (attitude, subjective social norm, and perceived behavioral control) themselves depend respectively on a set of underlying beliefs, which will be the subject of hypotheses below.

1.3 | Teachers' Representations About the Consequences to Building Quality Affective Relationships

To date, only two studies focus precisely on one ingredient participating in creating quality affective teacher–student

relationships: teachers' representations of the advantages and disadvantages, that is, the consequences, of building quality affective teacher–student relationships (García-Moya et al. 2019; Pimpalkhute et al. 2023).

García-Moya et al. (2019, 2) used interviews with 20 secondary school teachers in England and Spain to examine teachers' beliefs about “the benefits and potential tensions associated with relationship building.” Although they used the term relationship alone, they were interested in “affective and relational aspects” of relationships (p. 9), which they equated with each other and opposed to the instrumental dimension. Participants perceived teacher–student relationships as increasing teachers' job satisfaction and well-being and as promoting student learning. However, they also felt that efforts to build affective relationships with students could increase teachers' stress and reduce their authority—potential barriers to their intent to build quality affective teacher–student relationships.

Pimpalkhute et al. (2023) ran focus groups with 115 education professionals (teachers and other staff) in American middle schools. Although they too used the term relationship alone, they referred to attachment theory and were also interested in what we call here quality affective relationships. Participants described several benefits of positive teacher–student relationships that could increase intention to build quality affective relationships, notably the facts that these relationships improve trust and communication, enhance students' academic and social skills, facilitate behavior management, increase student and parent satisfaction, and increase teachers' job satisfaction. Less positively, participants felt that establishing quality affective relationships requires additional time and effort, makes teachers more emotionally vulnerable, blurs boundaries between students and teachers, and gives students opportunities to misuse the relationship. According to teachers, efforts to building quality affective teacher–student relationships have therefore both positive and negative consequences.

According to TPB, the studies on teachers' representations of positive and negative consequences of building quality affective teacher-student relationships are closed to beliefs relating to attitude (e.g., building quality affective teacher-student relationships facilitates students' motivation; it requires time and effort).

To complete previous qualitative work, the current study uses a quantitative framework. Decisions on whether to adopt a behavior within a certain environment are influenced by both explicit and implicit motives (McClelland et al. 1989). Explicit (or self-attributed) motives reflect an individual's self-awareness and can be assessed using declarative measures, as in earlier, qualitative studies of teachers' intentions to establish quality affective relationships with students (García-Moya et al. 2019; Pimpalkhute et al. 2023). Implicit motives are not consciously accessible, which means they can be measured only indirectly. In the current study, we evaluated links between beliefs and intention to provide ES to students independently of participants' consciousness of these links and/or their relative importance. Hence, our study focuses on partially latent and inaccessible links that previous qualitative research could not identify.

1.4 | Factors Influencing Quality Affective Teacher-Student Relationships

Pianta et al.'s (2003) conceptual model identify three broad categories of factors that shape teacher-student relationships in general and their affective dimension in particular (Davis 2003; Murray and Pianta 2007): external, student-related, and teacher-related factors.

External factors are mostly school factors, such as school size, class size, teacher-student ratio, division of the timetable, school climate, senior staff's managerial style, and a school's approach to social relationships, discipline, and teaching methods. Student-related factors include gender, social skills, academic competencies, and behavior problems (Myers and Pianta 2008; Pianta et al. 2003). For instance, girls tend to have closer relationships with their teachers than boys (Choi and Dobbs-Oates 2016), partly because boys show more antisocial behaviors (Pianta et al. 2003).

Teacher characteristics impacting teacher-student relationships include level of qualifications and professional training (Chen and Phillips 2018; Kelley 2007) as well as stress and negative affect (Gastaldi et al. 2014; Yoon 2002). Studies examining teachers' relational styles have found that teachers with greater social and emotional skills (Jennings et al. 2017) and teachers with secure attachment styles are more likely to establish warm relationships and avoid conflicts with their students (Horppu and Ikonen-Varila 2001; Kesner 2000; Morris-Rothschild and Brassard 2006). Finally, teachers' beliefs about their role or their efficacy also impact their relationships with students at a dyadic level (Chung et al. 2005; Mashburn et al. 2006). This later finding highlights the importance of taking into account teachers' beliefs when considering the determinants of quality affective teacher-student relationships.

The aforementioned results are of prime interest as they point several factors facilitating or impeding quality teacher-student relationships in general, and its affective quality in

particular. Viewed through the prism of the TPB, these studies on facilitators/impeders of quality affective teacher-student relationships are closed to beliefs relating to PBC. For example, teacher-student ratio or professional training facilitates PBC-ability to build quality affective teacher-student relationships. Teachers' beliefs about their role may reduce PBC-autonomy if ES is not considered part of their role.

The current study extended these results by considering the impact of all the constructs of the TPB: cognitive attitude, experiential attitude, descriptive norm, injunctive norm, PBC-ability, and PBC-autonomy.

1.5 | Objectives and Hypotheses

Our study pursued two main aims. The first aim was to identify which TPB determinants—attitude, subjective social norm, and PBC—most strongly predicted the intention to provide ES. We hypothesized that attitude, subjective norm, and PBC significantly and substantially predict this intention. We expected to observe a link between teachers' cognitive and experiential attitude and teachers' PBC on the one hand, and intention to provide ES to students on the other. As the role of many beliefs related to attitude and PBC has been shown in studies of factors influencing teacher-student relationships and studies of teachers' representations, we expect attitude and PBC to play a central role in teachers' intention to provide ES to students. It was difficult to formulate precise hypotheses regarding subjective norm where there are contradictory social norms regarding this issue in France, with some circles viewing affective teacher-student relationships as important and other circles considering it inimical to the teachers' primary task of dispensing knowledge (Virat 2019). Moreover, the concept of subjective norm is generally considered to be a weaker predictor of intentions (Armitage and Conner 2001).

Various meta-analyses show that, together, attitude (without distinguishing between the cognitive and experiential components), subjective norm (considered from the injunctive angle) and PBC (without distinguishing between the ability and autonomy components) explain 39% of the variance in behavioral intention (Armitage and Conner 2001; Ravis and Sheeran 2003). When considered separately, attitude, injunctive norm and perceived control accounted for 24%, 14% and 18% of the variance in behavioral intention, respectively. The additional consideration of the descriptive norm adds a further 5% to the prediction of intention (Ravis and Sheeran 2003). Consequently, we expected the determinants of intention to explain more than 50% of the variance in intention to provide emotional support to students, and for the impact of attitude and perceived control to exceed that of subjective norm.

H1: *Attitude, subjective social norm, and PBC will each make significant, independent contributions to predicting teachers' intention to provide ES to students.*

H2: *Subjective social norm will have a smaller contribution to predicting teachers' intention to provide ES to students.*

The second aim of our study was to investigate the beliefs underlying these determinants and assess their relative contribution—that is, their hierarchical weight in predicting intention's determinants—thereby pinpointing the most promising intervention targets.

Building on García-Moya et al. (2019) and Pimpalkhute et al. (2023), we hypothesized that teachers' beliefs about the consequences of ES would stand out as important attitudinal beliefs that promote or hinder teachers' positive attitude toward ES.

H3: *Certain teachers' beliefs about the consequences of providing ES will make significant, independent contributions to predicting teachers' attitude toward ES, particularly the beliefs that ES:*

- Promotes students' learning,*
- Promotes students' motivation,*
- Promotes teacher—student relationships,*
- Promotes teachers' job satisfaction,*
- Promotes teachers' well-being,*
- Is likely to increase teachers' stress,*
- Is likely to reduce teachers' authority.*

In a more inductive way, we also expect some emergent beliefs not previously reported in the literature to show predictive power.

Moreover, we hypothesized that some of the evidenced facilitators/impeders of quality affective teacher-student relationships would also be important in promoting or hindering PBC over ES.

H4: *Specific control beliefs will make significant, independent contributions to predicting teachers' PBC over ES, particularly the beliefs that:*

- ES is part of their role,*
- Teachers have sufficient time and resources to provide ES (sufficient teacher-student ratio, perceived social support at work),*
- Teachers have received ES-specific training,*
- The school and class climates are good,*
- Relations with students are good.*

In a more inductive way, we also expect certain PBC beliefs to emerge that have not been identified in the literature.

Regarding the subjective norm determinant, which has been little studied to date, we make the exploratory hypothesis that certain people—such as colleagues, support staff, students, or parents—will contribute to teachers' subjective social norm.

H5: *Some teachers' beliefs about people who do—or do not—provide ES or about people who expect them to provide—or not*

provide—ES will make significant, independent contributions to predicting teachers' subjective social norm.

2 | Method

2.1 | Participants

We sent the questionnaire to French primary, middle, and high school teachers via lists of teachers' email addresses, LinkedIn, and Facebook. Participants were not obliged to answer all the questions. We received responses from 238 teachers, 237 of whom indicated their gender (205 women, 32 men). Participants were aged between 22 and 65 years ($M = 45.2$ years; $SD = 9.5$ years) and had between 0- and 46-years' teaching experience ($M = 17.3$ years; $SD = 10.2$ years). The characteristics of the teachers in our sample were similar to those of French teachers in general (66% women, mean age 42.6 years, 16 years' teaching experience; OCDE 2014). Our sample comprised 86 primary school teachers, 146 secondary school teachers (85 middle school and 61 high school teachers), and six teachers who either did not provide this information or indicated another situation (e.g., they taught in both primary and secondary schools).

2.2 | Procedure

We followed Ajzen (2006) recommendations for TPB studies, which consist of steps to be followed and items to be adapted to the behavior under study. First, we precisely defined the behavior. Drawing on previous definitions of emotional support (Federici and Skaalvik 2014; House 1981; Patrick et al. 2011), we defined ES as “the time and energy a teacher spends to ensure that students perceive him or her as caring and empathetic and their relationship as one of trust, closeness, and affection.” Second, we conducted a qualitative pilot study to identify contextually relevant beliefs underlying the determinants of intention. An initial sample (separate sample from the main sample which contains the participants) of 22 primary and secondary school teachers (17 female) were asked, via an online questionnaire, to think about “spending time and energy from now on to ensure that students perceive him or her as caring and empathetic and their relationship as one of trust, closeness, and affection” and to list (1) the positive/negative consequences and feelings associated with it, corresponding to attitudinal beliefs, (2) people who are the more/least likely to do it and to expect them to do so, corresponding to normative beliefs, and (3) the factors likely to facilitate/impede the provision such behaviors, corresponding to perceived control beliefs. Responses were content analyzed. Due to the exploratory nature of the study of participants' beliefs, all the beliefs expressed by this subsample were retained, even if expressed by a small number of participants (see Table 1).

Third, a questionnaire was designed to assess teachers' intention to provide ES, its determinants, and their underlying beliefs on 1–7 Likert scales. Pairs of items measuring intention (e.g., “I intend to provide ES to my students from now on”), cognitive attitude (e.g., “providing ES to my students from now on will be useful”), experiential attitude (e.g., “providing ES to my students from now on

TABLE 1 | Contextually relevant beliefs underlying the attitude, subjective norm, and PBC determinants about providing ES to students.

Attitudinal beliefs: Providing ES to students	
– Enhances student learning – Promotes student engagement – Helps students adjust to school – Increases students' sense of recognition – Increases students' self-confidence – Increases students' trust in the teacher – Increases students' motivation – Promotes students' well-being – Develops students' social skills – Leads students to acquire human values – Promotes students' sense of belonging to school – Confuses students about the nature of the teacher-student relationship (teacher as friend) – Biases students' evaluation – Reduces students' autonomy – Causes separation anxiety for students at the end of the year – Makes students' work dependent on external motivation – Increases students' enjoyment of work – Improves the teacher-student relationship – Improves the flow of lessons – Increases students' sense of usefulness – Increases students' authority – Leads students to push the boundaries of intimacy – Is time consuming for teachers – Leads teachers to endorse on a role that is not theirs – Leads teachers to be overly concerned about certain students	
Subjective norm beliefs	
Descriptive beliefs: Those who are the more/ least likely to provide ES	Injunctive beliefs: Those who are the more/least likely to provide ES
– Teachers who are convinced of the benefits of affective teacher-student relationships – Teachers who show little interest in their students – Teachers who do not want to do more than they already do	– Principals – Support staff – Educational counsellors – Medico-social staff – Students – Students' parents – Teacher trainers – School inspectors – Teachers' relatives – Teachers who do not see the affective relationships as part of their role

(Continues)

PBC beliefs: Factors facilitating/hindering ES

- Class size (small groups teaching)
- School climate
- Classroom climate
- Having pleasant students
- Having pleasant premises
- Having breaks between lessons
- Having IT tools that can help foster relationships
- Receiving training in providing ES
- Considering ES as part of the teacher's job
- Having a dedicated classroom
- Having a dedicated office
- Having time
- Having extracurricular activities, during or outside working hours
- ES provision being part of the working time
- Working in only one school
- Working close to home
- Length of teaching experience
- Having activities outside of school
- Discussing ES with colleagues

will be pleasant”), descriptive norm (e.g., “Many teachers I value provide ES to their students”), injunctive norm (e.g., “People who are important to me want me to provide ES to my students from now”), PBC-ability (e.g., “I feel capable to provide ES to my students from now on”) and PBC-autonomy (e.g., “I am the one who decides to provide ES to my students from now on”), were adapted from Ajzen (2006). According to the author's instructions, each of the beliefs shown in Table 1 was assessed by pairs of items measuring its strength and its power on 7-point scales. More specifically, attitudinal beliefs were measured by the items “Providing ES to my students from now on will (e.g., increase enjoyment of work)” and “(e.g., increased enjoyment of work) is a good thing”. Descriptive normative beliefs were assessed with the items “(e.g., teachers who do not want to do more than they already do) are likely to provide ES to their students from now on” and “I like to be like (e.g., teachers who do not want to do more than they already do) when it comes to teaching”. Injunctive normative beliefs were assessed with the items “(e.g., parents) expect me to provide ES to my students from now on” and “(e.g., parents) opinions regarding my teaching are very important to me”. Perceived control beliefs were assessed via the items “(e.g., being trained) complicates/facilitates the provision of ES to my students” and “(e.g., being trained) is very true/probable”.

2.3 | Data Analysis Strategy

We used Jamovi statistical software to perform the analyses carried out on the maximum amount of available data.

2.3.1 | Preliminary Analyses and Variables Creation

Before creating the variable “intention to provide ES to my students from now on”, the association between the two items measuring this intention was calculated. As the Pearson correlation was significant ($r(236) = 0.77$, $p < 0.001$), responses to both items were combined into a single variable by calculating their mean.

Because not all studies distinguish between the two components of each intention determinant, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with maximum likelihood extraction and oblimin rotation to test whether the items measuring both components of each intention determinant were distributed across two factors (e.g., both items measuring cognitive attitude loaded on one factor and both items measuring experiential attitude loaded on another factor) or across a single factor (e.g., the four attitudinal items loaded on a unique factor). Overall, the results (see Appendix A: Table A1) indicated that the components of each intention determinant should be treated separately: the analysis retained six factors, on each of which the pair of items measuring each component of the intention determinants loaded, except for one item measuring descriptive norm (Bartlett's sphericity test $X^2(66) = 1044$, $p < 0.001$, KMO > 0.59 , RMSEA = 0.00, TLI = 1.00). This item, while significantly correlated with the second descriptive norm item ($r(230) = 0.20$, $p = 0.002$) loaded on the factor on which loaded the items measuring injunctive norm, indicating that the normative constructs overlap, what will be discussed below. The variables “cognitive attitude”, “experiential attitude”, “descriptive norm”, “injunctive norm”, “PBC-ability”, and “PBC-autonomy” were created by calculating the means of their respective items.

Following Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) expectancy-value model, according to which the more probable and valuable a belief is, the more it is expected to be conducive of the intention determinant it underlies (i.e., beliefs perceived as highly probable but of low value or beliefs perceived as highly valuable but unlikely are supposed to be less decisive), Ajzen (1991, 2006) recommended to ponder the strength of each belief by its power to create the beliefs variables. Consequently, responses to the items measuring the strength and the power of each belief were multiplied to create the corresponding variables. Note that, in line with La Barbera and Ajzen (2020), the strength of attitudinal beliefs about the disadvantages of providing ES, normative beliefs about social referents unlikely to provide/expect ES, and control beliefs about factors hindering ES provision were reverse-coded.

2.3.2 | Testing the Model

To identify incentives and barriers to participants' intention to provide ES to their students, we followed a two-step strategy used in previous TPB studies (Huart et al. 2022, 2023; La Barbera and Ajzen 2020), which consisted of (1) identifying the significant determinants of participants' intention to provide ES to their students among the intention determinants proposed by the TPB and (2) identifying which beliefs significantly predicted the determinants that reached significance in step 1. Specifically, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis in which

participants' intention to provide ES to their students was regressed on cognitive and experiential attitudes, descriptive and injunctive norms, PBC-ability, and autonomy in a first model. In a second model, the level of education in which the participants teach was added to check whether or not this variable made an additional contribution to the explanation of intention. Multiple regression analyses were then performed to regress each intention determinant that had reached significance on its respective beliefs. Consistent with La Barbera and Ajzen (2020), nonsignificant determinants were not analyzed further as they did not contribute independently from the other ones to the explanation of participants' intention to provide ES to their students.

3 | Results

Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2.

3.1 | Intention Determinants

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis showed that the first model, which included the intention determinants proposed by the TPB, explained 68% of the variance of participants' intention to provide ES to their students from now on (adjusted- $R^2 = 0.665$, $F(6,213) = 73.6$, $p < 0.001$). Adding the level of education at which the participants teach to the predictors in the second model did not add any more to the explanation of this intention ($\Delta R^2 = 0.004$, $F(1,212) = 2.75$, *ns*). Among the determinants of intention (see Table 3), all but the injunctive norm reached significance. In other words, participants' intention to provide ES to their students was predicted by whether they expected it to be beneficial (cognitive attitude) and pleasant (experiential attitude), by whether they expected others to do so (descriptive norm), and by whether they felt capable (PBC-ability) and autonomous in doing so (PBC-autonomy). These significant links (standardized β) are shown in Figure 2.

3.2 | Beliefs

3.2.1 | Attitudinal Beliefs

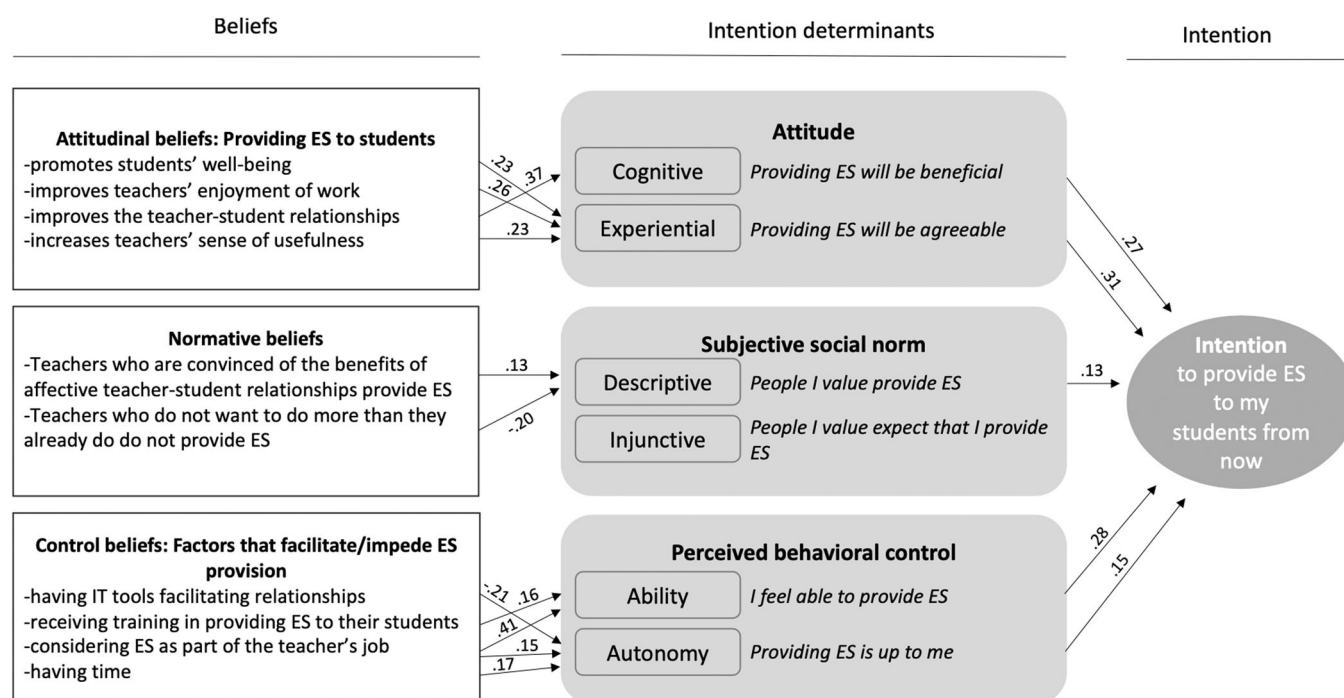
The results of the two regression analyses in which participants' cognitive and experiential attitudes were regressed on attitudinal beliefs showed that these beliefs explained about 50% of the

TABLE 2 | Descriptive statistics.

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Intention	236	6.29	1.09
Cognitive attitude	235	6.60	0.74
Experiential attitude	234	6.12	1.10
Descriptive norm	232	4.25	1.34
Injunctive norm	237	4.10	1.82
PBC-ability	237	6.02	1.18
PBC-autonomy	234	5.08	1.67

TABLE 3 | Results of the regression of intention on its determinants.

Variable	<i>b</i>	SE	95% CI		β	<i>t</i> (215)	<i>p</i>
			Low	Up			
(Intercept)	−0.55	0.39	−1.31	0.21	0.00	−1.42	0.157
Cognitive attitude	0.39	0.08	0.24	0.54	0.27	5.09	< 0.001
Experiential attitude	0.30	0.06	0.19	0.41	0.31	5.39	< 0.001
Descriptive norm	0.10	0.03	0.03	0.17	0.13	2.92	0.004
Injunctive norm	−0.01	0.03	−0.05	0.05	−0.01	−0.14	0.892
PBC-ability	0.25	0.04	0.16	0.34	0.28	5.63	< 0.001
PBC-autonomy	0.10	0.03	0.04	0.15	0.15	3.61	< 0.001

**FIGURE 2** | Condensed representation of the results of the analyses regressing intention on its determinants and significant determinants on their underlying beliefs. Only significant relationships ($p < 0.05$) are shown.

variance of cognitive attitude (adjusted- $R^2 = 0.497$, $F(25,179) = 9.05$, $p < 0.001$) as well as of experiential attitude (adjusted- $R^2 = 0.481$, $F(25,179) = 8.56$, $p < 0.001$).

As shown in Table 4, among these beliefs, the belief that providing ES will improve teacher-student relationships made an independent contribution to explaining participants' evaluation of the outcomes associated with providing ES to their students (cognitive attitude). These significant links (standardized β) are shown in Figure 2.

As shown in Table 5, three beliefs made an independent contribution to participants' evaluation of the experience of providing ES to their students (experiential attitude): the beliefs that providing ES promotes student well-being, teachers' enjoyment of work and teachers' feelings of usefulness. These significant links (standardized β) are shown in Figure 2.

3.2.2 | Normative Beliefs

The results of the regression analysis regressing descriptive norm on descriptive normative beliefs showed that these beliefs explained about 5% of the variance of cognitive attitude (adjusted- $R^2 = 0.046$, $F(3,227) = 4.68$, $p = 0.003$).

As shown in Table 6, among these beliefs, those about teachers who are convinced of the benefits of affective teacher-student relationships and about teachers who do not want to do more than they already do made respectively positive and negative contribution to descriptive subjective social norm.

3.2.3 | Perceived Control Beliefs

Regression analyses regressing PBC-ability and PBC-autonomy on perceived control beliefs showed that these

TABLE 4 | Results of the regression of cognitive attitude on attitudinal beliefs.

Belief about	<i>b</i>	SE	95% CI		β	<i>t</i> (179)	<i>p</i>
			Low	Up			
(Intercept)	6.63	0.04	6.56	6.70	0.00	183.57	< 0.001
Student learning	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.06	0.75	0.457
Student engagement	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.00	−0.05	0.960
Students' adjustment	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.05	0.55	0.581
Students' sense of recognition	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.01	0.03	0.39	0.696
Students' self-confidence	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.10	1.31	0.192
Students' trust in the teacher	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.04	−0.55	0.580
Students' motivation	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.00	−0.02	0.985
Students' well-being	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.00	−0.03	0.974
Students' social skills	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.01	−0.02	−0.22	0.829
Students' human values	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.08	0.78	0.438
Students' sense of belonging	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.01	0.04	0.51	0.610
Student confusing teacher-friend	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.02	0.29	0.775
Biased assessments	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.05	0.65	0.519
Reduced students' autonomy	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.01	−0.02	−0.28	0.778
Students' separation anxiety	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.06	0.90	0.370
External motivation	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.00	−0.04	0.970
Enjoyment of work	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.15	1.95	0.053
Teacher-student relationships	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.05	0.37	4.36	< 0.001
Lessons flow	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.01	0.15	0.881
Teachers' sense of usefulness	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.12	1.59	0.114
Teacher's authority	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.01	0.01	0.12	0.905
The boundaries of intimacy	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.04	−0.72	0.470
Time consuming	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.08	1.16	0.249
Teachers endorsing a role that is not theirs	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.00	−0.05	0.961
Teachers being overly concerned	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.01	−0.06	−0.85	0.394

beliefs explained, respectively, 33% of the variance in PBC-capacity (adjusted- $R^2 = 0.325$, $F(19,188) = 6.25$, $p < 0.001$) and 13% of the variance in PBC-autonomy (adjusted- $R^2 = 0.133$, $F(19,187) = 2.67$, $p < 0.001$).

As shown in Table 7, beliefs that made an independent positive contribution to predicting whether teachers felt able to provide ES to their students (PBC-ability) were the beliefs that receiving training and considering ES as part of the teacher's job facilitated the provision of ES. These significant links (standardized β) are shown in Figure 2.

As shown in Table 8, the beliefs that IT tools that help foster relationships, considering ES as part of the teacher's job, and having time are three factors that had a significant independent influence on whether teachers felt autonomous in providing ES to their students (PBC-autonomy). These significant links (standardized β) are shown in Figure 2.

4 | Discussion

In the current study, we used the theory of planned behavior as a framework for studying teachers' intention to provide ES to their students. In accordance with hypothesis 1, results showed that participants' intention to provide ES was predicted by how participants consider that it will be beneficial (cognitive attitude) and agreeable (experiential attitude), by believing that others do provide such support (descriptive norm) and by feeling able to provide it and autonomous in this respect (PBC-ability and PBC-autonomy). In other words, all determinants of intention, but teachers' perception that people expect them to provide ES (injunctive norm), had an impact. The determinants most related (higher effect size) to teachers' intention to provide ES to their students were cognitive attitude, experiential attitude, and PB-ability in accordance with hypothesis 2.

The role of all these determinants does not differ according to the level of education (primary vs. secondary education).

TABLE 5 | Results of the regression of experiential attitude on attitudinal beliefs.

Belief about	<i>b</i>	SE	95% CI		β	<i>t</i> (179)	<i>p</i>
			Low	Up			
(Intercept)	6.16	0.06	6.05	6.27	0.00	111.82	< 0.001
Student learning	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.08	0.92	0.359
Student engagement	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.02	0.00	−0.03	0.972
Students' adjustment	−0.01	0.01	−0.03	0.01	−0.12	−1.33	0.185
Students' sense of recognition	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.06	0.81	0.419
Students' self-confidence	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.02	0.00	−0.04	0.967
Students' trust in the teacher	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.01	−0.03	−0.35	0.728
Students' motivation	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.02	0.01	0.07	0.945
Students' well-being	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.23	2.56	0.011
Students' social skills	−0.01	0.01	−0.04	0.01	−0.12	−1.12	0.264
Students' human values	0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.03	0.07	0.69	0.491
Students' sense of belonging	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.05	0.57	0.568
Student confusing teacher–friend	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.10	1.29	0.198
Biased assessments	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.07	0.88	0.380
Reduced students' autonomy	0.00	0.01	−0.03	0.02	−0.03	−0.44	0.663
Students' separation anxiety	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.02	0.00	−0.02	0.983
External motivation	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.02	−0.01	−0.23	0.818
Enjoyment of work	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.26	3.29	0.001
Teacher–student relationships	0.02	0.01	−0.01	0.04	0.13	1.53	0.129
Lessons flow	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.02	−0.01	−0.06	0.949
Teachers' sense of usefulness	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.23	2.93	0.004
Teacher's authority	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.01	0.02	0.32	0.748
The boundaries of intimacy	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.05	0.86	0.390
Time consuming	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.05	0.65	0.514
Teachers endorsing a role that is not theirs	−0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.01	−0.06	−0.76	0.447
Teachers being overly concerned	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.05	0.77	0.443

TABLE 6 | Results of the regression of descriptive norm on descriptive normative beliefs.

Belief about	<i>B</i>	SE	95% CI		β	<i>t</i> (188)	<i>p</i>
			Low	Up			
(Intercept)	4.26	0.09	4.09	4.42	0.00	49.32	< 0.001
Teachers who are convinced of the benefits of affective teacher–student relationships	0.02	0.01	−0.01	0.04	0.13	2.04	0.042
Teachers who show little interest in their students	0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.03	0.03	0.47	0.635
Teachers who do not want to do more than they already do	−0.03	0.01	−0.06	−0.01	−0.20	−2.99	0.003

From the TPB perspective, this can be explained insofar as the possible effect of the level of education on the intention to provide ES is mediated by the attitude towards ES, by subjective norm, and by perceived behavioral control. Thus, when attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control are assessed, it is no longer necessary to retain control variables of this type, as characterized by the assumption of sufficiency

(Ajzen 2020; Fishbein and Ajzen 2011). These results concerning the determinants of intention according to TPB are relatively consistent with the theoretical model proposed by Robinson (2022), who explains that teachers' motivation to build quality relationships with their students is linked to the value they place on teacher–student relationships and to the fact that they feel capable of building such relationships.

TABLE 7 | Results of the regression of PBC-ability on control beliefs.

Belief about	<i>b</i>	SE	95% CI		β	<i>t</i> (188)	<i>p</i>
			Low	Up			
(Intercept)	5.96	0.07	5.83	6.10	0.00	88.70	< 0.001
Class size (small groups teaching)	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.01	0.05	0.71	0.479
School climate	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.07	0.94	0.351
Classroom climate	0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.03	0.05	0.54	0.591
Pleasant students	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.07	0.71	0.476
Pleasant premises	−0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.01	−0.06	−0.83	0.405
Having breaks between lessons	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.01	0.17	0.867
IT tools that help foster relationships	−0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.00	−0.10	−1.47	0.143
Receiving training in providing ES	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.16	2.33	0.021
Considering ES as part of the teacher's job	0.04	0.01	0.03	0.05	0.41	6.32	< 0.001
Having a dedicated classroom	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.00	−0.07	−0.94	0.350
Having a dedicated office	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.10	1.38	0.169
Having time	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.05	0.62	0.538
Having extracurricular activities	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.01	−0.10	0.922
Providing ES as part of the working time	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.03	0.47	0.636
Working in only one school	−0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.00	−0.10	−1.68	0.095
Working close to home	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.01	0.04	0.66	0.512
Length of teaching experience	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.81	0.418
Having activities outside of school	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.03	−0.43	0.671
Discussing ES with colleagues	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.10	1.53	0.128

On the other hand, subjective social norm play a minor role here as has been widely observed in psychology studies based on TPB (Armitage and Conner 2001). There are several possible explanations for this result. First of all, in France, ES is the object of contradictory social norms, with some people considering that affective teacher-student relationships are important and others considering that the primary mission of teachers is to dispense knowledge (Virat 2019). Consequently, a global measure is unlikely to be able to assess the influence of specific individuals (such as a colleague or a principal, for example). In addition, the measurement of subjective social norm may be more subject to social desirability, insofar as teachers place great importance on their pedagogical autonomy and may be reluctant to acknowledge the influence of others on their choices. Finally, norms can be internalized, and their influence could then be mediated by teachers' attitude towards ES: the link with intention reflects only the direct effect, not the total effect. This has been observed in other contexts (Bananuka et al. 2019), even if TPB did not initially postulate this mediating effect (Ajzen 1991). Studies on the role of norms in teachers' intention to build teacher-student relationships, based on other methodologies, would be useful to better understand this aspect.

Partly confirming hypothesis 3, four attitudinal beliefs had a major impact on teachers' attitude (cognitive and experiential) towards ES and are therefore critical targets for interventions aimed at encouraging teachers to provide ES. Attitudinal belief

about ES consequences on teacher-student relationships had the largest effect size of the four beliefs, but examination of the confidence intervals suggests caution when comparing their effect sizes. Then, two beliefs were moderately (Gignac and Szodorai 2016) related to teachers' attitude towards ES: belief about teachers' enjoyment of work and belief about teachers' sense of usefulness. All these three beliefs relate to the idea that providing ES improves job satisfaction, which is consistent with the results of studies on teachers' relational needs. For example, positive teacher-student relationships are an important determinant of teachers' job satisfaction (Spilt et al. 2011; Veldman et al. 2013), whereas having poor relationships with students impairs teachers' well-being (Aldrup et al. 2018). A desire to build positive relationships with students is also a determining factor in choosing to become a teacher (Bergmark et al. 2018; Manuel and Hughes 2006).

It would therefore seem that one way of encouraging teachers to provide ES to their students is to make them aware of the personal satisfaction they can derive from it. Beliefs about personal satisfaction seem to play a more important role than those about students' satisfaction. Indeed, the fourth attitudinal belief, according to which ES promotes student well-being, is associated with teachers' attitude towards ES but explains a smaller proportion of the variations of this attitude than beliefs about the consequences for teachers. This supports the hypothesis that the teachers who are most motivated to build relationships with their students are those who see this as

TABLE 8 | Results of the regression of PBC-autonomy on perceived control beliefs.

Belief about	<i>b</i>	SE	95% CI		β	<i>t</i> (188)	<i>p</i>
			Low	Up			
(Intercept)	5.14	0.11	4.92	5.35	0.00	47.66	< 0.001
Class size (small groups teaching)	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.07	0.98	0.329
School climate	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.02	−0.01	−0.13	0.896
Classroom climate	0.00	0.02	−0.04	0.03	−0.02	−0.14	0.891
Pleasant students	0.02	0.02	−0.01	0.05	0.12	1.19	0.236
Pleasant premises	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.02	0.02	0.22	0.823
Having breaks between lessons	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.08	1.17	0.243
IT tools that help foster relationships	−0.03	0.01	−0.04	−0.01	−0.21	−2.77	0.006
Receiving training in providing ES	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.02	0.28	0.780
Considering ES as part of the teacher's job	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.15	2.05	0.041
Having a dedicated classroom	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.02	0.29	0.771
Having a dedicated office	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.03	0.12	1.42	0.159
Having time	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.17	2.02	0.045
Having extracurricular activities	−0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.01	−0.08	−0.98	0.329
Providing ES being part of the working time	−0.01	0.01	−0.02	0.01	−0.06	−0.85	0.396
Working in only one school	−0.02	0.01	−0.04	0.00	−0.11	−1.65	0.102
Working close to home	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.05	0.64	0.523
Length of teaching experience	0.00	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.04	0.53	0.596
Having activities outside of school	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.10	1.25	0.212
Discussing ES with colleagues	−0.01	0.01	−0.03	0.01	−0.09	−1.22	0.224

having an influence on their own well-being or pleasure (Robinson 2022). In addition, a number of beliefs about the positive effects of ES for students are not significantly related to teachers' attitudes towards ES, perhaps because these beliefs are widely held. Making teachers aware of the effects of ES for students does not seem to be as promising an avenue as making them aware of the benefits for themselves.

The link between the belief that ES could reduce teachers' authority and attitude towards ES does not reach significance, contrary to what has been highlighted in qualitative work (García-Moya et al. 2019; Pimpalkhute et al. 2023). There are two possible explanations for this. Perhaps the authority issue is not so central, and simply serves as a justification for teachers who do not intend to provide ES for other reasons. Even more likely, the bias associated with recruiting a convenience sample with very high scores of intentions to provide ES could mask the role of beliefs about authority, which would then appear with a more representative sample. Likewise, studies using other methodologies could provide a better understanding of whether teacher training to teacher–student relationship would benefit from addressing the issue of authority.

Four control beliefs had an impact on teachers' perceived behavioral control (PBC-ability, PBC-autonomy, or both). Overall, they support hypothesis 4. The belief that ES is part of the teachers' job had the largest effect size on PBC (PBC-ability). It constitutes a critical target for interventions aimed at

encouraging teachers to provide ES. When interpreting these results, it is important to consider the provision of ES in relation to other types of support, namely pedagogical/instrumental support, as teachers may feel the need to prioritize certain types of support over others, especially in situations where they anticipate having insufficient resources to provide all types of support. In such cases, teachers may be torn between building relationships with students and fulfilling their instructional role. Even teachers who see providing ES as beneficial to students may consider ES to be secondary to pedagogical support, particularly in France, which is the country where the social and emotional development of students seems to be most secondary to the acquisition of academic knowledge and skills (OECD 2014; Virat 2019).

Conceptions of a teacher's role and priorities are important issues here. These conceptions depend as much on an individual's representations as on social norms about the roles of school and teachers. In this regard, the results revealed that two normative beliefs were significantly associated with the descriptive social norm determinant. The belief about teachers convinced of the benefits of affective teacher–student relationships was associated with a more positive descriptive subjective social norm, whereas the belief about teachers who do not want to do more was linked to a more negative descriptive subjective social norm. These results may be due to a process of comparison: Teachers who compare themselves with those who do not want to do more may be reluctant to provide ES because

they are worried that doing so would result in them doing more work than other teachers. This may be linked to a school culture that does not recognize and value providing ES as a key part of the teacher's role. Hence, changing school culture and the way teachers' work is organized may allow teachers to provide this support without the fear of becoming burnt out by doing "extra" work.

We can assume that teachers' and the school system's excessive focus on the cognitive and instrumental dimensions of teaching increases the risk of neglecting affective and relational aspects, which has long been discussed (Baker et al. 1997; Noddings 1992). Room for progress on this issue is particularly great in France, where many people still feel that school's only role is to transmit knowledge (Virat 2019), and where teacher training pays little attention to teacher-student relationships (Espinosa 2022). As Robinson (2022) argues more broadly, the lack of emphasis on the teacher-student relationship in teacher training may indicate that efforts to build quality teacher-student relationships are an extra effort that teachers may or may not realize. Consequently, teachers and the school system need to be made aware of the role teacher-student relationships play in developing children's and adolescents' academic and social skills, and of the particular importance of ES from teachers, which has a greater influence than instrumental support (Malecki and Demaray 2003; Tao et al. 2022).

The belief about having time is also associated with teachers' PBC-autonomy. Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll 1989), according to which individuals try to preserve their existing resources and acquire new resources, provides a possible explanation for this finding. When individuals feel their resources are diminishing or threatened, their spontaneous reaction is to preserve their existing resources. Teachers experiencing stress due to a high workload or time pressure show less engagement in their work (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2018). As such, belief about ES needing time could lead teachers to believe that they cannot provide ES, which would reduce their intention to provide ES especially when ES is not considered as part of teacher role. Hence, when seeking ways to encourage teachers to provide ES, it is first necessary to ascertain how they divide their time between their various tasks, and how they define priorities according to their perceptions of their role. Training could help teachers manage their time and set priorities.

In addition, the belief about receiving training to provide ES is also associated with PBC-ability. Whatever its direct influence on teacher's support behaviors, feeling trained in providing ES could increase the perception of self-efficacy, which could then favor the intention to provide ES. To interpret this result, it is possible to put forward the hypothesis that teachers are not completely at ease with ES: what form does it take? At what times? To which students? This is perhaps even more true when they have to interact with students who cause them difficulties.

Finally, the belief about having IT tools facilitating relationships is significantly associated with PBC-autonomy. However, the link is negative: the more teachers believe that IT tools are available and facilitating, the less autonomy they feel in providing ES. This could be explained by the fact that some teachers consider that facilitating IT tools exist, but do not feel

personally comfortable with them. Alternatively, the presence of these tools may be perceived as a loss of autonomy because it could impose on them a certain way of building the relationship that does not suit them. Research into distance learning in France shows that many teachers see digital tools as a barrier to teacher-student relationships (Adler and Virat 2022).

Contrary to hypothesis 4, some beliefs were not found to play a major role in participants' intention to provide ES. More precisely, beliefs about the quality of the classroom climate or the quality of relationships with students are not significantly linked to PBC. This result is astonishing insofar as students' behavioral difficulties are recognized as one of the most important determinants of teacher-student relationship (Doumen et al. 2008; Hamre et al. 2007; Murray and Murray 2004; Rudasill et al. 2010). It could come from the restricted variance of the PBC variable in addition to the restricted variance of the intention to provide ES. If most participants perceive themselves as capable of providing ES, it becomes less likely to see the role of certain predictive beliefs. Future studies should use more heterogeneous samples to test this explanation.

Another explanation could be that teachers may conceptually distinguish the relational context from their own ability to provide ES. In other words, they may believe they are capable of providing ES even if the relationships or climate are less good, which means that they evaluate their own skills or internal resources more than the role of context when assessing PBC. It invites to refine what kind of PBC the teachers think they have. Is it an overall perception that reflects their sense of competence, or is it more specific to certain contexts, such as dealing with students with behavioral problems? Future research on "relational self-efficacy" (Robinson 2022) would benefit from looking at specific contexts, especially those where teacher-student relationships are generally more conflictual.

To sum up, our results bring new elements for understanding how to improve teachers' ES to students. While our pilot study reveals a number of beliefs identical to those obtained in the qualitative studies mentioned earlier (García-Moya et al. 2019; Pimpalkhute et al. 2023), the quantitative analysis reveals the predominant role of certain beliefs. This is particularly important as these critical beliefs can be influenced.

4.1 | Implications

The present study did not assess the effects of training program in a controlled trial. Therefore, practical implications should be considered with caution: they are extrapolations rather than causal conclusions from intervention designs. Despite this caution, our results "can serve as a useful framework for designing effective behaviour change interventions [...] even if it does not and was not meant to provide guidance on the means, strategies or techniques that can effectively produce changes in these beliefs" (Ajzen 2015, 3).

Our results could have important practical implications for teacher training because they revealed previously unidentified factors that impact intention to provide ES. More precisely, our findings highlight a set of psychological and contextual barriers

that influence teachers' intention to provide ES. Below, we summarize these obstacles and propose practical strategies tailored to different stakeholders: teachers, teacher trainers, school leaders, and policymakers.

4.1.1 | Low Awareness of the Personal Benefits of ES

Despite its documented effects on students, teachers are more strongly influenced by beliefs about their own job satisfaction, enjoyment of work, and sense of usefulness. Training programs should emphasize that ES benefits not only students but also teachers. One strategy for promoting awareness of these benefits would be to encourage teachers to engage in reflective and metacognitive processes (e.g., journaling, guided discussion, video analysis), along the lines of the relationship-focused reflection program, a coaching program that has shown positive results on teacher-student relationships (Bosman et al. 2021; Koenen et al. 2021). Beyond the benefits of ES for students, the present results show how important it is for this reflective approach to make teachers aware of the benefits for themselves. Becoming aware of how ES contributes to job satisfaction may further encourage teachers. Coaching or mentoring initiatives that enable testimonials and case studies from peers to illustrate the emotional rewards of teacher-student relationships could sustain their commitment over time.

4.1.2 | Perception That ES Is not Part of Teacher Role

Teachers' belief that ES is part of their professional role is linked to PBC. This belief may be influenced by both personal representations and institutional norms. Both initial and in-service teacher training would benefit from integrating the relational dimension and aiming to favor teachers' beliefs favorable to the intention to provide ES to students. The perception of ES's consequences plays a crucial role. Training programs should emphasize that ES benefits not only students but also teachers. Integrating ES training into teacher initial training programs would help change the way teachers view their role. This could also reduce the influence of the beliefs highlighted in this study which are associated with the descriptive subjective social norm.

In addition, it could be beneficial to facilitate discussions on professional identity during training, using real-life scenarios in the classroom to position ES as an essential educational tool. Furthermore, promoting relational leadership in schools would help to normalize ES, which would then be more readily recognized as an important aspect of teachers' professional role.

4.1.3 | Time Pressure and Priority Management

The belief that teachers lack the time to provide ES to students reduces teachers' sense of autonomy. This obstacle is exacerbated when extracurricular activities are seen as an extra task rather than a central part of teaching. Programs focused on social and emotional skills (Jennings et al. 2017) could help teachers develop their "relational self-efficacy" (Robinson 2022) by integrating experiential learning components such as guided

role-plays, video feedback, or peer observation to help teachers recognize and develop their relational skills.

Such training programs should include time management and prioritization strategies development to help teachers allocate resources effectively. Reflection on ES could help teachers identify opportunities to provide ES during routine classroom interactions (e.g., greetings, transitions, informal conversations) where ES can be expressed without being time-consuming. Cognitive exercises and collective reflection can also help teachers reinterpret ES as a core component of effective pedagogy rather than an optional or emotionally demanding add-on. Case study or access to students' narratives may enhance the perceived legitimacy and pedagogical value of ES.

Beyond individual training, systemic changes are essential. Schools should foster a culture that values teacher-student relationships and provides structural support for positive interactions. This might include redesigning schedules to allow time for meaningful exchanges outside instructional periods, protecting time for relational activities. Such efforts require school systems to explicitly prioritize the relational dimension as part of broader educational goals. It would also be beneficial that supervisors and trainers consider ES provision as part of teachers' workload and give importance to this aspect in formal or informal evaluations or, more broadly, in professional discussions they have with teachers.

4.1.4 | Lack of Training

Teachers' belief about training is linked to PBC. As mentioned above, it is important to offer experiential learning modules (e.g., case studies, role-playing, peer coaching, video feedback) focused on relational scenarios. As also suggested, developing mentoring programs in which experienced teachers help their colleagues manage difficult relational dynamics would help develop their sense of competence.

4.1.5 | Peer Comparisons

Some teachers compare themselves to colleagues who do not provide ES to their students, which can discourage them from engaging in ES. To reduce this barrier, it would be useful to establish peer-led learning communities to promote the sharing of relational practices. This could help create a school-wide culture that values ES and recognizes it institutionally.

4.1.6 | Technological Barriers to Autonomy

Although digital tools can be a means of fostering relationships, they can also be perceived as undermining autonomy to provide ES, particularly when they are imposed or poorly suited to teachers' needs or working methods. Training on digital tools based on teachers' expectations toward building personalized interactions with students could contribute to perceived behavioral control over the provision of ES. As with the design of such training, it is important to involve teachers in the evaluation of educational technology tools to align their functionalities with relational objectives.

4.1.7 | Towards an Integrated Strategy

Efforts to improve teachers' ES behaviors must combine individual training with institutional changes. Simply addressing beliefs is unlikely to be sufficient if the school culture, political environment, or organizational structure as a whole remain unfavorable.

In addition, assessing the impact of training on teachers' beliefs is critical. Do shifts in beliefs translate into increased ES intentions and behaviors? Exploring this question offers a promising avenue for research on developing teachers' interpersonal skills and enhancing teacher–student relationships. Collaborative efforts between researchers, training institutions and school systems could yield actionable insights to refine and expand such initiatives.

4.2 | Limitations

Our study's first limitation is that it is based on a convenience sample. Because the call for participants stated the survey's theme, participants were undoubtedly teachers who were interested in ES, whereas teachers who felt that ES was not part of their role may not have responded. This may be why participants' intentions to provide ES were high, even though teachers in France provide relatively little ES to students (OECD 2019). Moreover, teachers' perceptions of the barriers and incentives to providing ES may differ according to whether they have high or low intention to provide ES. A similar study with a representative sample of teachers would, perhaps, reveal results that did not appear here but that have been reported by other studies, notably the role of the belief that providing ES can reduce a teacher's authority (Pimpalkhute et al. 2023; Roux-Lafay 2016; Weinstein 1998).

Second, some of the beliefs we examined did not significantly impact determinants of the intention to provide ES. However, this does not mean that these beliefs have no influence at all, as their effects may have been masked by the impacts of other beliefs or may not have been apparent in this sample of small size. We have only been able to observe that they play a less central role than other beliefs in predicting the determinants of intention, without knowing whether they can still have an influence.

Third, another limitation comes from the cross-sectional design. Even if this is contrary to TPB's predictions, we can hypothesize an influence of intention on attitude, on the perception of social norms or control, as well as an influence on beliefs, what Ajzen calls a feedback loop (Ajzen 2015). A longitudinal or interventional methodology would enable us to better understand causal relationships. In addition, a longitudinal or interventional study would make it possible to evaluate emotional support behaviors as a consequence of intention, which has not been studied here.

Furthermore, the method of the pilot study we used to determine beliefs associated with intention to provide ES may not have identified all relevant beliefs. For example, because the TPB is based on explicit beliefs, we did not examine implicit beliefs (e.g., automatic beliefs), even though they may impact intention to provide ES. For example, teacher–student relationships are linked to teachers' social-emotional skills, which

are particularly important for maintaining positive relationships with students with behavioral difficulties (Jennings et al. 2017). Although other studies have observed that teachers who lack ES skills are apprehensive about establishing relationships with students they consider “difficult,” teachers' social-emotional skills did not feature in the list of beliefs we examined. Once again, we were able to discuss only the beliefs we found to be significantly linked to intention to provide ES and were unable to consider other beliefs, notably those not identified during the pilot study.

Another limitation of this study is the exclusive reliance on measures using Likert-type scales, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Given the value that voluntary participants place on emotional support, they may have overestimated their intention or perceived ability to provide such support. Future studies could address this limitation by incorporating alternative methods such as behavioral observations, student-reported perceptions or implicit assessment tools to triangulate and validate self-reported data.

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The authors have nothing to report.

Ethics Statement

All participants provided voluntary consent before answering the questionnaire. The Research Ethics Committee at the University of Nantes (France) approved the study protocol, which was registered under reference 23092024.

Consent

All participants provided voluntary and informed consent before completing the questionnaire.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data sets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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Appendix

TABLE A1 | Results of the EFA examining the items measuring the determinants of teachers' intention to provide ES to their students.

Providing/provide emotional support to students from now on ...	Factors					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
... is within my reach (PBC-ability)	1.011					
... is something I can do (PBC-ability)	0.707					
... will be useful (cognitive attitude)		0.996				
... will be beneficial (cognitive attitude)		0.529				
... will be satisfying (experiential attitude)			0.749			
... will be pleasant (experiential attitude)			0.717			
There are people expecting me to... (injunctive norm)				0.789		
People who are important to me want me to ... (injunctive norm)				0.667		
People who are important to me will be... (descriptive norm)				0.528		
Rare are the teachers who... (descriptive norm, reversed)					1.00	
... is entirely up to me (PBC-autonomy)						0.745
I alone decide if I... (PBC-autonomy)						0.482