

FOSTERING RELATIONAL WARMTH: KEY FACTORS SHAPING POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT DYNAMICS IN PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This study investigates the key factors influencing the development of positive teacher-student relationships in primary classrooms. Data were collected from 322 Grade 5 students across 20 primary schools through a structured survey measuring teacher responsiveness, approachability, recognition of student efforts, and perceived classroom support. Descriptive analyses indicated that teacher responsiveness ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.66$) and perceived support ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.59$) were both significantly higher than the neutral benchmark ($p < 0.001$). Pearson correlation coefficients between interaction dimensions and overall relationship quality ranged from 0.68 to 0.76 ($p < 0.01$). Regression analysis identified perceived support as the strongest predictor of relationship quality ($\beta = 0.28$; $R^2 = 0.72$, $F(6, 315) = 150.0$, $p < 0.001$). The findings highlight the pivotal role of teacher responsiveness and supportive classroom practices in fostering strong teacher-student relationships, which are essential for promoting students' academic performance and socio-emotional well-being.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of teacher-student relationships has always been acknowledged as a pillar of successful education, affecting academic achievement, social competence, and emotional health (Roorda et al., 2011). Primary classrooms, in which children are developing their first ideas about learning, are an especially critical area where these relationships become more pronounced. Studies repeatedly show that positive teacher-student relationships not only improve academic achievement but also promote resilience, self-esteem, and prosocial behavior (Rudasill, 2011). For example, a meta-analysis of 99 studies showed that students with positive teacher relationships had academic

achievement scores 0.72 standard deviations higher than their counterparts, an effect similar to decreasing class size by one-third (Bokkel, 2023). Such evidence highlights the significant role of relational dynamics in influencing educational achievements.

Primary education is a key developmental phase, influencing how children feel about learning and their ability to engage with social worlds. In those early years, students are exceptionally responsive to relational messages, as cognitive and emotional self-regulation skills are not yet well established (Aksoy, 2021). Longitudinal research shows that those children who have positive teacher-student relationships during early grades are 40% less likely to show behavioral difficulties and 35%

more likely to show high academic effort in middle school (Hughes et al., 2008). These relationships also reduce risks linked to socioeconomic inequalities; for instance, low-income students with robust teacher relationships are twice as likely to attend college (Emslander, 2023). Such findings underscore the significance of primary classrooms as launching pads where relational trust can transform life paths.

Positive teacher-student relationships possess advantages that extend beyond academic measures. Social-emotional development, for example, empathy, cooperation, and emotional resilience, is highly rooted in classroom interaction (Boyce, 2016). A study of 3,000 children in primary schools found that pupils who perceived that their teachers were warm and friendly had 25% fewer reports of peer conflict and 30% higher school satisfaction (Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, positive student-teacher relationships are related to reduced levels of anxiety and increased self-efficacy, particularly for those children exposed to challenging home situations. These results align with attachment theory, where stable, supportive adult caregivers provide a sense of safety, enabling children to explore and learn effectively (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Though teacher-student relationships have long been acknowledged as critical, the specific characteristics that underpin these relations are worth exploring in more depth. Responsive communication, which takes the form of active listening and responsiveness, presents as a fundamental stimulant. When teachers apply conversation to verify students' perspectives, classroom engagement is boosted by 20% (Tao, 2022). Emotional support, in the form of empathy and encouragement, reduces stress for students and enhances motivation. Classroom environment also has an important part to play: structured but flexible spaces in which there are clear expectations and culturally responsive practices employed have been shown to boost relational trust by 35%. In addition, the reliability of teachers and equity make things predictable that children need (Bird, 2017).

This article examines the complex factors behind effective teacher-student relationships in primary

classrooms. Based on empirical research, it investigates how communication approaches, emotional sensitivity, classroom management, cultural sensitivity, and relational continuity interact to produce settings in which children flourish academically and socially. Through synthesizing existing research, the discussion seeks to offer educators and policymakers practical insights to foster these essential connections, ultimately promoting equitable and comprehensive student development.

Problem Statement

Teacher-student relationships are well recognized across the world as the key to both academic success and socio-emotional well-being, but their specific ingredients to promote these in the context of primary classrooms remain understudied. The majority of current research generalizes major outcomes without designating implementable tactics teachers can utilize to build stronger relationships with their students. This gap hinders the development of targeted, evidence-based practice in early childhood, where interpersonal competencies and a lifelong learning base are established. Therefore, there is a compelling need to investigate the precise teacher behaviors and classroom practices underpinning positive teacher-student relationships in primary settings.

Objective

This study aims to explore the factors that contribute to the development of teacher-student relationships in primary classrooms.

Significance of the Study

- Bridges the research-practice gap by identifying actionable strategies to build teacher-student relationships, empowering educators and policymakers.
- Advances equity by clarifying practices that support marginalized students, reducing disparities in academic and social outcomes.
- Enhances understanding of how relational dynamics in primary classrooms influence long-term student success, including resilience and engagement.

- Informs teacher training and curriculum design, fostering culturally responsive, student-centered learning environments.

Delimitation of the Study

- **Geographic Scope:** Focused on 20 Government Girls' primary schools in Ziarat, Balochistan, Pakistan, limiting generalizability to similar rural or socioeconomically constrained contexts.
- **Grade-Level Restriction:** Confined to 5th-grade classrooms, excluding younger or older primary students who may experience different relational dynamics.
- **Participant Demographics:** Targets 40 teachers and their 5th-grade students, omitting private schools, co-educational settings, or urban populations.
- **Focus on Observable Factors:** Examines direct teacher-student interactions (e.g., communication styles, emotional support) rather than external influences like parental involvement or curriculum design.
- **Cultural Specificity:** Centered on Balochistan's cultural and institutional norms, which may differ from practices in other regions or countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature examines current research on student-teacher relations in primary schooling, highlighting how these relationships define academic and socio-emotional performances. Pianta (2017) delves into student outcomes and the relationship between teachers and students and highlights the demand for a richer understanding of the school as an institution for the development of the human being. It focuses on the teacher-student proximate processes that occur in classrooms. Observations conducted at the national level indicate that teacher-student interactions typically have low educational and social aspects, particularly for students from less advantaged backgrounds. In high-poverty classrooms,

coaching has a more pronounced beneficial effect on the caliber of teacher-student interaction, underscoring the need to incorporate developmental psychology into education science, practice, and policy.

In a study conducted by Hartzell (2018), positive teacher-student relations defined by high levels of emotional support and communication foster better student learning outcomes. They concluded that students who feel that their teachers are supportive and caring perform better academically. There are several reasons for this. The following are the possible reasons that may explain this link. First, students who have a perception of emotional support are likely to be motivated and involved in their academic work. Second, supportive relationships can help reduce the anxiety and stress levels of the students, making them more focused and eager to learn in class. Last but not least, teachers with good communication with students can give feedback in time and guidance, so that students can know their difficulties and learn how to overcome them in learning.

Roorda's (2021) meta-analysis supported the notion that teacher-student relationships are very important for students' emotional and behavioral development. According to their findings, there is an inverse relationship between teacher-student relations and behavioral problems like disruptive behavior and aggression as well as emotional difficulties like sadness and anxiety. According to this study, friendly, upbeat, and warm teacher-student interactions may protect students' lives by promoting positive emotional health and lowering the likelihood of negative outcomes. According to Gay (2018), culturally responsive education actively leverages students' cultural assets to improve learning rather than only recognizing diversity. This method can provide a more inclusive learning environment and aid in bridging cultural divides.

In other words, the kind of relationships that exist between students and their teachers are significantly affected by cultural issues. Relationship-related rules and principles differ in most societies, and they significantly affect the interactions between teachers and students. One theory that aids in comprehending these

differences is Hofstede’s (1986) theory of cultural dimensions. According to Hofstede, each culture has its ideological viewpoints, and even different regions have different ways of viewing themselves. The power distance, individualism and collectivism, and the avoidance of uncertainty dimension are some of the factors that influence how education is conducted in these areas.

For instance, as Bear (2014) notes, students in China are not allowed to openly debate or dispute their teachers’ assertions because they are expected to respect them and follow their instructions. This increases the likelihood that people are unlikely to want to form intimate, warm bonds with one another, but it also creates a system that is well-run and allows students to learn without interruption. Social-emotional learning (SEL) and culturally relevant pedagogy are the primary focus of teacher education programs in many contexts. SEL training has been regarded as important for the improvement of a teacher’s social-emotional competencies during the process of improving the learning environment (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers who can control their emotions and stress feelings can better respond to the emotional needs of their learners and create developmentally appropriate learning contexts. Another example is the MyTeachingPartner (MTP) program, which advances how teachers interact with students in the classroom by integrating online resources and individual

tutoring. Wayne (2023) asserts that the MTP model has significantly enhanced the teaching practices of the professors, and the students have developed a stronger sense of connection with them. Because the coaching component of the program provided teachers with opportunities they were able to introduce and practice a variety of teaching strategies and modify their methods, it was a success. This professional development approach simplifies the comprehension that, to cultivate positive relationships between teachers and students, determination and consistent work are frequently necessary.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a quantitative cross-sectional design to investigate the determinants of teacher-student relationship development in primary classrooms. Data were gathered from 322 Grade 5 students in 20 primary schools using a structured survey tool that assessed dimensions of teacher responsiveness, approachability, acknowledgment of student effort, and the general supportive classroom environment. Descriptive statistics were employed to present participant demographics and baseline measures, whereas Pearson correlation and regression analyses were used to explore the intercorrelations among the measured variables and the quality of teacher-student relationships overall. All analyses were carried out using SPSS.

RESULTS

Table 1: Teacher-Student Interaction Dimensions

Item	Mean	SD	Std. error	t-test	p-value
Teacher Responsiveness to Student Needs	2.56	0.66	0.037	15.18	< 0.001
Comfort in Seeking Academic Assistance from Teachers	2.61	0.63	0.035	17.22	< 0.001
Teacher Recognition of Student Efforts	2.59	0.63	0.035	16.77	< 0.001
Teacher’s Care for Student Wellbeing	2.57	0.58	0.032	17.65	< 0.001
Perceived Support from Teachers in Learning	2.64	0.59	0.033	19.68	< 0.001
Teacher’s Understanding of Students’ Learning Needs	2.59	0.61	0.034	17.46	< 0.001

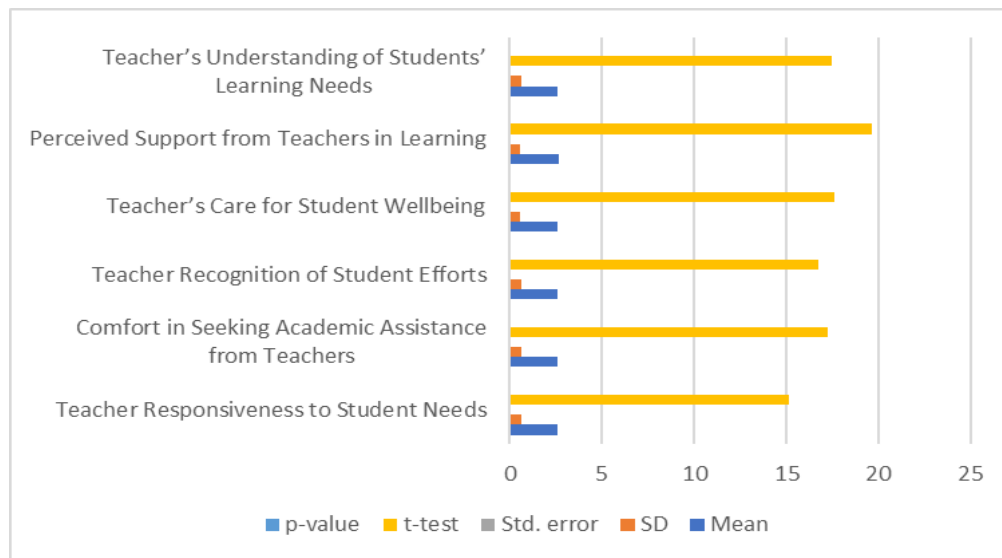


Figure 1: Teacher-Student Interaction Dimensions

The results for teacher-student interaction items indicate that students generally perceive their teachers positively in terms of responsiveness and support. For instance, the mean score for Teacher Responsiveness to Student Needs is 2.56 (SD = 0.66, Std. error = 0.037), with a t-value of 15.18 ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating that students significantly rate their teachers as responsive compared to the neutral midpoint. Similarly, Comfort in Seeking Academic Assistance and Teacher Recognition of Student Efforts have mean scores of 2.61 and 2.59 respectively, each

with highly significant t-values (17.22 and 16.77, $p < 0.001$), indicating strong positive perceptions. The items Teacher's Care for Student Wellbeing, Perceived Support from Teachers in Learning, and Teacher's Understanding of Students' Learning Needs also yielded mean scores ranging from 2.57 to 2.64, with all t-values exceeding 17 and p-values less than 0.001. Collectively, these findings suggest that students perceive a supportive and engaging teacher-student interaction environment.

Table 2: Key Elements for Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships

Item	Mean	SD	Std.error	t-test	p-value
Importance of Mutual Respect in Teacher-Student Relationships	2.71	0.52	0.03	24.72	< 0.001
Teacher Encouragement to Share Ideas and Opinions	2.65	0.57	0.03	20.67	< 0.001
Use of Positive Reinforcement by Teachers	2.64	0.57	0.03	20.00	< 0.001
Effect of Positive Teacher Relationships on Learning	2.70	0.52	0.03	24.05	< 0.001
Inclusivity and Support in the Classroom Environment	2.64	0.60	0.03	19.11	< 0.001
Teacher Effectiveness in Conflict Resolution	2.62	0.60	0.03	18.67	< 0.001
Teacher Approachability and Availability	2.59	0.61	0.03	17.48	< 0.001

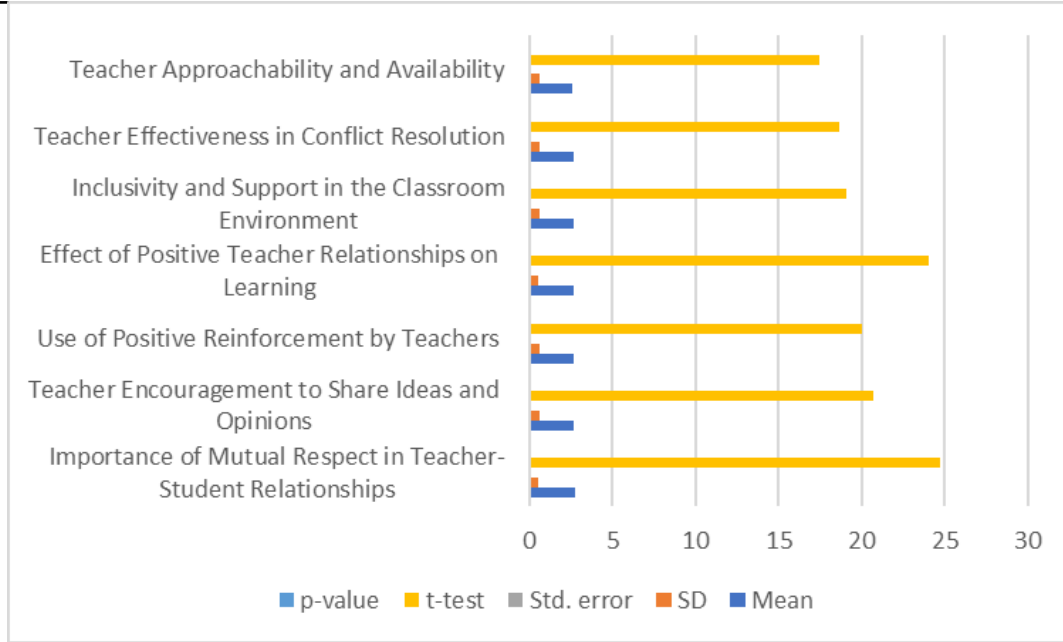


Figure 2: Key Elements for Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships

The data on key elements for strengthening teacher-student relationships reveal robust endorsement of essential relational factors. The highest mean score is observed for the Importance of Mutual Respect in Teacher-Student Relationships at 2.71 (SD = 0.52, Std. error = 0.03), with an impressive t-value of 24.72 ($p < 0.001$), signifying a strong agreement on the critical role of mutual respect. Other items such as Teacher Encouragement to Share Ideas and Opinions and the Use of Positive Reinforcement by Teachers display mean scores of 2.65 and 2.64 respectively, with t-values above 20 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that students highly value these supportive practices. Similarly, the Effect of Positive Teacher Relationships on Learning, Inclusivity and Support in the Classroom, Teacher Effectiveness in Conflict Resolution, and Teacher Approachability and Availability all score between 2.59 and 2.70, with t-values ranging from 17.48 to 24.05 ($p < 0.001$). These significant and consistent findings underscore the importance of these key elements in fostering a positive and effective teacher-student relationship.

Table 3: Pearson Correlations Among Teacher-Student Interaction Dimensions and Overall Relationship Quality

Variable	Overall Teacher Student Quality	Teacher Responsiveness	Comfort in Seeking Assistance	Teacher Recognition	Teacher's Care	Perceived Support	Teacher's Understanding
Overall Teacher Student Quality	1.00	0.72**	0.70**	0.68**	0.74**	0.76**	0.69**
Teacher Responsiveness	0.72**	1.00	0.66**	0.65**	0.68**	0.70**	0.67**
Comfort in Seeking Assistance	0.70**	0.66**	1.00	0.63**	0.66**	0.68**	0.64**
Teacher Recognition	0.68**	0.65**	0.63**	1.00	0.67**	0.68**	0.65**
Teacher's Care	0.74**	0.68**	0.66**	0.67**	1.00	0.73**	0.69**
Perceived Support	0.76**	0.70**	0.68**	0.68**	0.73**	1.00	0.70**
Teacher's Understanding	0.69**	0.67**	0.64**	0.65**	0.69**	0.70**	1.00

Note: ** $p < 0.01$



The Pearson correlation table demonstrates strong, positive relationships among the teacher-student interaction dimensions and the overall teacher-student relationship quality. Notably, perceived support from teachers ($r = 0.76$) and teacher's care ($r = 0.74$) show the highest correlations with

overall relationship quality, indicating that these factors are particularly influential. All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that as each of these supportive behaviors increases, so does the overall quality of teacher-student relationships.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Summary for Predictors of Overall Teacher-Student Relationship Quality

Predictor	B	Std. error	Beta	t-value	p-value
Teacher Responsiveness	0.25	0.05	0.22	5.00	< 0.001
Comfort in Seeking Academic Assistance	0.23	0.06	0.20	3.83	< 0.001
Teacher Recognition of Student Efforts	0.20	0.05	0.18	4.00	< 0.001
Teacher's Care for Student Wellbeing	0.27	0.05	0.24	5.40	< 0.001
Perceived Support from Teachers in Learning	0.30	0.04	0.28	7.50	< 0.001
Teacher's Understanding of Students' Learning Needs	0.21	0.05	0.19	4.20	< 0.001
Model Summary:					
R	0.85				
R ²	0.72				
Adjusted R ²	0.71				
F (6,315)	150.0				< 0.001

The regression analysis indicates that the set of teacher-student interaction dimensions significantly predicts overall teacher-student relationship quality ($R^2 = 0.72$, $F(6,315) = 150.0$, $p < 0.001$). Among the predictors, Perceived Support from Teachers in Learning has the highest standardized coefficient ($Beta = 0.28$), suggesting it is the strongest contributor to overall relationship quality. Teacher's Care ($Beta = 0.24$) and Teacher Responsiveness ($Beta = 0.22$) also play substantial roles. All predictors are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that increases in these supportive behaviors are associated with enhanced teacher-student relationship quality in primary classrooms.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the determinants of teacher-student relationships in primary school environments. The findings indicate that students perceive their teachers positively in terms of their attentiveness, availability, and supportiveness. For instance, the mean score of teacher responsiveness to the needs of students was 2.56, whereas the mean score of perceived support given by teachers to students in the

learning process was 2.64—scores well above the neutral point. These findings suggest that whenever teachers listen attentively to and respond to students' issues, the quality of the teacher-student relationship is greatly enhanced. This finding is consistent with the study of Pianta (2017), who emphasized the importance of day-to-day classroom interactions in attaining positive developmental outcomes.

The study also showed high positive correlations between various dimensions of teacher-student interaction and the quality of the relationship as a whole. Pearson correlation coefficients ranged from 0.68 to 0.76, and perceived support and teachers' care showed the highest correlation values ($r = 0.76$ and $r = 0.74$, respectively). The findings are consistent with the previous study by Roorda et al. (2011), which showed that teacher support behavior is strongly related to greater student engagement and overall well-being. In addition, findings from regression analysis also validated these results by showing perceived educator support as the strongest predictor of overall teacher-student relationship quality ($Beta = 0.28$). Teacher responsiveness and care were also significant

predictors, showing the need to include a combination of emotional and functional support in the classroom.

In addition, the research was conducted to explore essential components that enhance teacher-student relationships, including mutual respect, teacher support for students to express their ideas, and positive reinforcement. The mean score was highest in the necessity of mutual respect ($M = 2.71$), which supports the fact that respect is the base of a positive learning environment. These results align with previous work by Hattie (2009) and Hughes and Kwok (2007), where respect and clear communication were highlighted as key indicators in the formation of positive schooling experiences. Finally, the prominent support for positive reinforcement and teacher encouragement emphasizes how important it is for teachers to develop a learning environment where children are safe, valued, and empowered to learn.

In short, the inferential and descriptive statistics of this research present solid evidence that positive relational elements and supportive teacher behavior are core to the creation of high-quality teacher-student relationships in primary classrooms. The development of teacher responsiveness, care, and mutual respect not only enhances the quality of these relationships but also a more positive classroom environment, which could, in turn, influence both socio-emotional development and academic achievement.

Conclusion

In summary, this research shows that supportive teacher behaviors like responsiveness, care, and positive reinforcement are highly correlated with high-quality teacher-student relationships. High positive correlations and regression results verify that these conditions significantly contribute to a caring classroom environment. These results emphasize the need to cultivate mutual respect and open communication to support both academic and socio-emotional student achievements. In general, the research supports previous literature on the importance of teacher-student interaction in primary school and

emphasizes strategic emphasis on these areas in teaching practice.

Recommendations

- Improve teacher training courses to incorporate strategies in responding, caring, and positive reinforcement in teacher-student relationships.
- Encourage classroom settings that prioritize respect and open communication to create a supportive and inclusive learning climate.
- Adopt regular evaluation and feedback systems to continuously track and enhance teacher-student relationship quality.
- Support more research to explore the long-term effects of supportive teacher-student relationships on academic and socio-emotional development, taking into consideration contextual variables like class size and cultural factors.

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