

Student-teacher relationships and their influence on students' motivation, engagement, and academic success at the university level

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Abstract

Strong student-teacher relationships foster a supportive learning environment, boosting students' motivation and engagement in school. These positive connections are key drivers of academic success, as they encourage students to feel valued and understood. The objectives of the study were to identify the level of student-teacher relationships, students' motivation, engagement, and academic success, and to analyze the student-teacher relationships and their influence on students' motivation, engagement, and academic success at the university level. Students of all public and private universities in Lahore district was the population. The instruments of this research were questionnaires. The validity of the questionnaire was found through experts' opinions and reliability through pilot testing. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used. SPSS was used to analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed that there was highly significant effect of student-teacher relationships, on students' motivation, engagement, and academic success at the university level.

Keywords: student-teacher relationships, students' motivation, engagement, academic success, university level

Introduction

The quality of student-teacher relationships is a critical factor that significantly impacts students' motivation, engagement, and academic success. Research indicates that positive relationships with teachers create an environment where students feel supported, valued, and motivated to learn (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). When students perceive their teachers as caring and understanding, they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement and commitment to their academic work (Wentzel, 1998). This is particularly important in an educational landscape that increasingly recognizes the role of social and emotional learning in fostering student achievement. Positive student-teacher relationships can enhance students' intrinsic motivation, which is a key driver of academic success. When teachers build rapport with their students, they foster a sense of belonging and security, which can lead to increased motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, when students believe that their teachers are genuinely interested in their well-being and success, they are more likely to engage with the material and participate in classroom activities. This emotional connection encourages students to take risks in their learning, knowing

they have a supportive safety net. Furthermore, the significance of teacher warmth and support is evident in various studies, which have consistently shown that students who feel emotionally supported by their teachers are more motivated to achieve academic goals (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017).

Building on the importance of positive student-teacher relationships, it is essential to explore the mechanisms through which these relationships influence motivation and engagement. One key aspect is the role of trust in the classroom. Trust serves as the foundation for effective communication and collaboration between students and teachers. When students trust their teachers, they are more likely to share their thoughts and feelings openly, leading to a richer, more engaging learning environment. Research by Cornelius-White (2007) highlights that a trusting relationship between students and teachers significantly enhances students' engagement and academic outcomes. Students who feel they can express their concerns without fear of judgment are more likely to seek help when they struggle, ultimately contributing to their academic success. Moreover, student-teacher relationships contribute to a sense of community within the classroom. A strong classroom community fosters a collaborative learning environment where students are encouraged to work together, share ideas, and support one another (Bruscia, 2019). In such environments, students not only feel connected to their teachers but also to their peers, which further enhances their motivation to participate actively in classroom discussions and activities. This sense of belonging is particularly important for students who may feel marginalized or disconnected from the educational system. Research indicates that students who perceive their classrooms as supportive communities are more likely to exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation and engagement (Wentzel, 1998).

In addition to emotional support, teachers can play a pivotal role in shaping students' academic self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific tasks, which is crucial for academic success. Teachers can enhance students' self-efficacy by providing constructive feedback, recognizing their efforts, and celebrating their achievements, no matter how small (Schunk, 2003). By reinforcing students' belief in their capabilities, teachers help to cultivate a growth mindset, wherein students view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles. This perspective is vital for sustaining motivation, as students who believe in their ability to succeed are more likely to persevere through difficulties and remain engaged in their learning (Dweck, 2006). Engagement, both behavioral and emotional, is another critical component influenced by student-teacher relationships. Behavioral engagement refers to students' participation in academic activities, while emotional engagement encompasses their interest and emotional responses to the learning experience (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Teachers who establish strong relationships with their students create classrooms that promote both types of engagement. For example, when teachers demonstrate enthusiasm for the subject matter and show respect for students' perspectives, they cultivate an engaging classroom atmosphere (Hattie, 2009). This engagement leads to higher academic performance, as students who are actively involved in their learning are more likely to retain information and develop critical thinking skills.

Moreover, effective communication is a vital aspect of building strong student-teacher relationships. Teachers who engage in open, two-way communication with their students create an inclusive learning environment that encourages students to express their thoughts and concerns (Zhang, 2017). This type of communication fosters trust and respect, which are foundational elements of strong relationships. When students feel comfortable communicating with their teachers, they are more likely to seek help when needed, participate in discussions, and collaborate

with their peers, all of which contribute to a positive learning experience and better academic outcomes. Conversely, negative student-teacher relationships can hinder motivation and engagement. Studies have shown that students who perceive their teachers as unapproachable or indifferent are at risk of disengagement and decreased academic performance (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). This disengagement can manifest as lower participation in class, diminished interest in the subject matter, and ultimately, poorer academic results. Additionally, students who feel disconnected from their teachers may develop negative attitudes towards school, which can lead to increased absenteeism and a decline in overall academic achievement (Renshaw et al., 2015).

The influence of student-teacher relationships on academic success is particularly pronounced in at-risk populations. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often face additional challenges in their educational journeys. Research indicates that strong, supportive relationships with teachers can act as a protective factor, helping these students navigate academic obstacles (Baker, 2006). When teachers provide emotional support and encouragement, they help to mitigate the effects of external stressors, allowing students to focus on their academic goals. This is especially crucial in the context of urban education, where students may encounter various socio-economic challenges that affect their educational experiences. Furthermore, the role of teacher expectations in shaping student-teacher relationships cannot be overlooked. Teachers who hold high expectations for their students contribute positively to their motivation and academic success (Jussim & Harber, 2005). When teachers communicate their belief in students' capabilities, it fosters a growth mindset, encouraging students to strive for excellence. In contrast, low expectations can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where students internalize these beliefs and, as a result, perform poorly. Therefore, maintaining high expectations while providing the necessary support is essential for fostering positive student-teacher relationships that enhance motivation and engagement.

In addition to individual factors, school culture plays a significant role in shaping student-teacher relationships. Schools that prioritize positive relationships and create a collaborative environment among educators, students, and families tend to see better academic outcomes. For example, initiatives that promote professional development for teachers in building rapport and communication skills can enhance the quality of student-teacher interactions (Pianta, 2006). Additionally, schools that encourage a sense of community among students and staff foster an environment where positive relationships can flourish, further supporting student motivation and engagement. The relationship between students and teachers is a cornerstone of educational success, influencing motivation, engagement, and overall academic performance. Positive student-teacher relationships contribute to a supportive learning environment where students feel valued and motivated to excel. Conversely, negative relationships can hinder student engagement and achievement, particularly among at-risk populations. Therefore, it is crucial for educators to prioritize building strong, supportive relationships with their students and to foster a school culture that emphasizes the importance of these connections. By investing in positive student-teacher relationships, educators can significantly enhance students' academic success and overall well-being.

Objectives

- 1- To identify the level of student-teacher relationships, students' motivation, engagement, and academic success at the university level
- 2- To analyze the student-teacher relationships and their influence on students' motivation, engagement, and academic success at the university level.

Methodology

Quantitative research survey design was used. The philosophical paradigm of this research was positivism. The population consisted of students from all public and private universities in the Lahore district. Lahore has 34 universities in total, 13 of which are public and 21 of which are private (HEC, 2022). A large sample of students should be included in the study. The sample was collected using a multistage simple random sampling technique. Using basic random selection, the researcher selected four private and three public universities in Lahore. 500 students made up the sample size, chosen by simple random sampling. The sample was collected using a multi-stage basic random sampling technique. Questionnaires served as the research's instruments. Expert judgments and pilot testing revealed the questionnaire's validity and reliability. Both inferential and descriptive statistics were applied. SPSS was used to analyze the data.

Data analysis

Student-teacher relationships

Table 1

Item-wise analysis

Items	N	M	S.D.
My teacher is approachable and encourages me to ask questions when I have doubts or need help.	500	1.81	.641
I believe that my teacher respects my opinions and values my contributions to class discussions.	500	1.75	.543
My teacher creates a positive and supportive classroom environment where I feel comfortable participating and sharing my ideas.	500	1.74	.496
I receive constructive feedback from my teacher that helps me improve my understanding of the subject matter.	500	1.51	.609
I feel that my teacher genuinely cares about my academic success and personal well-being.	500	1.68	.558

The above table illustrates the sample description. According to the respondents' responses, my teacher is approachable and encourages me to ask questions when I have doubts or need help ($M=1.81$; $SD=0.64$), I believe that my teacher respects my opinions and values my contributions to class discussions ($M=1.75$; $SD=0.54$), My teacher creates a positive and supportive classroom environment where I feel comfortable participating and sharing my ideas ($M=1.74$; $SD=0.49$), I receive constructive feedback from my teacher that helps me improve my understanding of the subject matter ($M=1.51$; $SD=0.60$) and I feel that my teacher genuinely cares about my academic success and personal well-being ($M=1.68$; $SD=0.55$). Overall, respondents' responses reflected toward the level of agreement.

Students' motivation

Table 2

Item-wise analysis

Items	N	M	S.D.
I am genuinely interested in the subjects I study at university.	500	1.82	.720
I often seek out additional resources (like books, online materials, or study groups) to enhance my understanding of the course material.	500	1.80	.666

I believe that my effort in studying will lead to positive outcomes in my academic performance.	500	1.61	.604
I feel motivated to participate in class discussions and activities.	500	1.76	.615
I set specific goals for myself to achieve in my academic work.	500	1.71	.558

The above table illustrates the sample description. According to the respondents' responses, I am genuinely interested in the subjects I study at university ($M=1.82$; $SD=0.72$), I often seek out additional resources (like books, online materials, or study groups) to enhance my understanding of the course material ($M=1.61$; $SD=0.60$), I believe that my effort in studying will lead to positive outcomes in my academic performance ($M=1.61$; $SD=0.60$), I feel motivated to participate in class discussions and activities ($M=1.76$; $SD=0.61$) and I set specific goals for myself to achieve in my academic work ($M=1.71$; $SD=0.55$). Overall, respondents' responses reflected toward the level of agreement.

Students' engagement

Table 3

Item-wise analysis

Items	N	M	S.D.
I actively participate in class discussions and activities.	500	1.75	.696
I feel motivated to complete my assignments and projects on time.	500	1.66	.557
I feel comfortable approaching my instructor for help or clarification when needed.	500	1.79	.651
I engage with my classmates during group work and collaborative projects.	500	1.78	.573
I am genuinely interested in the topics covered in my courses.	500	1.73	.619

The above table illustrates the sample description. According to the respondents' responses, I actively participate in class discussions and activities ($M=1.75$; $SD=0.69$), I feel motivated to complete my assignments and projects on time ($M=1.66$; $SD=0.55$), I feel comfortable approaching my instructor for help or clarification when needed ($M=1.79$; $SD=0.65$), I engage with my classmates during group work and collaborative projects ($M=1.78$; $SD=0.57$) and I am genuinely interested in the topics covered in my courses ($M=1.73$; $SD=0.61$). Overall, respondents' responses reflected toward the level of agreement.

Students' academic success

Table 4

Item-wise analysis

Items	N	M	S.D.
I believe that my study habits contribute positively to my academic performance.	500	1.49	.523
I actively seek help from peers or instructors when I encounter challenges in my studies.	500	1.70	.554
I set clear academic goals for myself and work towards achieving them consistently.	500	1.69	.506
I manage my time effectively to balance academic responsibilities with other commitments.	500	1.70	.550
I feel supported by my teachers in achieving my academic goals.	500	1.71	.659

The above table illustrates the sample description. According to the respondents' responses, I believe that my study habits contribute positively to my academic performance ($M=1.49$;

SD=0.52), I actively seek help from peers or instructors when I encounter challenges in my studies (M=1.70; SD=0.55), I set clear academic goals for myself and work towards achieving them consistently (M=1.69; SD=0.50), I manage my time effectively to balance academic responsibilities with other commitments (M=1.70; SD=0.55) and I feel supported by my teachers in achieving my academic goals (M=1.71; SD=0.65). Overall, respondents' responses reflected toward the level of agreement

Table 5

Effect student-teacher relationships on students' motivation at the university level

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Student-teacher relationships	.610	.066	.672	16.947	.000
	.646	.038			

The above table illustrates the effect student-teacher relationships on students' motivation at the university level. The B value 0.672, t-value 16.947 and p-value 0.000. This shows that there was highly significant effect student-teacher relationships on students' motivation at the university level.

Table 6

Effect student-teacher relationships on students' engagement at the university level

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Student-teacher relationships	.846	.098	.437	9.059	.000
	.512	.057			

The above table illustrates the effect student-teacher relationships on students' engagement at the university level. The B value 0.437, t-value 9.059 and p-value 0.000. This shows that there was highly significant effect student-teacher relationships on students' engagement at the university level.

Table 7

Effect student-teacher relationships on students' academic success at the university level

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Student-teacher relationships	.435	.078	.661	16.415	.000
	.736	.045			

The above table illustrates the effect student-teacher relationships on students' academic success at the university level. The B value 0.661, t-value 16.415 and p-value 0.000. This shows that there was highly significant effect student-teacher relationships on students' academic success at the university level.

Discussion

Research indicates a highly significant effect of student-teacher relationships on students' motivation at the university level. Positive interactions between students and teachers foster a

sense of belonging and support, which enhances students' intrinsic motivation to engage with the material and participate actively in their learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Wentzel, 1998). Students who perceive their teachers as caring and approachable are more likely to feel motivated to achieve academic success, as these relationships create an encouraging environment conducive to learning (Cornelius-White, 2007). Additionally, when teachers maintain high expectations while providing support, it reinforces students' self-efficacy and motivation (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Thus, nurturing strong student-teacher relationships is essential for promoting motivation in higher education settings.

The quality of student-teacher relationships has a highly significant effect on students' engagement at the university level. Research shows that positive relationships with teachers enhance students' emotional and behavioral engagement, leading to greater participation in academic activities (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). When students feel supported and valued by their instructors, they are more likely to engage in discussions, collaborate with peers, and take an active role in their learning process (Hattie, 2009). Furthermore, trust and open communication between students and teachers contribute to a classroom environment that encourages student involvement and enthusiasm for the subject matter (Zhang, 2017). As such, fostering strong student-teacher relationships is vital for enhancing engagement in higher education.

Student-teacher relationships have a highly significant effect on students' academic success at the university level. Strong, supportive interactions with instructors contribute to improved academic performance by fostering a sense of belonging and motivation among students (Baker, 2006). Research indicates that when students feel connected to their teachers, they are more likely to engage with the course material, attend classes regularly, and achieve higher grades (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Additionally, positive relationships enable effective communication, allowing students to seek help and feedback, which further enhances their learning outcomes (Pianta, 2006). Therefore, nurturing strong student-teacher relationships is essential for promoting academic success in higher education settings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of student-teacher relationships reveals their critical role in enhancing motivation, engagement, and academic success at the university level. First, positive student-teacher interactions foster intrinsic motivation by creating a supportive learning environment where students feel valued and understood. Second, these relationships significantly enhance student engagement, as a sense of trust and belonging encourages active participation in classroom activities and collaboration with peers. Finally, strong student-teacher relationships directly correlate with improved academic outcomes, as they facilitate open communication and provide essential support for students facing challenges. By prioritizing the development of positive relationships, educators can create enriching educational experiences that not only benefit individual students but also contribute to a vibrant academic community. Ultimately, investing in these relationships is essential for cultivating a successful learning environment in higher education.

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