

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER’S EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND
STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN
KOHAT DISTRICT

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between teachers’ emotional support and students’ academic motivation at the secondary school level in Kohat District. A sample of 373 students from grade 9 and grade 10 was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Two self-developed instruments were employed: the Teacher Emotional Support Scale (TESS), comprising subscales of care, empathy, friendliness and positivity, responsiveness, respect, and encouragement and recognition; and the Student Academic Motivation Scale (SAMS), comprising intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy/confidence, goal orientation, and engagement/participation. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, along with Pearson correlation to assess the relationship between the variables. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship ($r = .573$, $p < .01$) between teachers’ emotional support and students’ academic motivation, suggesting that greater emotional support from teachers is associated with higher student motivation. Subscale correlations further confirmed positive and significant associations between individual dimensions of teachers’ emotional support and overall academic motivation. The study provides useful implications for teachers, policymakers, and educational practitioners in strengthening supportive classroom environments, particularly in rural contexts.

Keywords: Teachers’ Emotional Support, Students’ Academic Motivation, Secondary Education

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Introduction

Education is very important in developing the intellectual, social and emotional aspects of individuals, particularly in the adolescence when individuals experience rapid physical or psychological changes. Secondary education is an important transitional phase that enables students to develop basic knowledge and skills in higher education and career. During this time, academic motivation is a motivating factor towards the involvement and success of students. Motivation does not only dictate the degree and duration of learning endeavors, but also it affects the attitude of the students toward learning (Ryan and Deci, 2020). Therefore, it is vital to learn the elements that will increase the level of motivation among the students to boost the educational results.

Among the other influencing factors of academic motivation, teacher-student relationships have always been one of the determinant factors. Not only are the teachers the source of knowledge but also the emotional attachment of their students. They can provide a learning atmosphere in a classroom by being warm, caring, and emotionally supporting. Students who view their teachers to be emotionally supportive have also been found to have a greater level of engagement, self-efficacy and motivation (Wentzel, 2017). Thus, teacher-student relationships cannot be disregarded as a measure of academic success among students.

Emotional teacher support can be defined as such that reveal knowledge, compassion, support and sensitivity to the emotional and psychological needs of students (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Such support involves being a respectful person, appreciating the efforts of the students, giving positive feedbacks and being friendly. Emotional support has the potential to reduce the adverse outcomes of stress, contribute to better self-perceptions, and make students more ready to tackle academic challenges (Pakarinen et al., 2021). It helps to establish a psychologically safe atmosphere of learning, which is an essential condition of motivation to prosper.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) can be used to explain the effects of emotional support through the theoretical perspective. SDT suggests that motivation thrives when three fundamental psychological needs are met, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2017). Emotional support of the teachers may meet these needs by creating a sense of belongingness, recognizing their opinions, and providing scaffolding which helps students to gain competence. Students experience greater persistence and comprehension when they have an intrinsic motivation that is achieved through not just feeling valuable but also through emotional support (Ryan and Deci, 2020).

The students in secondary schools are in a development phase where they are more sensitive to emotions and also exploration of identity. They are subject to most time academic pressure, peer pressure, and even self-doubt. Emotional supportive teachers may serve in this regard as protective agents that shield students against academic anxiety and emotional burnout (Pietarinen, Soini, and Pyhälto, 2014). Emotional support makes the students feel safe enough to take risks and perceive mistakes as learning process, which make them continue to learn.

Conversely, absence of emotional support may create disengagement, low self-esteem and dropout. The higher is the perceived uncaring or emotional detachment of teachers in the eyes of students, the more they lose interest in the learning process and become negatively oriented towards school (Roorda et al., 2017). This highlights the need to investigate the direct correlation between emotional support by teachers and motivation

among the students particularly at the secondary level as they develop their attitudes towards education over the long term.

Research studies carried across the world have always found a positive correlation between emotional support of teachers and student motivation. As an example, Hughes et al. (2021) discovered that positive relationships between teachers and students were associated with motivation and engagement in adolescents. Equally, Koca and Aksoy (2023) found that teacher emotional support boosts self-determined types of motivation and academic persistence in students. These results underscore the generality of teacher emotional support in motivation promotion in different school environments.

Emotional support is usually not taken seriously in the South Asian setting where there is overcrowding in classrooms and teacher-centered pedagogies ruled. The teacher-student interaction in most cases in Pakistan is not as much as within the context of delivering the content and thus it can be hard to achieve positive motivational orientations (Rehman & Haider, 2013). The introduction of an emphasis on emotional support would be a solution to the motivational problems and yield better results in Pakistani high schools.

In Pakistan, the affective aspects of teaching are usually shown in the shadow of the educational issues like the lack of resources, excessive curriculum load and examination pressure. There is also a lack of training of teachers in meeting socio-emotional needs of students and classrooms with poor emotional well-being persist (Bashir and Akhtar, 2021). This poses a critical void because the motivation is highly dependent on the quality of emotional relationships between teachers and students. To fill this gap, it would be necessary to conduct empirical research focused on the impact of emotional support on motivation within the Pakistani context. The Kohat District, which is a province of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is one socio-cultural setting in which interpersonal relationships are framed by traditional values and collectivist norms. The culture and the respect levels determine the teacher student relationship in such an environment. Although these norms can encourage discipline, they can also reduce free emotional interaction between teachers and students (Ali & Shah, 2022). Of particular relevance is the nature and effect of teacher emotional support. There is also Kohat secondary schools which suffer from their separate problems like large class strength, little or no guidance counseling services and lack of the participation of parents. These factors might have negative implications on the motivation of students and their emotional state (Hayat & Shabbir, 2020). Teachers will play even more of an emotional support in these, to keep that motivation in students when they don't have other things.

Academic Resilience Academic resilience of students, i.e., those who have the ability to battle against all odds and continue to march towards their goal, has been found associated with emotional support. Students who perceive their teachers as caring are more apt to use adaptive coping and persistence (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). This is the need of the hour especially in case of Kohat where learners may pass through social-economic hard times which puts their education at stake. Emotional support is one of the potential protective factors that can maintain them in a positive spirit in their challenging life.

Moreover, it has been proposed that emotional support also enhances the feeling of school belonging in the students and this is a significant predictor of motivation. Students get more emotional attachment to school when they are made to feel that their teachers care about them as individuals enhancing their desires to engage and perform (Allen et al., 2018). It is also necessary that belongingness is highly valued by adolescents who are in need of social acceptance and validation at this phase of their development.

Gender disparities also contribute to the perceptions of emotional support by the students and their effect on motivation. In other studies, teacher emotional support has been found more responsive to female students as compared to males, and this contributes to high levels of motivation (Ruzek et al., 2020). The investigation of such gendered tendencies within the Kohat setting can help to uncover important information on how teacher practice could be adapted to satisfy the needs of different students. They also process the learners' goals by providing them emotional support, through the teacher. For example, supportive teachers who provide encouragement and success incentives, as well as performance-oriented students that may need emotional reassurance to reduce fear of failure, can be advantageous for mastery-oriented learners (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2020). This relationship suggests that emotional support may influence the types of goals students set and thereby may indirectly influence their motivation and performance. Emotional support has been shown not only to benefit students but also to improve teacher well-being and job satisfaction. Educators who have good emotional relationships with students experience lower levels of burnout and work satisfaction (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). This forms a virtuous circle in which teachers who are healthy in emotional condition are better placed to offer motivation and support to their students.

Overall, classroom emotional support can be improved to improve the overall quality of education and equity in the long term. Emotional support facilitates inclusive learning conditions in which every student despite their backgrounds and capabilities feel appreciated and encouraged to learn (OECD, 2020). This is also in line with the objectives of the National Education Policy of Pakistan that focus on holistic development of students not only in terms of their academic knowledge or skills, but also in terms of their emotional or social capabilities (Government of Pakistan, 2017).

Emotional support has not been given much systematic consideration in the Pakistani secondary schools although it has been known to be important. The majority of the current studies carried out in Pakistan were based on cognitive and instructional dimensions of teaching, and little attention was paid to the emotional climate in classrooms (Youseaf and Malik, 2019). This deficiency of local evidence highlights the necessity to conduct specific research addressing the emotional aspect of the teacher-student interactions and its influence on motivation.

With the increasing awareness of socio-emotional learning on a global scale, there is a great need to explore the significance of teacher emotional support to the circumstances in Pakistan. The results of such studies can be used to inform the teacher training programs, classroom activities, and education policies to promote holistic development and motivation (UNESCO, 2023). Developing an evidence base will contribute to the introduction of emotional support into the mainstream pedagogical practices. Thus, this research aims to investigate the association between teacher emotional support and academic motivation of students in secondary level in Kohat District. This research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to enhancing student motivation and performance in Pakistan through the provision of a dimension of teaching that has had little exploration in terms of its effects on student learning and performance because of its cultural uniqueness and in the context of education that is both challenging and diverse.

Conceptual Framework

The research is grounded on a conceptual framework that shows the rationale association between the key variables that are being examined. The structural construct of the research

shows the relationship between the teacher emotional support (as independent variable) and student motivation (as dependent variable) at the secondary school level (See Fig.1).

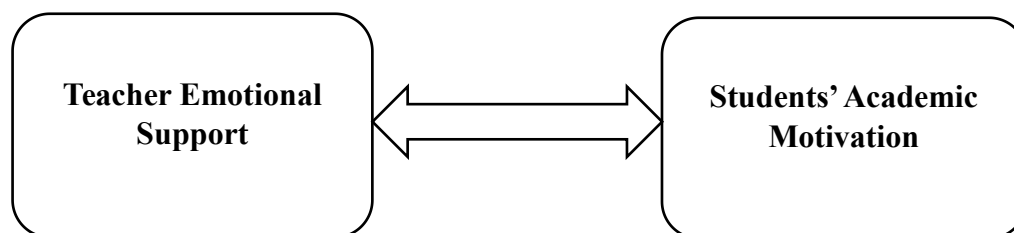


Fig.1. Showing the Conceptual Framework of the Study

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between teachers' emotional support and students' academic motivation at the secondary level.

Research Questions

RQ: Does there exist the relationship between teachers' emotional support and students' academic motivation at the secondary level?

Research Methodology

Population

The sample of this research was all students studying in the secondary level (Grades 9 and 10) in the public schools in the Kohat District. This covered male and female students with different social, cultural and academic demographics. Based on the Annual Statistical Report of Government Schools, the total number of students in the District Kohat at secondary level was 19319 with 12417 male students and 6901 female students.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the research included male students of Grade 9 and Grade 10 in the public secondary schools of the Kohat District. The sample of 373 male students was established as the sample which was predetermined with the help of Cochran formula which is used to calculate the appropriate sample which was large enough to represent the population and statistically significant to analyze. The sampling used to select the participants was a simple random sampling technique. This approach was selected so that all students within the target population could have an equal opportunity to be part of the study within the scope of minimizing the selection bias factor and increasing the generalizability of the results.

Research Design

Emotional support of teachers was taken as the independent variable, and academic motivation of students was present as the dependent variable to the study. The correlation research design was used to test the relationship between these two variables among male secondary school students in public schools in the Kohat District. The research design was a cross-sectional survey which entailed the collection of data at one point in time. The quantitative research methodology was employed, which entailed administration of structured questionnaires to the students so as to measure their perception on teacher emotional support as well as their academic motivation levels. The correlational design allowed the researcher to establish the nature and strength of the relationship that existed between the academic motivation of students and the emotional support they received by the teachers and provided information with regards to the effect of teacher emotional support to students in the academic setting.



Data Collection Instruments

Self-administered structured questionnaires that were developed to measure the two constructs of interest to the Teacher Emotional Support (TES) and Students Academic Motivation (SAM) were used in this research to gather primary data. The questionnaires were developed according to the comprehensive analysis of the literature and validated scales and adjusted to the local environment of secondary schools in Kohat District.

The Teachers’ Emotional Support Scale (TESS): The Teacher Emotional Support Scale (TESS) was created to represent the perception of students, regarding the emotional support offered by their teachers. The scale had 6 major subscales containing five items. The answers were taken on a five-point Likert-scale of 1 Strongly Disagree (SD), 5 Strongly Agree (SA). The sub scales of TESS are; Care; Empathy; Friendliness and Positivity; Responsiveness; Respect; and Encouragement and Recognition.

Students’ Academic Motivation Scale (SAMS): The students’ Academic motivation Scale (SAMS) was created in order to measure the level of motivation in students concerning their academic endeavors. The scale had six subscales and five items in each subscale. The answers were noted in a five point Likert scale where 1 =Strongly Disagree (SD) and 5 =Strongly Agree (SA). This scale was able to measure both internal and external levels of motivation (beliefs, attitudes, participation, and self-regulatory behaviors of the students). SAMS subscales are; Intrinsic Motivation; Extrinsic Motivation; Self-Efficacy/Confidence; Goal-Orientation; and Engagement/Participation.

Validity and Reliability

Both scales were found to be content valid with help of the reviews of supervisors and other faculty members of the experience in question. Pilot on a study sample of 50 students was performed to evaluate the clarity, understanding and preliminary reliability. The alpha values of the TESS and SAMS were also confirmed by calculating the values of Cronbach alpha and the results obtained were 0.86 and 0.89 respectively and can be regarded as acceptable.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study data was gathered by conducting personal visits to the chosen public secondary schools in the Kohat District. The researchers informed the students about the purpose of the research and gave the students clear guidelines on how to fill out the questionnaires. All the participants were informed and gave their consent before recording the data. The data were then collected and then organized and tabulated to analyze. Data was collected from 366 participants although the sample size was 373. The data were analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation to evaluate the intensity and direction of relationship between teacher emotional support and academic motivation of students.

Results

RQ: Does there exist the relationship between teachers’ emotional support and students’ academic motivation at the secondary level?

Table 1: Pearson Correlation between Teachers’ Emotional Support and Students’ Academic Motivation

		Teachers’ Emotional Support		Students’ Academic Motivation
Teachers’ Emotional Support	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
Students’ Academic Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.573**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows Pearson correlation analysis between the emotional support and the academic motivation of students and their teachers. The findings show that the two variables have a positive and statistically significant correlation ($r = .573$, $p < .01$). That is, as the students experience more emotional support by their teachers, there is an indication that the students tend to show greater motivation towards their academic achievements. The value of correlation coefficient ($r = .573$) is the value of a moderate positive relationship, which implies that the teacher emotional support is an important factor that contributes to the motivation of students. That is, when teachers are caring, empathetic, responsive, show respect, and offer encouragement and recognition, students have higher chances of remaining engaged, having academic aspirations, and making unyielding endeavors in their studies. This observation correlates with the fact that emotional context of the teacher student relation plays a key role in the motivation attitudes and behaviours of the students who in the long run can be able to improve their academic success and general education.

Table 2: *Pearson Correlation between Subscales of Teachers' Emotional Support and Students' Academic Motivation*

		C	E	FP	RE	R	ER	AM
C	Pearson Correlation	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
E	Pearson Correlation	.584**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
FP	Pearson Correlation	.268**	.183**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
RE	Pearson Correlation	.594**	.602**	.159**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.002				
R	Pearson Correlation	.580**	.608**	.113*	.662**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.030	.000			
ER	Pearson Correlation	.467**	.552**	.064	.626**	.579**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.224	.000	.000		
AM	Pearson Correlation	.584**	.433**	.523	.405**	.431**	.447**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Key: Care=C; E= Empathy; FP= Friendliness & Positivity; RE= Responsiveness; R= Respect; ER=Encouragement & Recognition; AM= Academic Motivation

The Pearson correlation coefficients between the subscales of emotional support of teachers (Care, Empathy, Friendliness & Positivity, Responsiveness, Respect, and

Encouragement and Recognition) and overall academic motivation of students are provided in Table 2. The analysis shows that there are a number of statistically significant and positive correlations which are implying that the higher the levels of perceived emotional support by the teachers, the higher the levels of academic motivation among students. In particular, there is a significant positive relationship between Care and Academic Motivation ($r = .584, p < .01$), which means that in case the teacher is genuinely interested in the welfare of students, it is more likely that the students will be more motivated to learn. In the same vein, there is moderate interaction between Empathy and Academic Motivation ($r = .433, p < .01$), which illustrates that teachers that are sensitive to the emotions and views of students have a positive effect on their motivation. Friendliness & Positivity also indicates a moderate positive relationship with motivation among students ($r = .523, p < .01$) that indicates that positive and encouraging classroom setting can be used to motivate students to learn. Similarly, there is a positive correlation between Responsiveness and ($r = .405, p < .01$) which means that the more timely the teacher reacts to the needs of students and provides them with the necessary support, the higher the incentives they are.

Additionally, Respect is associated with a moderate positive correlation ($r = .431, p < .01$) meaning that appreciating the opinion of students and treating them justly increases their motivation. Encouragement and Recognition also has a positive significant correlation ($r = .447, p < .01$) with academic motivation which implies that when students are recognized and appreciated with their efforts and achievements, they will be willing to work even harder. Besides being directly related to motivation, the subscales have positive correlations with one another, including the high positive correlations between Responsiveness and Respect ($r = .662, p < .01$) and Empathy and Respect ($r = .608, p < .01$). This trend suggests that educators that present one dimension of emotional support are also likely to present other supportive behaviors and therefore forming a caring learning environment. On the whole, this table shows that all the subcomponents of teacher emotional support have a significant and positive correlation with academic motivation of students that highlights the importance of teacher-student emotional support relationships in improving motivation and interest in learners.

Discussion

The findings of the current research revealed that there was a moderate and significant positive correlation between the emotional support of teachers and the academic motivation of the students ($r = .57, p < .01$). This implies that teacher emotional support plays an important role in motivating students not only directly, but also indirectly via the classroom processes. This is a small to moderate effect size, which is in line with recent meta-analysis results, which point to moderate to strong correlations between teacher support and student motivation, engagement, and academic persistence (Nie et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2025). The studies point out that supportive relationships are crucial, but other variables that define the motivation in students include quality of instructions, learning materials, and the psychological appropriateness of the classroom environment. In such a way, a complex strategy is still required, and emotional support can be regarded as one of the primary enablers in addition to pedagogical and institutional ones.

The other significant discovery was the comparatively high percentage of the neutral or undecided responses to the questions about the establishment of the friendly classroom environment and the encouragement of engagement. This shows that not every class or teacher has equal emotional support on students. There are those children who have caring

and supportive teacher practices, and there are those who have inconsiderate or inconsistent practices by teachers. The same has been indicated in the Pakistani schools where support provided by teachers is not usually rooted in school culture, but it hinges on the individuals (Muhammad, Siddique, Jabeen, and Akhtar, 2023; Rauf and Khan, 2024). This discrepancy undermines the process of interaction that is sustained to maximize the positive impacts of emotional support. Indeed, recent studies indicate that affective support can improve motivation as well as aid in the decrease of emotional exhaustion in case it is provided in a systematic way (Nisar, Ullah, and Ali, 2023). Similarly, positive teacher student relationships have been indicated to contribute to the intrinsic motivation of students, their engagement, and their academic performance in general education (Ahmed and Perveen, 2024) as well as in particular learning situations, such as the second language learning (Hussain, Malik, and Chen, 2023).

Finally, the findings confirm the hypothesis that the emotional support of teachers has a strong and positive influence on the academic motivation of learners. Intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and goal-oriented behaviour are both enabled by components like care, friendship, rapport and encouragement (Khan and Yasmin, 2024). The medium scores of perceived support and the presence of neutral scores of this study do indicate, however, that such practices are not always evident in all classrooms. This brings out the issue of professional development, policy assistance and a systematic training to establish emotional support as a teaching competency. Recent research also proves that the support of the students in terms of their basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness by the teachers is closely connected with motivation and socio-emotional skills (García and Lopez, 2024). Having emotionally supportive classrooms can therefore not only help to increase student motivation, but can also be maintained.

Conclusions

The current research was aimed at investigate the impact of teachers emotional support towards academic motivation among students at secondary school level in Kohat district. Results clearly supported that teachers' emotional support has a significant and positive effect on students' motivation to study.

The study investigated a significant direct effect among teacher' emotional support and students' academic motivation. Notably, an overall positive relationship between teachers' emotional support and students 'academic motivation was established. This shows that it is likely that students' motivation, confidence, and engagement are increased when teachers behave in a supportive, caring and respectful manner. These findings are consistent with current literature, which suggests that the emotional support satisfies students' fundamental psychological needs and drives them toward intrinsic motivation to learn.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, several recommendations are provided to enhance the emotional support of teachers and the academic motivation of students (at varying levels) in the secondary level:

1. The teachers should be caring, concerned and respectable of students. Even such simple steps as attention to the feelings of students, confirmation of their concerns and support can be significant in motivating students.
2. Positive language use, friendly approach and recognition of attempts by the students helps in creating a safe learning environment that subsequently leads to high

engagement and minimized fear of failure. In that way, educators are expected to create a favorable classroom atmosphere.

3. Emotional support must be connected with instructional strategies, such as the establishment of attainable learning objectives, identifying small achievements and providing specific positive feedback which might boost student self-efficacy and confidence.
4. The teachers are supposed to put their eyes on the students that are facing either motivationally or emotionally and approach them individually in order to provide them with assistance or mentorship.
5. School leaders are expected to organize management of classroom, motivation and emotional intelligence training regularly to ensure that teachers learn how to deal with emotional needs of students.
6. Principals ought to encourage teamwork, trust, and open communication between teachers and students that can enhance the overtones of the school.
7. The school heads must integrate the teacher relational support measures into the teacher assessment mechanisms so that positive teacher student relationships become an attribute that is being appreciated in good teaching.
8. Education department must establish policies that put the balance between the socio-emotional development in the students and their academic achievement on one hand in ensuring the quality of education.
9. It is also recommended that governments invest resources in social-emotional learning efforts, provide teachers with rewards for exemplifying emotional support and promoting student motivation.

Limitations of the Study

While this study contributes useful information about the relationship between teachers' emotional support and students' academic motivation in secondary-level classrooms, some limitations need to be addressed.

1. The study was restricted to secondary schools in one district, and results may not be generalized to other regions or educational systems.
2. The study was conducted as a cross-sectional survey, at one given point in time. This constrains the ability to infer causation on teachers' emotional support of students as well as student motivation.
3. The data were obtained via self-report questionnaires, and there may be a possibility of social desirability bias or distorted self-appraisals among the participants.
4. This research only focused on emotional support and academic motivation. Other potentially influential variables (e.g. parental support, peer influence, SES) were not taken into account.

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