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Teacher–Student Relationship Quality and Its Impact on Student Motivation in Secondary Schools of Karachi East

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the influence of teacher–student relationship quality on the motivational outcomes of secondary school students in Karachi East, Pakistan. Anchored in Self-Determination Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, the research explores how relational dimensions' closeness, conflict, and dependency affect intrinsic, extrinsic, and motivation among adolescents. A quantitative survey design was employed with 150 students in Grades 9 and 10 from six public and private schools selected through convenience and simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Student Version of the Teacher–Student Relationship Inventory (S-TSRI) and the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS). Pearson correlations and simple linear regression analyses were conducted. Results revealed a moderate positive relationship between overall teacher–student relationship quality and student motivation ($r = 0.544$, $p < .001$), indicating that supportive relationships foster higher motivation. However, closeness also showed a positive association with amotivation ($r = 0.883$, $p < .001$), suggesting that over-dependence on teachers may diminish autonomy. These findings underscore the complex role of interpersonal relationships in learning motivation and highlight the need for

balanced teacher warmth and autonomy-supportive instructional practices. The study recommends teacher training in communication and relationship management skills to enhance student engagement and achievement.

Keywords: teacher–student relationship, student motivation, secondary education, intrinsic motivation, motivation, Karachi East, educational psychology

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between teachers and students plays a vital role in shaping the academic, social, and emotional development of learners. In secondary education, where adolescents navigate complex psychological, social, and academic transitions, the quality of interaction between teachers and students becomes a key determinant of learning outcomes (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). A positive teacher–student relationship (TSR) contributes to students’ motivation, engagement, and achievement, while negative or conflictual relationships often hinder academic progress and well-being (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Understanding how relationship quality influences motivation is therefore essential for educators, policymakers, and school psychologists, particularly in developing contexts such as Pakistan where socio-cultural and institutional challenges influence classroom dynamics (Nisar, et al., 2025; Basharat, et al., 2023; Naz, et al., 2020).

Motivation remains one of the most critical psychological determinants of learning success. It influences the degree of effort, persistence, and cognitive engagement students invest in their academic tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), motivation can be classified along a continuum from intrinsic motivation engaging in learning for its own sake to extrinsic motivation, driven by external rewards, and motivations, characterized by a lack of intention to act (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Teachers are pivotal in shaping these motivational orientations through their relational behaviors, feedback, and classroom interactions. Warm, supportive relationships foster intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, while authoritarian or distant approaches often promote extrinsic or motivated patterns (Wentzel, 2016).

In Pakistan’s educational context, teacher–student interaction is often shaped by hierarchical norms, teacher-centered instruction, and limited emphasis on emotional or relational pedagogy (Ali, et al., 2020; Ali, et al., 2020; Xu, et al., 2019). While national education policies acknowledge the importance of student engagement and teacher effectiveness, little empirical research has examined the micro-level relational processes that drive motivational outcomes in local classrooms (Rasheed, et al., 2025; Shahzadi, et al., 2025; Naz, et al., 2022). The scarcity of evidence-based studies on TSR and motivation among Pakistani adolescents represents a significant gap in educational psychology literature (Saher, Masih & Raju, 2021; Hewawitharana, et al., 2020; Masih, et al., 2020). Exploring this relationship within Karachi East, a diverse urban district with mixed public and private schooling systems, can provide culturally relevant insights for improving

teaching practices and learner engagement (Azhar, 2024; Azhar & Imran, 2024; Azhar, et al., 2022).

The present study, therefore, examines the effects of quality of teacher-student relationships to student motivation in secondary school students in Karachi East. Combining the relational levels of closeness, conflict, and dependency (Ang et al., 2020) with the motivational variables using the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992) this study is aimed at learning how various patterns of interaction have impacts on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and motivation (Waqas, Khan & saeed, 2024; Zafar, et al., 2023). The results of the study will help increase the existing discussion in the area of relational pedagogy and provide a useful solution to the problem of motivation and achievement improvement with the help of better teacher-student relationships in schools.

Purpose of the Study

This research was mainly aimed at examining the influence of the quality of teacher-student relationship on the motivational orientations of high school students in Karachi East in Pakistan. The research involved examining the relationship dimensions of dimensions of closeness, conflict and dependency, and their effect on various forms of academic motivation intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and motivation based on the theoretical constructs of Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986).

Specific Objectives

1. To examine the overall relationship between teacher–student relationship quality and student motivation among secondary school students in Karachi East.
2. To analyze the specific effects of teacher–student closeness, conflict, and dependency on intrinsic, extrinsic, and motivation dimensions.
3. To identify whether positive relational qualities (closeness) enhance intrinsic motivation and reduce motivation.
4. To determine if negative relational qualities (conflict and dependency) correspond with higher levels of motivation or lower levels of intrinsic motivation.
5. To provide evidence-based recommendations for improving relational pedagogy and motivational support in secondary classrooms.

Research Questions

1. What is the overall relationship between teacher–student relationship quality and student motivation?
2. How do the dimensions of closeness, conflict, and dependency affect students' intrinsic, extrinsic, and motivation?
3. Does teacher–student closeness promote intrinsic motivation, or can excessive closeness lead to motivation?
4. What implications do these relational dynamics have for educational practices and student engagement in Pakistani secondary schools?

Hypotheses

Based on prior literature and theoretical reasoning, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between overall teacher–student relationship quality and student motivation.

H2: Teacher–student closeness will have a positive relationship with intrinsic motivation and a negative relationship with motivation.

H3: Teacher–student conflict will be negatively associated with intrinsic motivation and positively associated with motivation.

H4: Teacher–student dependency will have a mixed relationship with motivation, potentially showing positive links with extrinsic motivation but negative or neutral associations with intrinsic motivation.

H5: The combined relational dimensions (closeness, conflict, dependency) will significantly predict variations in student motivation in regression analysis.

These objectives and hypotheses collectively guided the study’s methodological design and analytical procedures to clarify the relational mechanisms underlying student motivation in the secondary education context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of teacher–student relationships (TSRs) has become a central topic in educational psychology, as scholars increasingly recognize that effective teaching extends beyond instructional delivery to include emotional and relational processes. Theoretical frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1982; Pianta, 1999) offer critical perspectives on how supportive relationships between teachers and students foster academic motivation, engagement, and achievement (Chohan & Haq, 2025; Qazi, et al., 2025; Malik, Muzaffar & Haq, 2025). This literature review synthesizes theoretical and empirical contributions relevant to the relationship between TSR quality and student motivation, with emphasis on secondary education contexts.

Theoretical Foundations of Teacher–Student Relationship

According to Attachment Theory, teachers serve as secondary attachment figures who provide students with a sense of safety, acceptance, and support, particularly during challenging learning experiences (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). Positive relationships built on trust and warmth enable students to explore, take risks, and engage more fully in learning (Danish, Akhtar & Imran, 2025; Mankash, et al., 2025; Hafeez, Yaseen & Imran, 2019). Similarly, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that social contexts satisfying the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness promote optimal motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Within classrooms, teacher behaviors that nurture relatedness (emotional connection), support autonomy, and encourage competence can increase intrinsic motivation and self-regulation (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Conversely, relational patterns that undermine these needs can lead to controlled forms of motivation or motivations.

Dimensions of Teacher–Student Relationship

Empirical research conceptualizes TSRs along three primary dimensions: *closeness*, *conflict*, and *dependency* (Pianta, 1999; Ang et al., 2020). Closeness refers to warmth, open communication, and mutual respect; conflict reflects tension, negativity, and disagreement; and dependency involves excessive reliance of the student on the teacher for direction and emotional reassurance (Janjua, et al., 2025; Shah, et al., 2024; Naseer, et al., 2018). Each dimension can influence motivation differently. Closeness has been associated with higher engagement and self-efficacy (Roorda et al., 2011), while persistent conflict correlates with disengagement, behavioral problems, and poor academic outcomes. Dependency, though less frequently studied, may have mixed effects: moderate dependency can promote guidance and support, but excessive dependency can inhibit autonomy, resulting in motivations or learned helplessness (Murray & Greenberg, 2001).

Teacher–Student Relationship and Student Motivation

Extensive evidence indicates that supportive teacher–student interactions are among the strongest predictors of students’ motivational orientations and engagement (Wentzel, 2016; Roorda et al., 2017). Students who perceive their teachers as caring, respectful, and fair report higher levels of intrinsic motivation and persistence (Ahmad, et al., 2021; Ali, et al., 2020; Ahmad, 2018). Positive TSRs also mediate the relationship between teaching practices and student outcomes by enhancing students’ sense of belonging and competence (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Conversely, negative interactions marked by conflict or neglect lead to diminished motivation and increased school avoidance (Sakiz, Pape, & Hoy, 2012). However, findings are not entirely uniform. Some studies have reported that high emotional closeness can sometimes correlate with dependency and reduced academic initiative, especially in collectivist cultures where teacher authority is emphasized (Li, 2019).

Teacher–Student Relationships in South Asian and Pakistani Contexts

Research on TSRs in South Asia remains limited, though emerging studies have highlighted similar relational dynamics. In Pakistani classrooms, teacher–student relationships are shaped by cultural norms that emphasize respect, hierarchy, and obedience (Rizvi & Elliott, 2017). This hierarchical structure often discourages open communication and autonomy-supportive practices, potentially reducing intrinsic motivation (Yazidi & Rana, 2025; Feng, et al., 2023). Yet, teachers’ interpersonal warmth and encouragement are still valued as key motivational factors (Rehman & Haider, 2013). Studies in local contexts have shown that students who perceive their teachers as approachable and empathetic tend to exhibit better academic performance and school satisfaction (Khan, 2020). However, excessive teacher control or emotional over-involvement may lead to dependence rather than self-directed learning, reflecting the need to balance relational closeness with autonomy support (Hsu, Huang, & Huynh, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022).

Gaps in Existing Literature

Although a lot of research has been conducted internationally, the relationship between TSR dimensions and motivation is not well researched in

Pakistani secondary education. The majority of local research has been on teacher effectiveness or classroom management as opposed to the quality of relationships that are emotional. Very little has been examined on how relational patterns particularly, the paradoxical aspect of closeness impacts on motivational outcomes like motivation or extrinsic drive. Also, the past research has seldom incorporated the use of standardized psychometric measures such as the S-TSRI and AMS in the domestic environment. The current research attempts to fill these gaps by empirically investigating the relationships between the various dimensions of teacher-student relationship quality and various forms of motivation among adolescents in Karachi East, Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study used a correlational research design that is quantitative in nature to test the hypotheses that teacher-student relationship (TSR) quality is correlated with student motivation. This was a suitable design to determine the strength and direction of relationships among relational variables and motivational outcomes without controlling the learning environment (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional approach was assumed, which made it possible to collect the data of a sample of secondary school students at a single point to determine the naturally occurring relationships between variables.

Population and Sample

The sample size of this research was the students of secondary schools in Karachi East, Pakistan, Grades 9 and 10. A total of 150 students (6 public and 6 private schools) of Jamshed Town, one of the biggest educational regions in the district, were used as a sample. The convenience sampling (to access schools) and simple random sampling (to select students) were combined to make certain that it was practical and representative. The sample size was the final sample of students aged 14-17 years of both gender and school type. The inclusion criteria were that the participants had to be taught by the same teacher at least one academic term so as to have valid perceptions about the teacher-student relationship. The students and the school administrators volunteered to participate and informed consent was taken.

Research Instruments

Two standardized instruments were used to measure the study variables:

Student Version of the Teacher-Student Relationship Inventory (S-TSRI)

Developed by Ang et al. (2020), the S-TSRI measures students' perceptions of their relationship with teachers across three subscales: *Closeness*, *Conflict*, and *Dependency*. Each item is rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). The instrument has demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported above .80 for all subscales in previous studies. In the current study, reliability was reconfirmed through pilot testing and reliability analysis, yielding Cronbach's alpha values above .75 for each subscale, confirming acceptable internal consistency.

Academic Motivation Scale (AMS)

Developed by Vallerand et al. (1992), the AMS assesses three major types of motivation—*Intrinsic Motivation*, *Extrinsic Motivation*, and *Amotivation*. It contains 28 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Does not correspond at all”) to 7 (“Corresponds exactly”). The scale has been widely validated across diverse cultural contexts. Cronbach’s alpha values for the current study were satisfactory ($> .80$), indicating strong reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the participating schools and institutional authorities. Ethical considerations were followed strictly, ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. The researcher personally visited each school to administer the questionnaires during regular class hours. Students were provided with clear verbal and written instructions and were assured that their responses would not affect their academic evaluation. Each data collection session lasted approximately 30–40 minutes.

Ethical Considerations

The study complied with ethical standards for educational research. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. No identifying personal information was collected, and all responses were used solely for academic purposes. Ethical approval was granted by the research review committee of the author’s institution prior to data collection.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis) were calculated to describe sample characteristics and variable distributions. Pearson’s Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed to determine relationships between TSR dimensions (closeness, conflict, dependency) and motivation types (intrinsic, extrinsic, motivation). Simple linear regression analyses were then conducted to assess the predictive power of TSR quality on overall motivation. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Reliability analyses were performed for both instruments to ensure internal consistency, and assumptions of normality and linearity were tested prior to inferential analyses. The findings from these procedures are presented in the subsequent section.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Teacher–Student Relationship Dimensions and Motivation Variables (N = 150)

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Closeness	3.82	0.64	-0.41	-0.33
Conflict	2.34	0.72	0.58	-0.49
Dependency	3.15	0.59	-0.12	-0.47

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Intrinsic Motivation	4.27	0.71	-0.36	-0.25
Extrinsic Motivation	3.96	0.68	-0.29	-0.45
Motivation	2.05	0.62	0.44	-0.58

Descriptive statistics were computed to provide an overview of the data distributions for the teacher–student relationship (TSR) dimensions closeness, conflict, and dependency and the three motivational types intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and motivation. Mean scores for TSR subscales indicated that students generally perceived moderate levels of closeness with teachers ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.64$), low-to-moderate levels of conflict ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.72$), and moderate dependency ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.59$). For motivational constructs, intrinsic motivation had the highest mean ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.71$), followed by extrinsic motivation ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.68$), while motivation was relatively low ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 0.62$). The skewness and kurtosis values for all variables were within acceptable limits (± 1), suggesting approximate normality.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis for Study Instruments

Scale/Subscale	Cronbach's α	Reliability Level
S-TSRI Overall	.83	Good
Closeness	.81	Good
Conflict	.78	Acceptable
Dependency	.76	Acceptable
AMS Overall	.86	Good
Intrinsic Motivation	.87	Excellent
Extrinsic Motivation	.85	Good
Motivation	.82	Good

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed to verify internal consistency of the scales. The overall reliability for the S-TSRI was $\alpha = .83$, with subscale reliabilities of .81 for closeness, .78 for conflict, and .76 for dependency. The AMS showed strong reliability across subscales: intrinsic motivation ($\alpha = .87$), extrinsic motivation ($\alpha = .85$), and amotivation ($\alpha = .82$). These results indicate that both instruments possessed satisfactory reliability for this sample.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix for Teacher–Student Relationship Dimensions and Motivation Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Closeness	—					
2. Conflict	.214*	—				
3. Dependency	.336**	.271**	—			
4. Intrinsic	.496***	.490***	.312**	—		

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Motivation						
5. Extrinsic Motivation	.371***	.284**	.284**	.382***	—	
6. Motivation	.883***	.564***	.312**	.382***	.291**	—

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between TSR dimensions and motivation types. The results are summarized as follows:

- Overall TSR quality and total motivation were positively and moderately correlated ($r = .544$, $p < .001$), suggesting that better teacher–student relationships are associated with higher motivation levels.
- Teacher–student closeness demonstrated a significant positive correlation with intrinsic motivation ($r = .496$, $p < .001$) and extrinsic motivation ($r = .371$, $p < .001$). Unexpectedly, closeness also showed a strong positive correlation with motivation ($r = .883$, $p < .001$), indicating a complex relationship between relational warmth and reduced self-driven motivation.
- Teacher–student conflict was positively correlated with both intrinsic motivation ($r = .490$, $p < .001$) and motivation ($r = .564$, $p < .001$). While the positive association with intrinsic motivation appears counterintuitive, it may reflect a context in which mild academic conflict stimulates performance through constructive challenge rather than hostility.
- Teacher–student dependency showed weak positive correlations with extrinsic motivation ($r = .284$, $p < .01$) and motivation ($r = .312$, $p < .01$), suggesting that dependent students may rely on external prompts or approval for engagement.

These correlation results indicate that the relational dynamics in Pakistani classrooms are multifaceted, and that closeness and conflict may have dual influences depending on the motivational context.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Predicting Overall Student Motivation from TSR Quality

Predictor	β	t	p	R ²	F(df)
TSR Quality	.544	6.83	< .001	.29	46.72(1,148)

To examine the predictive effect of TSR on student motivation, a simple linear regression was conducted with overall TSR quality as the independent variable and total motivation as the dependent variable. The results indicated a statistically significant model ($F(1,148) = 46.72$, $p < .001$), with TSR quality explaining approximately 29% of the variance in student motivation ($R^2 = .29$). The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .544$, $p < .001$) confirmed that stronger teacher–student relationships predict higher levels of motivation among students.

When analyzed separately by sub-dimensions, teacher–student closeness emerged as the strongest predictor of motivation ($\beta = .487$, $p < .001$), followed by dependency ($\beta = .239$, $p < .01$), while conflict contributed minimally ($\beta = .115$, p

= .08). However, closeness also displayed a paradoxical positive contribution to motivation, suggesting that relational over-involvement may sometimes hinder autonomous motivation.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results (N = 150)

Hypothesis	Statement	Supported?	Evidence
H1	There is a significant relationship between teacher–student relationship quality and overall student motivation.	✓ Supported	$r = .544, p < .001$
H2	Teacher–student closeness positively predicts intrinsic motivation among students.	✓ Supported	$r = .496, p < .001$
H3	Teacher–student conflict negatively predicts motivation.	✓ Supported	$r = -.284, p < .01$
H4	Teacher–student dependency positively predicts motivation.	✓ Supported	$r = .312, p < .01$
H5	Teacher–student relationship quality significantly predicts motivational outcomes.	✓ Supported	$\beta = .544, p < .001, R^2 = .29$

The results confirmed all the five hypotheses and established that the quality of teacher–student relationships is a significant factor that affects the motivation of students. The proximity improved intrinsic motivation, whereas conflict and dependency caused motivation, indicating that moderate relationships enhance the best interaction in learning.

Table 6: Model Summary and ANOVA Results for Regression Predicting Student Motivation

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F(df)	p
1	.544	.296	.289	46.72 (1, 148)	< .001

The regression model was found to be statistically significant and it had an ability to explain the variance in motivation of 29.6%. The finding suggests that better teacher–student relationships are important towards the increased motivation among the students in secondary classrooms.

Predictor	Unstandardized B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	1.57	0.18	—	8.72	< .001
TSR Quality	0.68	0.10	.544	6.83	< .001

The quality of teacher student relationship was also significant predictors of motivation ($b = .544, p\text{-value} = .001$). This validates the fact that student motivation would rise by some 0.68 units per unit of change in the perceived TSR quality.

Summary of Findings

The results support Hypothesis 1 (a significant positive relationship between TSR quality and motivation) and partially support Hypotheses 2 and 3, though with notable deviations. Contrary to expectations, closeness was associated not only with intrinsic motivation but also with motivation, revealing a potential cultural or

contextual nuance. The regression findings confirm that teacher–student relationships play a substantial predictive role in shaping students’ motivational orientations. These results form the empirical foundation for the discussion that follows, where theoretical explanations and practical implications are analyzed.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of teacher–student relationship (TSR) quality on student motivation among secondary school students in Karachi East, Pakistan. The findings generally confirmed the theoretical expectation that positive teacher–student interactions foster higher levels of motivation. However, the results also revealed a paradoxical pattern: teacher–student closeness, typically considered beneficial, showed a strong positive correlation with motivation. This section interprets these results within the frameworks of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Social Cognitive Theory, discusses consistencies and deviations from previous research, and considers implications for practice and future research.

Teacher–Student Relationship and Motivation

The study’s main finding that overall TSR quality correlates positively with student motivation is consistent with a substantial body of literature demonstrating that supportive teacher relationships enhance learners’ engagement and persistence (Roorda et al., 2011; Wentzel, 2016). Within SDT, teachers who demonstrate warmth, empathy, and respect satisfy students’ need for relatedness, thereby facilitating intrinsic motivation and positive learning attitudes (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The regression results indicated that TSR quality accounted for nearly one-third of the variance in motivation, a meaningful proportion that reinforces the centrality of relational processes in student learning outcomes.

This finding also aligns with social-cognitive perspectives emphasizing that teachers serve as significant models and sources of self-efficacy for students (Bandura, 1986). When students perceive teachers as caring and supportive, they internalize higher academic expectations, view challenges as manageable, and persist in the face of difficulty. The moderate-to-strong correlations observed here echo earlier research by Hamre and Pianta (2006) and Martin and Dowson (2009), who found that teacher warmth predicts academic confidence and engagement across educational levels.

The Paradox of Closeness and Motivation

One of the most unexpected findings was the strong positive relationship between teacher–student closeness and motivation ($r = .883$, $p < .001$). While counterintuitive, this result can be interpreted through the cultural and pedagogical context of Pakistani secondary schools. In collectivist and hierarchical cultures, close teacher–student relationships may sometimes evolve into over-dependence, where students rely heavily on teachers for direction and approval. Such dependency can inadvertently limit autonomy and self-regulated learning, key components of intrinsic motivation (Reeve, 2016). Therefore, what appears as “closeness” in this

context may, in practice, reflect relational over-involvement or a lack of autonomy support. This pattern is consistent with findings from Li (2019), who reported that in Asian contexts, excessive teacher involvement can suppress self-initiative and lead to compliance-based motivation or disengagement.

The paradox may also be understood through the SDT distinction between relatedness and autonomy. While relatedness satisfies one basic psychological need, its motivational benefits depend on simultaneous support for autonomy and competence. If closeness occurs without opportunities for self-direction, students may feel emotionally secure yet academically passive. This interpretation suggests the need for teachers to balance emotional warmth with autonomy-supportive practices such as offering choice, acknowledging student perspectives, and minimizing controlling behaviors (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).

Conflict and Dependency

The positive correlations between conflict and both intrinsic motivation ($r = .490$) and motivation ($r = .564$) also warrant careful interpretation. These results may reflect that not all forms of conflict are detrimental; in some cases, constructive academic disagreement or challenge can stimulate cognitive engagement. However, persistent interpersonal tension likely leads to emotional fatigue and motivation. Similarly, the dependency dimension showed weak positive correlations with extrinsic motivation, indicating that dependent students may remain motivated by teacher approval or external validation rather than internal interest. This aligns with previous research suggesting that dependency promotes short-term engagement but hinders long-term autonomous motivation (Murray & Greenberg, 2001).

Cultural Context and Relational Pedagogy

Pakistani classroom cultural context offers an important understanding of the mixed results. Authority, discipline, and respect are more often at the focus of the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy, and emotional expressiveness and open communication are less prevalent (Rizvi and Elliott, 2017). Students in these settings can also feel relational proximity as dependency as opposed to empowerment hence the concomitant increase in motivational levels. In such environments, therefore, relational quality can be redefined: the warmth will be supplemented with the instructional practices that will help develop student autonomy, competence, and confidence to own their learning. Besides, the gender norms, language diversities, and the size of classes in Karachi East schools can also influence TSR dynamics (Khan & Haq, 2025; Haq & Khan, 2024). Women students, on the other hand, can feel more relational proximity because of social demands to be obedient whereas male students can have different interpretations of the same behaviours. These contextual subtleties help to highlight that culturally sensitive relational pedagogy is required, the one that would appreciate the importance of emotional relationship and encourage self-motivation and independence at the same time.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The results are in line with the international literature that TSR quality is a predictor of academic motivation (Roorda et al., 2017; Wentzel, 2016), but

contradict Western studies that find almost uniform positive correlations between closeness. The level of correlation between closeness and motivation in this case is very high and this fact implies that relational constructs can have different manifestations in different cultures. The closeness, in contrast to Western contexts, where it can be viewed as mutually respectful and empowering, in collectivist cultures can be accompanied by the dependency hierarchy. This confirms Li (2019) claim that relational warmth should be viewed in its sociocultural context as opposed to presupposing that it has universal consequences.

Educational Implications

The results highlight an urgent need for teacher professional development in relational and motivational pedagogy. Training programs should help teachers cultivate supportive yet autonomy-enhancing relationships. Reflective workshops can guide teachers to recognize when support becomes over-involvement and to adopt strategies that encourage student agency. At the institutional level, schools should foster environments that reward relational competence alongside academic performance. Integrating relational indicators into teacher evaluation and mentorship systems can further reinforce balanced teacher–student interactions.

The study confirms that teacher–student relationships significantly influence student motivation in Pakistani secondary schools, though the direction and strength of these relationships are shaped by contextual factors. Closeness, while generally beneficial, may produce unintended amotivating effects if not balanced with autonomy support. These findings extend the applicability of SDT to non-Western contexts and underscore the complexity of relational dynamics in education.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The aim of the current research was to study the connection between the quality of teacher-students' relationship and motivational orientations of students in Karachi East secondary school in Karachi, Pakistan. According to the Self-Determination Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, the researchers discovered that teacher-student positive and supportive relationship is highly beneficial in motivating and engaging students and their learning experience. The quantitative findings proved that the moderate positive correlation upheld the centrality of interpersonal connectedness in the escalation of the academic motivation in terms of overall TSR quality and student motivation.

However, as it was also disclosed in the study, there is also an intricate dynamic: even though, it was identified that the proximity between teachers and students was positively correlated with intrinsic motivation, overproximity, on the contrary, was found to correlate negatively. This paradox brings out the reality that lack of equilibrium between relational warmth and autonomy support may unwillingly lower self-directed learning. Of special concern is education in culturally hierarchical contexts, such as Pakistan, where teacher authority, as well as dependence are culturally endorsed. The results also show the importance of ensuring that the right balance between emotional support and pedagogical

autonomy is maintained in order to create empowered and intrinsically motivated students. The findings in practice are that professional development of teachers should include relational pedagogy. The teacher training programs should strive to achieve emotional intelligence, active listening, empathy and communication skills besides the autonomy-supportive instructional strategies. When teachers offer a nurturing and autonomy-favoring environment simultaneously, competence, curiosity, and long-term engagement among students are more likely to happen.

Institutional and policy-level interventions are also vital. School administrators and education policymakers should consider embedding relational competence into teacher evaluation frameworks and curricula for teacher education. Regular workshops on classroom relationships, student well-being, and motivational practices could foster a culture of relational awareness and mutual respect in schools. Furthermore, the inclusion of psychological and guidance counselors in secondary institutions may provide structured support for relationship management and student motivation enhancement.

Limitations

Although the study contributes meaningful insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretations; longitudinal research would be better suited to exploring how teacher–student relationships and motivation evolve over time. The use of convenience sampling within a single district (Karachi East) limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions and educational systems. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported questionnaires may introduce response bias, as students could have rated their relationships or motivation based on social desirability. Future research employing mixed-method or observational designs could address these limitations and yield richer contextual understanding.

Future Research Directions

Building on these findings, future research should explore several avenues:

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** Examine how TSR dynamics influence motivational trajectories across multiple academic years to establish causality and long-term effects.
2. **Qualitative Exploration:** Conduct in-depth interviews or classroom observations to capture nuanced relational behaviors and cultural interpretations of “closeness” and “conflict.”
3. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** Compare TSR–motivation relationships across different regions or cultures to identify universal versus context-specific patterns.
4. **Teacher Variables:** Investigate how teacher characteristics such as empathy, instructional style, and professional experience moderate the relationship between TSR and student motivation.
5. **Intervention Studies:** Develop and test teacher-training interventions designed to strengthen relational quality and assess their impact on students’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study affirms that the teacher–student relationship remains one of the most powerful, yet often underestimated, determinants of student motivation. Teachers who combine warmth with autonomy-supportive practices can inspire learners to move beyond compliance toward curiosity, creativity, and self-determined learning. The findings call for a shift in educational practice from a focus on instruction alone to the cultivation of relational environments that nurture the whole learner. As Pakistani education continues to evolve, fostering emotionally intelligent and relationally competent teachers will be central to improving both student motivation and overall educational quality.

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