



Relationship between Teacher's Emotional Support and Students' Academic Engagement at Secondary Level in District Peshawar

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Article Details:

Received on 02 Feb, 2026

Revision Received on 29 Feb 2026

Accepted on 20 March, 2026

Published on 26 March, 2026

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the correlation between teacher emotional support and academic engagement of secondary school students in District Peshawar. The study used a quantitative, cross sectional, correlational design with a sample of 350 male students from 35 government boys' high schools. Teacher emotional support was measured using a structured questionnaire that consisted of four dimensions: Care and Empathy, Encouragement and Confidence-Building, Emotional Responsiveness and Availability, and Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment; while academic engagement was measured using Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive Engagement. The descriptive results indicated that teacher emotional support ($M = 3.480$, $SD = 0.760$) and academic engagement ($M = 3.416$, $SD = 0.771$) were high. Pearson correlation showed that there was a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between the variables ($r = .713$, $p < .001$). Multiple linear regression also revealed that the four dimensions of teacher emotional support accounted for 51.0% of the variance in academic engagement. Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment was the most significant predictor, followed by Emotional Responsiveness and Availability. The results indicated that students' academic engagement increased when they felt their teachers were caring, encouraging, responsive, respectful, and fair.

Key Words: Teacher Emotional Support, Academic Engagement, Secondary School Students, Government Schools, District Peshawar.



Introduction

Academic engagement is an important measure of student involvement in the teaching and learning process. Physical presence in school does not equate with learning; students can be in school but not focused, not engaged, or not willing to put in effort to learn. Academic engagement is a multi-dimensional construct that reflects the quality and degree of students' involvement in learning. Behavioral engagement involves attendance, attention, participation, effort, persistence, and compliance with classroom expectations. Emotional engagement relates to students' interest, enjoyment, sense of belonging, and emotional reactions to teachers, peers, subjects and school. Cognitive engagement is psychological investment, self-regulation, strategic learning, and a willingness to put in mental effort to comprehend difficult content, not just complete the tasks assigned (Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2019). These dimensions are interrelated and reflect the level of active engagement, appreciation, and psychological involvement students have in their learning.

Academic involvement is particularly critical during secondary school as adolescence brings with it significant cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and identity changes. In secondary school, pupils are met with ever more challenging study programmes, examination pressure, new peer dynamics, new expectations for self-study and choices about higher education and employment. Meanwhile, school contexts can be disengaging when they do not satisfy adolescents' increasing demands for competence, autonomy, respect and social belonging. Longitudinal studies show that social support from teachers, parents, and peers are related to behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement in the transition from middle school to high school (Wang & Eccles, 2012). More recent models of development also highlight the importance of ongoing interactions between student personal characteristics and social, cultural, and instructional contexts in which students learn (Wang et al., 2019). Academic engagement, therefore, is not only an individual trait, but also a product of students' everyday experiences in classrooms and schools.

Teachers are especially significant in this regard, as they have frequent contact with students and directly influence the emotional and instructional environment of the classroom among the school-based factors that impact engagement. Teacher emotional support is how much students feel their teachers are caring, respectful, approachable, encouraging, understanding, and responsive to their emotional and learning needs. Emotionally supportive teachers acknowledge students' struggles, listen to students' ideas, express trust in their skills, respond positively to their errors, and create classrooms where students feel emotionally safe. Emotional support does not mean that teachers need to compromise academic rigor or ignore inappropriate behaviour. Instead, it is a blend of clear expectations, appropriate classroom structure, sensitivity, fairness, empathy and respect. This kind of support can help students to question, to share problems, to take risks in learning and to persevere when things get tough.

Teacher emotional support is different from other types of teacher support. Instrumental or academic support includes explanations, learning resources, feedback and practical help with academic tasks, while emotional support includes caring, accepting, encouraging and being relationally secure. Both forms can be a source of learning, but not always in the same way. A teacher can be technically competent and emotionally unavailable, or caring and lacking in academic support. Studies with students from diverse national and educational backgrounds have



shown the importance of distinguishing between instrumental and emotional support when studying engagement and associated academic outcomes (Granziera et al., 2022). Likewise, recent meta-analytic evidence reveals that the magnitude of the association between teacher support and engagement depends on the type of teacher support and engagement under study (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). Thus, a single, undifferentiated view of teacher support may mask the unique nature of emotional support.

Self-Determination Theory is a well-established theory that explains the link between teacher emotional support and academic engagement. The theory suggests that students who have their basic psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy met will be more effective. Relatedness is feeling accepted, respected, and connected to important others, competence is feeling capable of successfully completing academic tasks, and autonomy is experiencing an appropriate sense of agency and personal ownership of learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Emotionally supportive teachers can meet students' needs for relatedness by caring and accepting them, for competence by encouraging and providing constructive feedback, and for autonomy by respecting their opinions. Students' perceptions of need-supportive teaching practices have been shown to be related to psychological-need satisfaction and more adaptive motivation (Ahn et al., 2021). Emotional support, therefore, can not only help students feel at ease, but can also create the motivational conditions necessary for constant involvement.

A related explanation is offered by social-cognitive and self-system perspectives. Students read teacher actions as messages about their competence, worth and status in the classroom. Teachers who respond with patience, give reassurance, acknowledge effort, and see mistakes as learning opportunities help students build academic self-efficacy and persevere when faced with challenges. However, frequent criticism, humiliation, neglect, unfairness or emotional distance can lead to anxiety and discouraging students from participation. Teacher emotional support has been found to be positively associated with academic self-efficacy and behavioral involvement in mathematics (Yang et al., 2021). Positive academic emotions have also been found to be mediators between perceived teacher support and academic engagement (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021). These results suggest that supportive relationships can have a direct effect on engagement, as well as indirect effects, via students' beliefs, feelings, motivation and resilience.

Recent empirical evidence is accumulating to support this relationship. Perceived teacher emotional support was also found to be an important factor in the relationship between academic resilience and engagement among high-school students (Romano et al., 2021). Based on the data of middle school students, An et al. (2022) found that perceived teacher support had a positive relationship with learning engagement, and that learning motivation played a role in this relationship. Teacher support was linked to engagement and other adaptive academic outcomes for high school and elementary students, with varying relative contributions of emotional and instrumental support across outcomes (Granziera et al., 2022). Tvedt et al. (2022) further demonstrated that trajectories of perceived emotional support from teachers were related to changes in classroom motivational climate and intentions to leave upper-secondary education. Together, these indicate that emotional support is not only important for students' current engagement in the classroom, but also for their ongoing relationship with school.



Studies published since 2023 have further substantiated this evidence and revealed some psychological mechanisms. Teacher support has been associated with engagement in the literature through academic self-efficacy, achievement-goal orientation, positive academic emotions, language-learning mindsets, grit, and technology-related self-efficacy (Feng et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2023; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023). Guo et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review in the field of physical education that also showed a positive association between perceived teacher support and various aspects of engagement. Studies in online and technology-enhanced learning environments have also found that teacher emotional support is linked to academic engagement, mediated by students' emotions, self-confidence, and their sense of effective learning (He et al., 2024; Liu & Zhou, 2024). While some of these examples are from subject-specific or online contexts, they all support the overarching idea that students are more active when they feel that their teachers are emotionally responsive and supportive.

The latest evidence further reinforces the rationale of this study. A 2024 meta-analysis revealed a consistent positive relationship between teacher support and school engagement across a wide number of studies, as well as differences in this relationship based on school level, dimension of engagement, type of teacher support, study design, and source of information (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). Shao et al. (2025) found that teacher support positively predicted secondary-school students' learning engagement both directly and indirectly via academic self-efficacy and psychological resilience. Similarly, Zhang and Hu (2025) found that perceived teacher support positively predicted engagement among senior high-school students, and that learning motivation mediated this relationship. Academic self-efficacy was found to mediate the relationship between teacher support and academic engagement for high-school students by Sun et al. (2025). Tvedt et al. (2025) also found that perceived emotional support might offset some of the engagement deficits linked to low academic self-efficacy for upper secondary school students. A recent systematic review also found that supportive teacher-student relationships are linked to engagement, achievement, and a decreased risk of early school leaving, and that more contextually diverse and longitudinal studies are needed (Di Lisio et al., 2025).

Although there is significant international evidence, there are important conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps. Conceptually, many studies focus on general teacher support or overall teacher-student relationships, but not emotional support as a construct. This makes it hard to distinguish between the effects of teachers' care, sensitivity, encouragement and emotional responsiveness on students' engagement and the effects of instruction in general. There is also variation in the definition and measurement of engagement, some studies only measure participation and effort and others incorporate emotional, cognitive and agentic aspects. Thus, evidence about general teacher support cannot be assumed to be evidence about teacher emotional support.

In context, a significant percentage of recent studies have been done in China, Europe, Australia or other non-Pakistani environments. Teacher emotional support can be interpreted and experienced in various ways depending on the culture, as teacher-student relationships are shaped by expectations of authority, discipline, communication, student voice, gender interaction, and respect. International findings thus need to be analyzed in the context of Pakistan and not simply generalized. Supportive teacher-student relationships and motivational practices have been linked



to students' motivation and academic achievement in Pakistani studies (Alamgir et al., 2024; Gul & Ali, 2023). A recent study in District Peshawar also revealed that the overall quality of teacher-student relationships was related to secondary students' academic achievement (Mehrun-Nisa & Rauf, 2025). These studies, however, mainly targeted motivation, achievement, motivational techniques, or overall relationship quality, but not teacher emotional support and multidimensional academic engagement.

This is an obvious empirical gap in District Peshawar. The available local evidence fails to sufficiently support the extent of emotional support perceived by secondary-school students, their level of academic engagement, the strength and direction of the relationship between these constructs, or the extent to which emotional support is a statistical explanation for variation in engagement. In addition, results from university students, foreign language learners, online contexts or education systems outside Pakistan may not fully reflect the situation of secondary schools in Peshawar. District evidence is required to guide teacher preparation, professional development, classroom management, counselling programs and school policies that foster positive and enriching learning environments.

Thus, the current cross sectional study is designed to measure the level of teacher emotional support and academic engagement among secondary school students of District Peshawar, to explore the relationship between teacher emotional support and academic engagement and to find out whether teacher emotional support significantly predicts academic engagement. The term "predicts" has a statistical rather than causal meaning since the variables will be measured at a single time. The study's narrow scope on emotional support and students' academic engagement is expected to add to the limited research in an under-studied Pakistani context and evidence on a potentially modifiable classroom factor. The results it produces can be a reminder to schools that academic engagement is not only about what is covered and how well it is taught, it is also about the relationships that are created in the classroom where students feel respected, understood, encouraged and emotionally safe.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of teacher emotional support and academic engagement among secondary school students in District Peshawar.
2. To examine the relationship between teacher emotional support and academic engagement among secondary school students in District Peshawar.
3. To determine whether teacher emotional support significantly predicts academic engagement among secondary school students in District Peshawar.

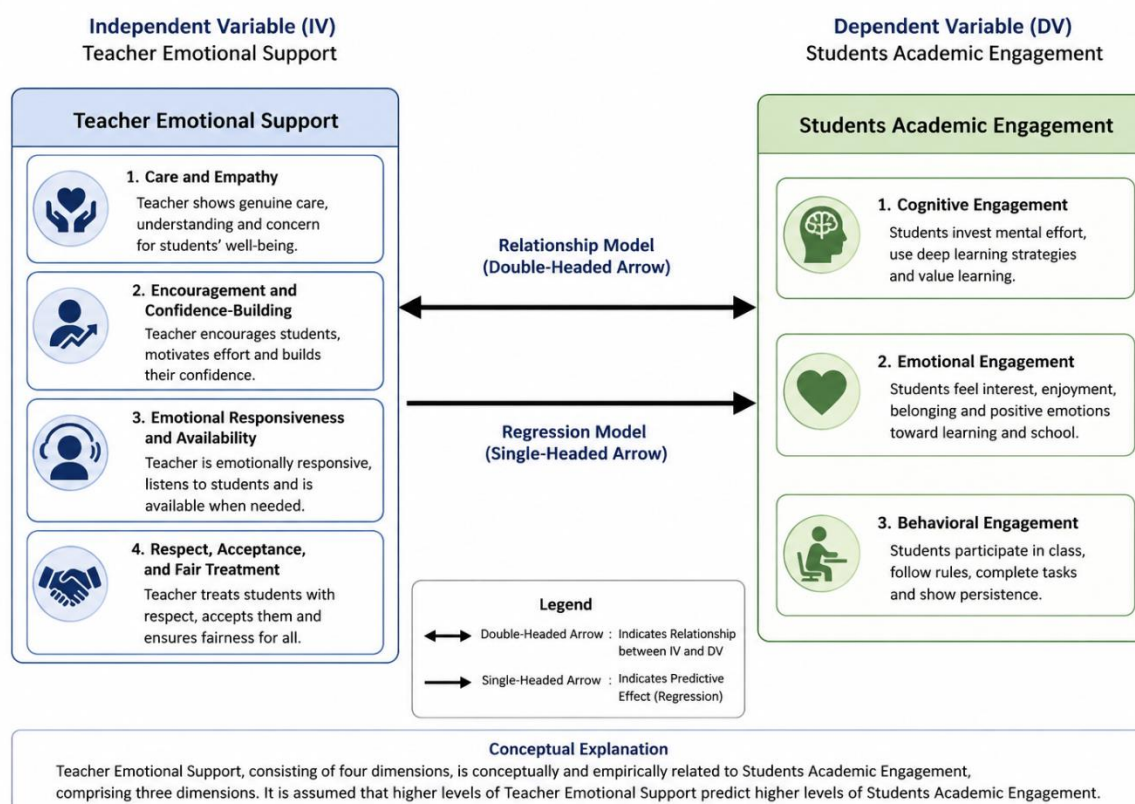
Research Hypotheses

H_{01} : There is no statistically significant relationship between teacher emotional support and academic engagement among secondary school students in District Peshawar.

H_{02} : Teacher emotional support does not significantly predict academic engagement among secondary school students in District Peshawar.



Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative, cross sectional correlational survey design was used in the study to explore the relationship between teacher emotional support and academic engagement of secondary school students in District Peshawar. The cross-sectional design was suitable as data regarding teacher emotional support and academic engagement were obtained from participants at one point in time. Descriptive, correlational and predictive aspects of the study were included. Descriptive component was used to determine the level of teacher emotional support and academic engagement. The correlational component identified the magnitude and direction of the relationship between the two variables, and the predictive component investigated the statistical prediction of academic engagement by teacher emotional support. Teacher emotional support was considered as an independent variable, and students' academic engagement was considered as a dependent variable. As the study was cross sectional and non-experimental, the word prediction was used in the statistical sense only.

Population of the Study

The population comprised of the students of Government High Schools in District Peshawar for the academic year 2024-2025. For government high-schools, the target population of students was



Grades 9 and 10. The Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Schools Statistical Report 2024-25 shows that there were 143 government high schools in District Peshawar, including 77 government boys' high schools and 66 government girls' high schools. According to the same report, there were 32,633 students enrolled in government boys' high schools while 29,726 students were enrolled in government girls' high schools. Thus, the total government high-school enrolment in District Peshawar was 62,359 students (EMIS, 2025). The study was limited to the government boys high schools and male students in Grade 9 and 10. Thus, the accessible population was 77 government boys' high schools and 32,633 male students. Government girls' high schools, female students, private schools, middle and higher secondary level students were excluded. Therefore, the results were generalized only to male students of government boys high schools of District Peshawar.

Table 1. Population of Government High Schools in District Peshawar

Population category	Boys	Girls	Total
Government high schools	77	66	143
Students enrolled at high-school level	32,633	29,726	62,359

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted on 350 male secondary school students of 35 government boys high schools of District Peshawar. From participating schools, 10 students were picked. A multistage cluster sampling technique with equal allocation was used. For the first stage, out of the total number of boys' high schools (77), 35 government schools were selected. In the second stage, 10 eligible students from class 6 and 10 were selected from each participating school. Equal numbers of students were chosen from each school, irrespective of the number of students in the school. This equal-allocation strategy allowed representation from a relatively large number of schools, and helped minimize the likelihood that the results would be driven by a small number of large schools (see Table 2).

Table 2. Sample Distribution

Sampling Unit	Number Selected
Government boys' high schools	35
Students selected from each school	10
Total Sample	350



Research Instruments

Data were collected through a structured, self-report questionnaire entitled “Relationship between Teachers’ Emotional Support and Students’ Academic Engagement at the Secondary Level in District Peshawar.” Participants were told that participation was voluntary; the responses would be confidential; they did not need to provide their names; and that participation would not influence their grade or school status. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Section A gathered demographic data such as age, grade, location of the school and medium of instruction. The 20 positively worded items in Section B assessed teacher emotional support in four dimensions: Care and Empathy (TES₁-TES₅); Encouragement and Confidence-Building (TES₆-TES₁₀); Emotional Responsiveness and Availability (TES₁₁-TES₁₅); and Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment (TES₁₆-TES₂₀). Academic engagement was assessed in Section C using 15 items in three sub scales: Behavioral Engagement (AE₁-AE₅), Emotional Engagement (AE₆-AE₁₀), and Cognitive Engagement (AE₁₁-AE₁₅). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. There was no need for reverse scoring. Teacher Emotional Support scores were between 20 and 100 and Academic Engagement scores were between 15 and 75. A higher score reflected a higher level of perceived teacher emotional support and higher level of academic engagement.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The questionnaire was expert validated. The instrument was sent to three experts in the relevant fields of education, educational psychology and research methodology. The experts rated the items on relevance, clarity, simplicity, suitability for secondary-school students, cultural appropriateness and consistency with the dimensions. The feedback and suggestions they provided were used in the final version of the questionnaire. This process was used to determine the content and face validity of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Reliability coefficients were calculated for each dimension and for the overall Teacher Emotional Support and Academic Engagement scales. The internal consistency of the coefficients was good to excellent, ranging from .808 to .901. The results indicated that all dimensions had acceptable reliability. The overall Teacher Emotional Support Scale had an alpha coefficient of .901, and the overall Academic Engagement Scale had an alpha coefficient of .892. These values indicated that the instrument was reliable enough to be used in the main study (see Table 3).

Table 3. Reliability of the Research Instrument

Variable	Dimension	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Interpretation
Teacher Emotional Support	Care and Empathy	5	.843	Good
	Encouragement & Confidence-Building	5	.862	Good
	Emotional Responsiveness and	5	.875	Good



	Availability			
	Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment	5	.808	Good
	Overall Teacher Emotional Support	20	.901	Excellent
Academic Engagement	Behavioral Engagement	5	.827	Good
	Emotional Engagement	5	.879	Good
	Cognitive Engagement	5	.842	Good
	Overall Academic Engagement	15	.892	Excellent

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was obtained after permission was granted by the appropriate educational authorities and head of the selected government boys' high schools. 350 students were chosen from 35 schools, 10 students from each school. The participants were told the purpose of the study, confidentiality and voluntary participation. Questionnaires were given during school hours, filled anonymously, collected right away, checked for completeness, coded and set up for analysis. Out of 350, 342 complete responses were received and thus response rate was 97.7%.

The data were coded, screened and analyzed by SPSS Statistics. Frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores were used to determine teacher emotional support and academic involvement. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to investigate the relationship between the variables, and simple linear regression was used to see whether teacher emotional support significantly predicted academic engagement. All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

Results

Descriptive Analysis of Teacher Emotional Support and Students Academic Engagement

The descriptive analysis was carried out on the basis of 342 male students of government boys high schools, District Peshawar, with valid responses. The overall mean score for teacher emotional support was high (M = 3.480, SD = 0.760), which means that the students generally felt that their teachers were caring, encouraging, emotionally available, respectful, and fair. The highest mean (M = 3.529, SD = 0.928) was found for the dimension Care and Empathy, indicating that the students were most likely to notice their teachers' concern and understanding. Encouragement and Confidence-Building had the lowest mean (M = 3.450, SD = 0.899), but was still in the high category.



The overall academic engagement was also high ($M = 3.416$, $SD = 0.771$), indicating that the students, overall, were engaged in learning activities. Emotional Engagement was the mean with the highest mean ($M = 3.450$, $SD = 0.889$), meaning that students often felt interested, enjoyed, and felt a sense of belonging in their academic activities. Cognitive Engagement was also in the high category ($M = 3.416$, $SD = 0.909$) while Behavioral Engagement had the lowest mean ($M = 3.381$, $SD = 0.923$) and was classified as moderate. This discovery indicated that students' emotional and cognitive engagement was relatively more than their observable classroom engagement and task-related behavior.

Skewness and kurtosis values for all dimensions and overall variables were between -1 and $+1$, which means that the distributions were reasonably symmetrical and did not show serious departure from normality. The relatively small standard errors also suggested that the sample means were good estimates with acceptable precision. The overall findings showed a high level of teacher emotional support and academic engagement of the students who participated. As all the 342 participants were male students in government boys' high schools, gender and school-sector based comparisons were not made.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Emotional Support and Academic Engagement

Scale/Dimension	Min	Max	Mean	SD	SE	Skewness	Kurtosis	Level
Care and Empathy	1.200	5.000	3.529	0.928	0.050	-0.402	-0.579	High
Encouragement and Confidence-Building	1.400	5.000	3.450	0.899	0.049	-0.189	-0.732	High
Emotional Responsiveness and Availability	1.000	5.000	3.456	0.902	0.049	-0.223	-0.713	High
Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment	1.200	5.000	3.486	0.879	0.048	-0.204	-0.777	High
Overall Teacher Emotional Support	1.650	4.950	3.480	0.760	0.041	-0.075	-0.860	High
Behavioral Engagement	1.000	5.000	3.381	0.923	0.050	-0.165	-0.783	Moderate
Emotional Engagement	1.400	5.000	3.450	0.889	0.048	-0.254	-0.633	High
Cognitive Engagement	1.000	5.000	3.416	0.909	0.049	-0.344	-0.460	High
Overall Academic Engagement	1.667	5.000	3.416	0.771	0.042	-0.138	-0.689	High



Note. SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error. Mean levels were interpreted as 1.00–1.80 = very low, 1.81–2.60 = low, 2.61–3.40 = moderate, 3.41–4.20 = high, and 4.21–5.00 = very high.

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Analysis

Pearson's product-moment correlation was employed to explore the correlation between teacher emotional support and students' academic engagement. Table 5 showed that the overall teacher emotional support and overall academic engagement were strongly positively related and statistically significant, $r = .713$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.657, .761]. This suggested that the more emotionally supported students felt by their teachers, the more engaged students felt in their academic work. The two variables had approximately 50.8% shared variance ($r^2 = .508$). Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between teacher emotional support and academic engagement was rejected.

The four dimensions of teacher emotional support were all positively and significantly associated with overall academic engagement. Emotional Responsiveness and Availability had the highest dimension-level correlation with academic engagement ($r = .623$), followed by Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment ($r = .601$), Encouragement and Confidence-Building ($r = .598$), and Care and Empathy ($r = .582$). These findings suggested that the teacher's emotional availability, responsiveness to concerns, respect, encouragement and caring were particularly related to the students' engagement. The teacher emotional support overall was most highly correlated with Emotional Engagement ($r = .643$), followed by Cognitive Engagement ($r = .594$), and Behavioral Engagement ($r = .582$). In particular, supportive teacher-student interactions were linked to students' interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm and sense of belonging. But the study was a cross sectional correlational design and these findings

Table 5: Relationship Between Teacher Emotional Support and Academic Engagement

Teacher Emotional Support	Behavioral Engagement	Emotional Engagement	Cognitive Engagement	Overall Academic Engagement
Care and Empathy	.471***	.527***	.487***	.582***
Encouragement and Confidence-Building	.475***	.541***	.511***	.598***
Emotional Responsiveness & Availability	.504***	.552***	.533***	.623***
Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment	.513***	.548***	.471***	.601***
Overall Teacher Emotional Support	.582*	.643*	.594*	.713*

Note. N=342. Values represent Pearson's r. *** $p < .001$, two-tailed.



Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was used to assess the overall and specific effects of the four dimensions of teacher emotional support on students' academic engagement. Care and Empathy, Encouragement and Confidence-Building, Emotional Responsiveness and Availability, and Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment were simultaneously entered as predictors of overall academic engagement. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(4,337)=87.654$, $p<.001$. The four dimensions of teacher emotional support accounted for 51.0% of the variance in students' academic engagement, and the adjusted model accounted for 50.4% of the variance. This was a significant explanatory power and suggested that teacher emotional support was a significant statistical predictor for academic engagement for the male government-school students in the sample.

Each of the four dimensions contributed uniquely and positively to academic engagement and was statistically significant. Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment was the highest predictor, followed closely by Emotional Responsiveness and Availability, Encouragement and Confidence-Building, and Care and Empathy. The impact of the other dimensions was statistically controlled, and students who perceived more respect, fairness, emotional availability, encouragement, care and empathy from their teachers reported higher academic engagement. The tolerance values were between .436 and .527 and the VIF values ranged from 1.896 to 2.294, which means there was no serious multicollinearity. The Durbin-Watson test was 2.045, which showed independence of residuals, and the Breusch-Pagan test was non-significant ($p=.098$), which indicated no serious heteroscedasticity. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected that there was no significant difference between teacher emotional support and students' academic engagement.

Table 6: Multiple Linear Regressions Predicting Students' Academic Engagement

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI for B	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	.894	.138	—	6.465	<.001	[.622, 1.166]	—	—
Care and Empathy	.137	.045	.165	3.022	.003	[.048, .226]	.488	2.050
Encouragement & Confidence-Building	.184	.046	.215	4.009	<.001	[.094, .274]	.507	1.971
Emotional Responsiveness & Availability	.198	.049	.232	4.015	<.001	[.101, .295]	.436	2.294
Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment	.206	.046	.235	4.472	<.001	[.115, .297]	.527	1.896

Note. $N=342$, $R=.714$, $R^2=.510$, adjusted $R^2=.504$, standard error of the estimate $=.543$, $F(4,337)=87.654$, $p<.001$.



Discussion

The current study investigated teacher emotional support and academic involvement of 342 male students of government boys' high schools of District Peshawar. Results showed that teachers' emotional support ($M = 3.480$, $SD = 0.760$) and academic engagement ($M = 3.416$, $SD = 0.771$) were generally high. More importantly, teacher emotional support was significantly and positively related to academic engagement, and the four dimensions of teacher emotional support accounted for a significant amount of variance in students' academic engagement. This general trend aligns with a growing international research base that links supportive teacher behaviours with students' motivation, emotional engagement, persistence, participation and cognitive engagement. A meta-analysis of 141 studies with over 525,000 students revealed a positive relationship between teacher support and school engagement, and a four-year longitudinal study indicated that teacher support had a positive effect on students' motivation and engagement in adolescence. Recent secondary-school research also found that teacher support is a direct and indirect predictor of engagement via learning motivation, academic self-efficacy, psychological resilience, classroom environment, and positive academic emotions.

The overall mean for teacher emotional support was high, indicating that students overall felt their teachers were caring, encouraging, emotionally available, respectful, and fair. The highest mean was for Care and Empathy, which means that students tended to notice teachers' care with regard to their feelings, difficulties, and personal situations. Encouragement and Confidence-Building was the lowest of the four dimensions, but was still in the high range. This discovery indicates that supportive relationships occurred in multiple ways of classroom interaction and not just as an isolated expression of kindness. Similar findings have indicated that emotional and instrumental teacher support can foster academic buoyancy and engagement, with perceived emotional support helping students to stay engaged when experiencing academic struggles. Perceived teacher emotional support was an important factor in the relationship between academic resilience and engagement among high school students (Romano et al., 2021). In a similar fashion, Shin and Chang (2022) found that high levels of teacher and peer relational support were associated with greater concurrent and subsequent engagement. Self-Determination Theory research also suggests that teacher involvement, structure, and autonomy support can help to foster engagement by meeting the three needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

Academic engagement was also generally high, with variations in the dimensions. Emotional Engagement had the highest mean, suggesting that students were generally interested, enjoying, enthusiastic and felt a sense of belonging in their learning. Cognitive Engagement was also high, indicating that students engaged in mental effort, employed learning strategies, made connections between new learning and prior knowledge, and tried to understand the academic content in depth. Behavioral Engagement was also relatively low and in the moderate range, but was near the cutoff for high. This trend indicates that pupils' emotional engagement and thinking did not always result in observable behaviours like participation in class, sustained attention, regular completion of tasks, and regular effort in class.



The finding is supported by the meta-analysis of Vargas-Madriz et al. (2024), which found that emotional engagement had one of the strongest associations with teacher support. Jia and Cheng (2024) also showed that teacher support was positively related to positive classroom emotions, which subsequently promoted engagement. Other recent studies have documented that enjoyment, positive academic emotions, mastery-oriented goals, self-efficacy and resilience are important factors in understanding how emotional support translates to academic engagement. Correlation analysis showed that overall teacher emotional support was significantly and positively correlated with academic engagement ($r = .713$, $p < .001$). This finding suggested that students' perceptions of care, encouragement, responsiveness, respect and fairness by teachers were positively related to their behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement. Emotional Responsiveness and Availability was most highly correlated with overall engagement, indicating that students were most sensitive to teachers who were approachable, listened to their concerns, acknowledged emotional struggles, and offered assistance when needed. This result is in line with the results of An et al. (2022) which revealed that perceived teacher support was directly related to engagement in middle school students and indirectly related to the model of learning motivation. In a similar vein, Zhang and Hu (2025) found that teacher support was a predictor of students' engagement, mediated by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in senior high schools. Shao et al. (2025) identified direct and indirect links via academic self-efficacy and psychological resilience, and Guo et al. (2025) revealed that emotional support influenced engagement through a cascading effect of academic self-efficacy and psychological resilience. The recent results of Ma and Li (2026) further supported the mediating role of self-efficacy and positive emotions between emotional support and engagement. The correlation in the present study was higher than the pooled correlation of $r = .300$ from Vargas-Madriz et al. (2024). This difference might be partially explained by the fact that both constructs were measured using self-report student instruments and the male government-school sample was homogenous; thus, the magnitude of this difference should be interpreted with caution and not assumed to be consistent across populations. The multiple-regression analysis also indicated that the four teacher-emotional-support dimensions accounted for 51.0% of the variance in academic engagement, indicating a significant statistical predictive power. Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment was the highest unique predictor followed closely by Emotional Responsiveness and Availability, Encouragement and Confidence-Building, and Care and Empathy. The findings indicate that the extent of students' engagement was not only related to teachers' general kindness, but also to the presence or absence of consistent dignity, acceptance, equitable treatment, emotional accessibility, and constructive encouragement. Respectful and fair treatment can minimize fear of humiliation, favoritism, rejection and negative evaluation, and provide the psychological safety needed to ask questions, engage in conversations, and persevere when making errors. Similarly, emotional responsiveness can help students to seek help instead of withdrawing when they have academic or personal challenges. There is evidence to support this interpretation, as positive teacher-student relationships foster engagement through perceived social support, lower academic pressures, self-efficacy, and positive emotions. Emotional support was also related to behavioral engagement via academic self-efficacy (Yang et al., 2021) and to learning engagement via social support and self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2024). However, the evidence from online university environment suggests that direct impact of teacher support can be different depending on the context of instruction, students' population and other motivational factors, so the current regression results should be understood in the context of government secondary school



of District Peshawar. Finally, the results revealed that teacher emotional support is a significant relational resource related to students' academic engagement. The high level of respect, fairness and emotional responsiveness suggests that effective support is manifested in everyday teacher behaviours, such as listening to students, applying rules consistently, not humiliating students in front of others, acknowledging students' emotions, giving constructive feedback and expressing trust in students' ability to improve. Government schools' professional-development programmes should thus include emotional-support skills alongside teaching methods that encourage attendance, punctuality, teamwork and perseverance. The relatively low level of Behavioral Engagement suggests that positive relationships should be integrated with opportunities for students to engage and take responsibility for their learning that are structured. But the study was conducted as a cross-sectional study and used self-reported data from male students, so the results of the study provided statistical association and prediction but not causation. Longitudinal evidence suggests that teacher support can influence engagement trajectories, and that engagement can also impact perceptions of relationships with teachers. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal, experimental, observational and multilevel designs and involve female students, teacher reports and classroom observations.

Conclusion

The study findings revealed that teacher emotional support had a positive and significant relationship with academic engagement of 342 male students of government boys high schools of District Peshawar. Both teacher emotional support and academic engagement were reported at high levels. Care and Empathy had the highest mean and Emotional Engagement was the most robust dimension of academic engagement. The relationship between overall teacher emotional support and academic engagement was strong and statistically significant, $r=.713$, $p<.001$. Moreover, the four dimensions of teacher emotional support accounted for 51.0% of the variance of academic engagement. Respect, Acceptance, and Fair Treatment was the most significant predictor, followed by Emotional Responsiveness and Availability, Encouragement and Confidence-Building, and Care and Empathy. Overall, the results indicated that when students felt that their teachers were caring, encouraging, emotionally available, respectful, and fair, they were more academically engaged.

Recommendations

From the results, it is recommended that the government high schools should improve the emotional support of the teacher by providing training for teachers on how to support the students with respect and fairness, listening to the students, giving constructive feedback, encouraging students after they have difficulties in learning, and sensitivity in dealing with the students' emotions. The school head should foster positive classroom relationships and regularly check on teacher-student relationships by listening to student feedback and observing classrooms. However, because behavioral engagement was somewhat lower, teachers should also give students more opportunities to be active, to learn collaboratively, to complete assignments on time, and to be involved in the classroom. Future research should involve female students, private schools, and other districts and should involve longitudinal or experimental designs to explore the causal impact of teacher emotional support on academic engagement.



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