

Influence of Teacher–Student Interaction on Students’ Self-Esteem at the Elementary School Level

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Abstract

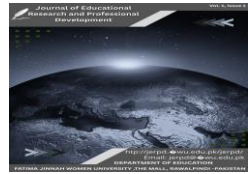
This study examined the role of teacher–student interaction on students’ self-esteem at the elementary level. Using an action research design, the study was conducted with 40 eighth-grade students from a public school in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and an observational checklist to assess classroom interaction techniques. Data was collected before and after a two-week intervention involving enhanced teacher–student interaction strategies such as praise, questioning, and student engagement. Findings revealed a significant improvement in students’ self-esteem following the intervention. The results highlight the critical role of positive teacher–student interaction in fostering students’ confidence, participation, and emotional well-being. The study recommends professional development programs for teachers to strengthen interactive classroom practices.

Keywords: Teacher–student interaction, Self-esteem, Elementary education, Classroom environment, Action research

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Introduction

Teacher–student interaction plays a fundamental role in shaping students’ academic and psychological development. Positive interactions characterized by trust, respect, and encouragement create a supportive learning environment that enhances both academic performance and emotional well-being. Research indicates that effective teacher–student relationships contribute significantly to students’ motivation, engagement, and self-concept. Self-esteem, defined as an individual’s evaluation of self-worth, is a crucial psychological factor influencing students’ learning and behavior. Students with high self-esteem tend to demonstrate greater confidence, participation, and resilience in academic settings. Conversely, low self-esteem can lead to poor academic performance, withdrawal, and behavioral issues. Despite the recognized importance of teacher–student interaction, many classrooms particularly in public schools lack effective interaction strategies. This often results in reduced student participation and low self-esteem. Therefore, it is essential to empirically examine how structured teacher–student interaction influences students’ self-esteem (Bright, 2025).

Theoretical perspectives provide a strong basis for understanding this relationship. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning and identity formation occur through social interaction, with teachers acting as mediators of cultural values and knowledge. Attachment theory similarly highlights the importance of secure, supportive relationships in fostering confidence and resilience. Symbolic interactionism adds another layer, suggesting that children construct their self-image based on the feedback they receive from significant others, particularly teachers. When teachers provide encouragement, empathy, and constructive feedback, students internalize a sense of competence and value. Conversely, repeated criticism, neglect, or favoritism can erode self-esteem, leaving lasting effects on motivation and social adjustment (Zahid, Bibi, & Zahoor, 2025). Empirical studies reinforce these theoretical claims. Hamre and Pianta (2006) demonstrated that emotionally supportive teacher–student relationships predicted higher levels of social competence and academic motivation among elementary students. Hughes et al. (2001) found that students who perceived their teachers as caring and responsive developed stronger self-confidence and exhibited fewer behavioral problems. Wentzel (2010) further emphasized the role of classroom



climate, showing that collaborative learning and constructive feedback foster belonging and self-worth. On the other hand, authoritarian teaching styles or lack of individualized attention were linked to diminished self-esteem and disengagement. These findings collectively highlight that the nature of teacher–student interaction is not peripheral but central to children’s psychological and academic development. Cross-cultural research adds nuance by showing that the influence of teacher–student interaction varies across cultural contexts. In collectivist societies, teachers are often regarded as moral guides, and their approval carries significant weight in shaping children’s self-concept. In more individualist settings, teacher support tends to enhance self-efficacy and personal achievement. Despite these differences, the consensus across diverse educational systems is clear: teacher–student interaction plays a critical role in shaping self-esteem (K12 Tutoring, 2025).

This study holds substantial significance for multiple stakeholders in the field of education, particularly within the context of elementary education in public schools. Firstly, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between teacher–student interaction and students’ self-esteem, an area that remains underexplored in the Pakistani educational context. By addressing this gap, the study strengthens the theoretical and practical understanding of how classroom dynamics influence students’ psychological development. Secondly, studying is highly beneficial for teachers, as it highlights the importance of adopting interactive teaching strategies such as encouragement, questioning, and acceptance of students’ ideas. These practices not only enhance academic engagement but also foster students’ confidence and emotional well-being. The findings provide practical insights that can guide teachers in improving their classroom behavior and instructional methods. Thirdly, the study has important implications for school administrators and policymakers. It emphasizes the need for professional development programs and training workshops focused on effective teacher–student interaction. By integrating such training into teacher education programs and institutional policies, schools can create more supportive and inclusive learning environments.

Furthermore, this research is significant for students themselves, as it underscores the role of positive classroom relationships in building self-esteem, which is essential for overall personality



development, decision-making, and academic success. Improved self-esteem can lead to better social adjustment, increased motivation, and reduced behavioral problems. Ultimately, the research aims to identify the specific teacher behaviors most strongly associated with positive self-esteem outcomes, explore how classroom climate mediates this relationship, and examine potential differences across gender, socioeconomic background, or cultural context. By focusing on early schooling, the study underscores the importance of nurturing self-esteem during a critical period of identity formation. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on educational psychology and offers actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers committed to fostering environments where children not only learn but also thrive.

Literature Review

Teacher–student interaction is a dynamic process involving communication, emotional exchange, and instructional engagement. According to educational theorists, effective interaction fosters a positive classroom climate and supports students’ cognitive and emotional development. Research highlights that positive teacher behaviors—such as encouragement, acceptance, and responsiveness—enhance students’ self-esteem and academic achievement. Students who experience supportive relationships with teachers are more likely to develop confidence, motivation, and social competence. Self-esteem has been widely studied as a determinant of academic success. It reflects an individual’s perception of self-worth and is influenced by social interactions, particularly feedback from significant figures such as teachers. Studies indicate that students internalize teacher feedback, which shapes their self-perception and confidence.

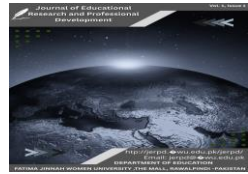
Models of teacher–student interaction, such as teacher-directed and student-centered approaches, demonstrate varying impacts on student outcomes. Student-centered approaches, characterized by dialogue and collaboration, are more effective in promoting self-esteem and independent learning. Recent advancements in educational research have increasingly emphasized the socio-emotional dimensions of learning, particularly the role of teacher–student interaction in shaping students’ psychological outcomes. Classrooms are now viewed not only as academic settings but also as



social environments where students develop their self-concept, identity, and emotional resilience (Wentzel, 2010).

One of the prominent theoretical perspectives supporting this relationship is attachment theory, which posits that supportive relationships with significant adults, such as teachers, contribute to students' emotional security and self-worth. When teachers provide warmth, responsiveness, and consistency, students are more likely to develop positive self-esteem (Pianta, 1999; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Conversely, negative interactions may lead to feelings of rejection and low self-worth. Another relevant framework is self-determination theory, which highlights the importance of fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Teacher–student interaction directly supports these needs. For instance, when teachers encourage participation and value student input, learners develop a sense of competence and autonomy, thereby enhancing their self-esteem (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that supportive teacher behaviors—such as praise, constructive feedback, and active listening—are positively associated with students' self-esteem and academic motivation. Students who perceive their teachers as supportive tend to show higher levels of confidence, engagement, and persistence (Hattie, 2009; Cornelius-White, 2007). In contrast, authoritarian teaching styles are linked with anxiety and low self-esteem (Rogers, 1983).

In addition, classroom climate has been identified as a critical mediator between teacher behavior and student outcomes. A positive classroom environment characterized by mutual respect and emotional support enhances students' willingness to participate and express themselves (Fraser, 2012). Such environments promote a positive self-image and encourage collaborative learning (Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007). Recent research also highlights the importance of **culturally** responsive teaching, which fosters inclusive learning environments by respecting students' cultural backgrounds. Teachers who adopt culturally responsive practices help students develop a stronger sense of identity and self-worth (Gay, 2018). This is particularly relevant in contexts like Pakistan, where cultural values significantly shape classroom interactions.



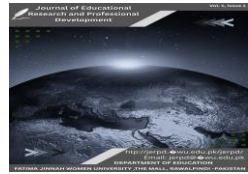
Furthermore, interactive pedagogical strategies—such as collaborative learning, inquiry-based instruction, and formative assessment—have been shown to enhance both academic achievement and self-esteem (Black & Wiliam, 2009). These approaches shift the focus toward student-centered learning, enabling learners to actively engage and build confidence in their abilities. Another important dimension is the role of feedback in shaping self-esteem. Constructive feedback that emphasizes effort rather than innate ability promotes a growth mindset and enhances students’ self-perception (Dweck, 2006). This type of feedback encourages students to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats to their self-worth. Moreover, longitudinal studies indicate that positive teacher–student interactions have lasting effects on students’ emotional and social development. Early supportive relationships with teachers are associated with better academic outcomes, improved behavior, and higher self-esteem over time (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Despite the growing body of international research, there is a scarcity of empirical studies in the Pakistani context examining the influence of teacher–student interaction on self-esteem, particularly at the elementary level. Therefore, this study addresses an important gap by providing context-specific evidence.

Research Objectives

- To examine the influence of teacher–student interaction on students’ self-esteem.
- To identify effective interaction strategies that enhance self-esteem.

Research Questions

- What is the influence of teacher–student interaction on students’ self-esteem?
- What strategies can enhance students’ self-esteem through interaction?



Results

Research Question 1: What is the influence of teacher–student interaction on students’ self-esteem?

Table 1. Influence of Teacher–Student Interaction on Self-Esteem

Indicator	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention
Self-worth & confidence	Moderate agreement; hesitant to express abilities	Strong agreement; expressed belief in abilities
Peer & teacher interaction	Limited willingness to ask/share	Greater confidence; active participation
Student participation	Uneven, dominated by few	Broad, inclusive participation

The intervention helped students internalize a stronger sense of competence, reducing hesitation and self-doubt. Teacher affirmation reshaped their self-concept, which translated into greater confidence in both academic and social tasks. Students became more comfortable approaching teachers and peers, showing that classroom relationships shifted toward openness and trust. This created a psychologically safe environment where children felt their voices mattered. Importantly, participation broadened beyond a few confident voices, demonstrating that improved self-esteem empowered hesitant learners to engage actively. These outcomes highlight the reciprocal link between supportive teacher interaction and observable behavioral change.

Research Question 2: What strategies can enhance students’ self-esteem through interaction?

Observation checklist results highlighted specific teacher strategies that contributed to improved self-esteem.

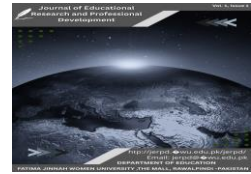


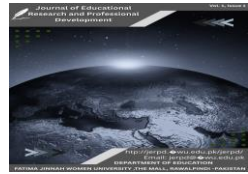
Table 2. Strategies Enhancing Self-Esteem Through Teacher–Student Interaction

Strategy	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention
Praise & encouragement	Occasional, limited to high achievers	Consistent, extended to all students
Acceptance of student ideas	Selective, some overlooked	Frequent validation and integration
Interactive questioning	Predominantly closed questions	Increased open, dialogic questioning
Inclusive participation	Few confident voices dominated	Wider distribution of classroom voice

Equitable praise signaled that effort and participation were valued, not just achievement, broadening motivation and reinforcing the idea that every student’s contribution mattered. Teachers’ validation of student ideas enhanced learners’ sense of agency and belonging, strengthening their confidence. The shift toward open, dialogic questioning positioned students as co-constructors of knowledge, encouraging critical thinking and intellectual assurance. Finally, inclusive participation practices redistributed classroom voice, empowering previously hesitant learners and democratizing the learning space. Together, these strategies created a holistic environment where self-esteem was nurtured through recognition, respect, and active engagement.

Discussion

The findings clearly demonstrate that teacher–student interaction exerts a strong influence on elementary students’ self-esteem. Students not only reported higher levels of confidence and self-worth but also displayed observable behavioral changes, such as increased participation and willingness to engage. This supports symbolic interactionist perspectives, which argue that self-esteem is constructed through social feedback. Teachers’ affirmations provided the positive cues necessary for children to reframe their self-image in empowering ways.



The strategies identified — praise, acceptance of ideas, interactive questioning, and inclusive participation — proved effective in enhancing self-esteem. These practices align with attachment theory, which emphasizes the importance of secure, supportive relationships, and with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, which highlights the role of dialogue and shared meaning-making in learning. By validating contributions and encouraging equitable participation, teachers created a psychologically safe environment where students felt valued, leading to both internal and external growth.

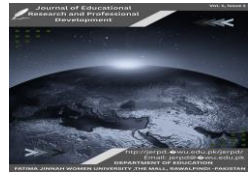
Importantly, the rise in student participation illustrates how self-esteem gains translate into classroom dynamics. Previously marginalized voices became active, suggesting that supportive teacher behaviors democratize learning spaces. This has broader implications: when students feel confident and included, they are more likely to engage in collaborative learning, develop resilience, and achieve academically.

Conclusion

This study confirms that teacher–student interaction plays a pivotal role in shaping elementary students’ self-esteem. The intervention led to measurable improvements in self-concept, confidence, and classroom participation, demonstrating that supportive teacher behaviors are developmental imperatives as well as pedagogical strategies. The results answer both research questions directly:

1. Influence: Teacher–student interaction positively impacts self-esteem, fostering confidence and active engagement.
2. Strategies: Specific practices — praise, acceptance of ideas, interactive questioning, and inclusive participation — effectively enhance self-esteem.

For practice, the findings suggest that professional development should prioritize relational pedagogy, equipping teachers with strategies to build affirming classroom environments. For research, future studies could explore long-term effects across different grade levels and cultural contexts, as well as links between self-esteem and academic achievement.



In conclusion, intentional teacher–student interaction is both a catalyst for psychological growth and a foundation for academic success. By fostering supportive relationships, educators can empower children to thrive, laying the groundwork for lifelong confidence and resilience.

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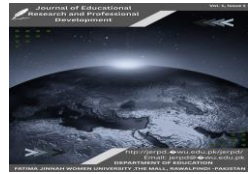
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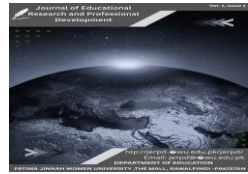
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