

**RESEARCH PAPER****The Role of Teacher Immediacy and Teacher-Student Rapport in Shaping Academic Motivation: Evidence from Prospective Teachers in Pakistan****¹Dr. Tariq Hussain*, ²Tooba Batool and ³Dr. Anjum Naz**

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***Corresponding Author:** tariq.ier@pu.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to examine the relationship between teacher immediacy (TI), teacher-student rapport (TSR), and academic motivation (AM) among prospective teachers in Lahore, Pakistan, while exploring gender differences. Teacher immediacy and rapport significantly impact academic motivation, aligning with social cognitive and self-determination theories. Understanding these relationships can enhance teacher education programs. A quantitative correlation research design was employed. Using multistage sampling, 455 participants from five universities were selected. Data were collected via three validated instruments: the Immediacy Behavior Scale (IBS), Teacher-Student Rapport Scale (TSRS), and Academic Motivation Scale (AMS), with reliability coefficients of 0.85, 0.75, and 0.75, respectively. Significant positive correlations were observed among TI, TSR, and AM. Male prospective teachers reported higher perceived TI and TSR, highlighting gender differences in these variables. To address gender disparities and enhance AM, teacher training programs should incorporate rapport-building and immediacy strategies, alongside gender-sensitive approaches, to foster positive teacher-student interactions.

KEYWORDS Academic Motivation, Prospective Teachers, Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Teacher Immediacy, Teacher-Student Rapport**Introduction**

Academic motivation is a critical factor influencing the success and development of prospective teachers. Among the many factors that contribute to academic motivation, teacher immediacy (TI) and teacher-student rapport (TSR) have emerged as vital components that shape motivation and commitment in educational settings (Estep & Roberts, 2015). TI and TSR are widely recognized as essential for effective teaching and fostering an engaging learning environment (Baker, 2010). These constructs are fundamental for shaping classroom dynamics, enhancing student motivation, and improving learning outcomes (De Loof et al., 2021; Derakhshan et al., 2022; Hu & Wang, 2023; Wang & Derakhshan, 2023). Implementing teaching strategies that prioritize building rapport and demonstrating immediacy can significantly boost student engagement and academic achievement (Leo et al., 2023). Understanding how these two elements influence prospective teachers' motivation provides valuable insights for educators to implement more effective teaching practices.

Prospective teachers, typically those pursuing certification or transitioning into the teaching profession, are key to revitalizing the educational system. They bring new perspectives, innovative teaching methods, and a commitment to professional growth (Jacobs & Swars Auslander, 2021). Their training ensures they possess the knowledge and skills required to provide quality education to their future students.

The concept of immediacy was first introduced by Mehrabian (1971) as part of the approach-avoidance theory, which examines the psychological and physical distance between individuals. Immediacy behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal, serve to reduce this distance and foster closer connections (Christophel, 1990; Edwards & Edwards, 2001; Gorham, 1988; Mehrabian, 1971). These behaviors include verbal actions such as calling students by name, using humor, and sharing personal experiences, as well as non-verbal cues like eye contact, smiling, and positive body language (Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985). In the classroom, teacher immediacy plays a crucial role in creating an environment where students feel motivated and engaged. Witt et al. (2004) emphasize that verbal immediacy (VI) and non-verbal immediacy (NVI) can have a rewarding effect on students, fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere that encourages student participation and focus. When immediacy is lacking, students may distance themselves and become reluctant to engage (Andersen, 1979). Richmond et al. (2008) further highlight that immediacy behaviors can reduce student anxiety, foster a sense of comfort, and encourage a more positive response to learning challenges.

Teacher-student rapport refers to the quality of the relationship and communication between teachers and students, including the level of trust and comfort established during interactions (Hu & Wang, 2023). TSR has been shown to be a crucial factor in enhancing student motivation, as it directly influences student engagement and willingness to communicate (Mottet et al., 2006). A positive rapport leads to a learning environment where students feel safe and valued, promoting active participation and contributing to improved academic outcomes (Ormrod, 2006). Research indicates that a strong rapport between teachers and students results in a supportive learning atmosphere, which significantly boosts students' motivation and involvement in academic activities (Frisby & Gaffney, 2015). Studies have also found that TSR is strongly correlated with student learning outcomes, and when teachers and students share a positive relationship, it fosters greater student success (Arslan & Karamese, 2018; Frymier & Houser, 2000).

Motivation is the internal drive that influences goal-directed behavior and underpins the learning process (Schunk et al., 2014). The Latin root of the word "motivation," **movere**, meaning "to move," reflects its role in propelling individuals to begin, sustain, and complete tasks. Motivation is a dynamic process that can be inferred from actions and verbalizations, such as effort and goal-setting (Sternberg & Williams, 2009). Academic motivation, specifically, guides students toward achieving their learning objectives and plays a crucial role in shaping behavior and outcomes in educational settings (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). In the context of teacher education, motivation influences prospective teachers' engagement with their studies, instructional practices, and eventual professional development (Martin, 2008). Motivated teachers are more likely to create effective learning environments, engage students meaningfully, and demonstrate commitment to their professional growth (Schunk et al., 2014).

While substantial research has examined the effects of teacher immediacy and TSR on student motivation, there is limited investigation into how these factors influence the academic motivation of prospective teachers. Existing studies suggest that positive teacher-student interactions, characterized by immediacy and rapport, contribute significantly to student motivation and academic performance (Baker, 2010; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). However, the impact of these factors on prospective teachers' academic motivation remains underexplored. Understanding how teacher immediacy and TSR influence the academic motivation of prospective teachers could offer valuable insights for improving teacher education programs and enhancing the effectiveness of future educators (Granitz, Koernig, & Harich, 2009; Frisby & Myers, 2008).

Despite the recognized importance of academic motivation in predicting teaching effectiveness and student outcomes, the academic motivation of prospective teachers

remains an area of concern. Teacher immediacy and teacher-student rapport are known to be linked to student motivation, yet their impact on prospective teachers' academic motivation remains unclear.

Literature Review

Prospective teachers are individuals preparing to enter the teaching profession, developing the necessary skills, knowledge, and dispositions for effective teaching. They may be undergraduate students pursuing a teaching degree, graduates enrolled in master's programs, or career changers transitioning into teaching (Jacobs & Swars Auslander, 2021).

Mehrabian (1971) introduced the concept of immediacy as a metaphor to describe approach and avoidance behaviors. According to him, behaviors such as raising an arm to greet a friend or leaning forward to show interest reflect people's preferences to approach things they like and avoid things they dislike. Immediacy behaviors, including standing close, making eye contact, and leaning forward, convey greater liking. Such behaviors are linked to familiarity and approach-avoidance tendencies (Mehrabian, 1971). These behaviors can be categorized into verbal and non-verbal forms (Christophel, 1990; Gorham, 1988; Edwards & Edwards, 2001).

Mehrabian's (1971) experiment on the impact of behaviors used alongside speech showed that non-verbal cues have more influence than verbal cues on communication. His findings revealed that feelings and attitudes are communicated more through facial expressions, vocal tone, and body language than through words. He presented the equation: Total feeling = 7% verbal feeling + 38% vocal feeling + 55% facial feeling, emphasizing the importance of non-verbal behaviors in conveying emotions and attitudes (Mehrabian, 1971).

Immediacy has been shown to have a significant impact on learning and communication. Richmond et al. (1987) define immediacy as a communication variable that influences how close someone feels to another, both physically and psychologically. Gorham (1988) discovered a positive correlation between immediacy and cognitive learning, noting that teacher behaviors that increase immediacy also increase student attention and retention. In controlled environments, teachers' immediacy behaviors raised students' arousal and attention, leading to better memory recall (Kelley & Gorham, 1988). This relationship between immediacy and cognitive learning is further supported by Richmond et al. (1987), who found a positive correlation between immediacy and both affective and cognitive learning.

Teacher immediacy refers to behaviors that reduce the perceived psychological distance between teachers and students, including both verbal and non-verbal actions (Dong, Sherer, & Lio, 2022). Early research by Breed (1971), Kleinfeld (1973), and Woolfolk (1978) identified the importance of teacher immediacy in promoting positive outcomes in the teaching-learning process. Andersen (1978) proposed that non-verbal immediacy directly contributes to teaching effectiveness. Similarly, Gorham (1988) identified verbal immediacy behaviors that positively impact student learning and motivation. Christophel (1990) further explored the connection between teacher immediacy and student motivation, suggesting that motivation serves as a mediating variable between immediacy and student learning.

Research by Frymier (1993) found that teacher immediacy is linked to student motivation, which, in turn, affects learning outcomes. Christophel (1990) and Richmond (1990) emphasized the role of motivation in the relationship between immediacy and learning, suggesting that increased motivation leads to enhanced cognitive learning. This idea is supported by Brophy (1987), who suggested that enthusiasm and passion from

teachers can boost student motivation. Teachers' use of verbal and non-verbal immediacy, such as humor, self-disclosure, and praise, can foster student engagement and interest in the subject matter (Edwards & Edwards, 2001; Gorham, 1988).

Velez and Cano (2008) explored how verbal teacher immediacy (VTI) contributes to student attachment and engagement in the classroom. They emphasized the importance of both verbal and non-verbal behaviors in creating a sense of belonging and motivating students to engage in learning. Non-verbal immediacy, including relaxed gestures, eye contact, and expressive body language, is particularly effective when combined with verbal immediacy in fostering a positive classroom environment (Velez & Cano, 2008).

Teacher-student rapport, defined as the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students, plays a crucial role in student motivation and engagement. Research by Zhou (2021) demonstrates that positive teacher-student rapport improves student engagement, especially in practical learning settings. Building rapport requires teachers to understand students' interests, respect their opinions, and create an open, approachable classroom atmosphere (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Wilson et al., 2010).

Santana (2019) outlined strategies for building rapport in the classroom, including recognizing students' identities, encouraging them, maintaining effective communication, and using humor. Positive teacher-student rapport has been linked to improved learning outcomes, as students are more likely to engage in the learning process when they feel valued and respected. According to Corpus et al. (2009), teachers who inspire their students through positive behavior and performance enhance student motivation and commitment.

Research by Wilson and Ryan (2013) highlights two key components of rapport: the teacher's characteristics and student engagement. Teachers' behaviors, such as clarity, fairness, and caring, foster a positive classroom atmosphere that encourages student engagement and participation. Studies indicate that students' perceptions of teacher rapport predict course outcomes, including higher course evaluations, improved attendance, and better final grades (Wilson & Ryan, 2013).

For prospective teachers, developing strong teacher-student rapport is crucial for fostering a positive learning environment and promoting student motivation. Roorda et al. (2011) found that students who feel connected to their teachers experience increased motivation and engagement, leading to a stronger sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is essential for aspiring educators, as it enhances their academic motivation and overall engagement in the teaching profession.

The concept of rapport is also vital in shaping students' academic achievement. Wentzel (1997) found that perceived support from teachers plays a significant role in student motivation, particularly in middle school. Teachers who provide a supportive and engaging classroom environment contribute to students' academic success and well-being. Similarly, Webb and Barrett (2014) demonstrated that teacher-student relationships in an ESL context impact students' learning outcomes, particularly when teachers use specific behaviors such as humor and non-verbal immediacy.

In conclusion, teacher immediacy and rapport are essential components of effective teaching and learning. Non-verbal behaviors, such as eye contact, body language, and gestures, as well as verbal expressions of encouragement and support, create a positive classroom environment that fosters student motivation, engagement, and learning. For prospective teachers, developing these interpersonal communication skills is key to becoming effective educators who can inspire and motivate their students.

Theoretical Framework

According to Bandura's (1991) theory of social cognition, learning takes place in a social setting where individual factors, behavior, and environment interact in a dynamic and reciprocal way. Human learning is the outcome of both internal and external factors. The mutual influence between three factors is termed as triadic reciprocal causation. One of the aspect of the theoretical framework of the present study has been taken from Bandura's (1991) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT).

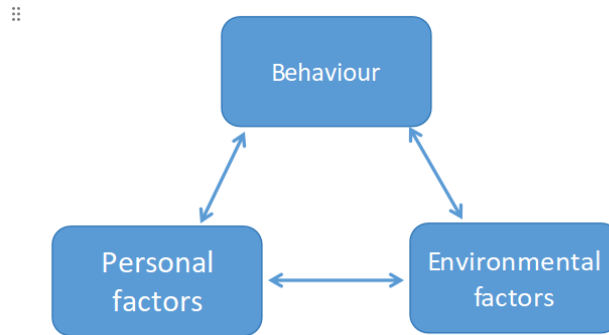


Figure 1 Triadic Reciprocal Determinism model. A concept from Albert Bandura

Four strategies were proposed by Andrew Martin (2008) to influence students' motivation and involvement. These include (a) comprehending the fundamentals of engagement and motivation, (b) putting instructional strategies into practice, (c) developing rapport between teachers and students, and (d) taking part in top-notch professional learning. He created the motivation and engagement wheel to help people understand the advantages and disadvantages of each. (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between teacher immediacy (TI), teacher-student rapport (TSR), and academic motivation (AM) among prospective teachers in Lahore's universities. The population consisted of aspiring educators enrolled in teacher training programs in public and private universities. The study used a correlation design to analyze the connections between these variables. A multistage sampling method was applied to select participants, ensuring that the sample was representative of the various institutions in the district. The final sample included 455 aspiring teachers.

Three instruments were developed to measure the constructs of TI, TSR, and AM. TI was assessed through a self-developed Immediacy Behavior Scale (IBS) with 16 statements, categorized into verbal and non-verbal behaviors. TSR was measured using a 17-item scale focusing on communication, emotional support, mutual respect, and engagement. AM was measured using a 14-item Academic Motivation Scale (AMS), which distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These scales used a 5-point Likert scale for responses.

The instruments were pilot-tested with 90 prospective teachers to ensure validity and reliability. Following feedback from experts, the scales were revised. The reliability of the instruments was determined using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.75. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to participants, who self-reported their perceptions of TI, TSR, and AM. For data analysis, regression and correlation analyses were used to assess the strength and direction of the relationships

between TI, TSR, and AM. Independent sample t-tests were also conducted to examine gender differences in these relationships. The findings aimed to offer practical insights into the influence of teacher immediacy and rapport on the academic motivation of prospective teachers, which could inform teacher training practices.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Relationship between Teacher immediacy with academic motivation

		Academic motivation	
		Intrinsic	Non Intrinsic
Teacher immediacy	Verbal	.373	.423
	Non verbal	.469	.489

The relationship among teacher immediacy and academic motivation is depicted in the table, which further distinguishes between intrinsic and non-intrinsic factors based on vocal and non-vocal communication aspects. A moderately positive rapport among VTI and intrinsic AM is suggested by the correlation coefficient (.373). This suggests that students' intrinsic motivation for academics tends to positively correlate with higher perceived immediacy in verbal interactions with teachers. Comparatively speaking, the correlation coefficient (.469) between intrinsic academic motivation and nonverbal teacher immediacy shows a higher positive relationship than verbal communication. This implies that teachers' nonverbal cues, like their body language or gestures, may have a greater impact on encouraging students' intrinsic motivation. For non-intrinsic academic motivation, both verbal (.423) and non-verbal (.489) teacher immediacy show positive correlations as well. This implies that regardless of the type of motivation (intrinsic or non-intrinsic), higher levels of perceived teacher immediacy through both verbal and non-verbal communication are related with increased motivation towards academic tasks that are driven by external factors.

Table 2
Relationship between teacher student rapport with academic motivation

		Academic motivation	
		Intrinsic	Non Intrinsic
Teacher Student Report	Communication Quality	.32	.29
	Emotional	.31	.40
	Mutual Respect	.27	.30
	Engagement and Interaction	.30	.47

The table displays the relationships between academic motivation and teacher-student rapport, looking at both intrinsic and extrinsic variables along a number of rapport-related dimensions. First, it demonstrates that, with correlation coefficients of 0.32 and 0.29, respectively, better perceived communication quality between instructors and students is positively correlated with motivation for academic tasks, regardless of whether the motivation originates from internal (intrinsic) or external (non-intrinsic) rewards. Positive correlations of 0.40 for non-intrinsic motivation and 0.31 for intrinsic motivation show how important emotional support is in teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, there are positive correlations between academic motivation and mutual respect between instructors and students in both the intrinsic (0.27) and non-intrinsic (0.30) domains. Lastly, with correlation coefficients of 0.30 for intrinsic motivation and 0.47 for non-intrinsic motivation, active participation and constructive interactions

between teachers and students greatly aid in motivating students. These results highlight the significance of encouraging and stimulating associations among teachers and students in a variety of contexts, as this can boost students' motivation and have a positive impact on their academic achievement and overall educational experience.

Table 3
Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	12.370	.976		12.679	.000
	verbal	.169	.030	.245	5.564	.000
	Non verbal	.340	.035	.429	9.758	.000

The independent variables verbal and nonverbal scores have a significant relationship with academic motivation, according to the results of the multiple linear regression analysis. When both verbal and nonverbal scores are zero, the expected academic motivation score is 12.370, according to the model's intercept of 12.370. The verbal score has a standardized coefficient of 0.245 and an unstandardized coefficient of 0.169, indicating that academic motivation rises by 0.169 units for every unit increase in the verbal score. Likewise, the nonverbal score exhibits a higher unstandardized coefficient of 0.340 and a standardized coefficient of 0.429, signifying that academic motivation rises by 0.340 units for every unit increase in the nonverbal score.

With p-values of 0.000, both coefficients are statistically significant, providing compelling evidence that academic motivation is significantly predicted by both verbal and nonverbal scores. Furthermore, compared to the verbal score, the nonverbal score appears to have a greater influence on academic motivation due to its higher standardized coefficient.

Table 4
Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
	(Constant)	14.357	.943		15.227	.000
	communication	.160	.035	.195	4.558	.000
	emotion	.160	.055	.148	2.927	.004
	Mutual	.104	.041	.116	2.536	.012
	engagement	.455	.077	.278	5.930	.000

a Dependent Variable: academic motivation

Significant predictors of academic motivation, such as engagement and interaction, mutual respect, emotional support, and communication quality, are highlighted by the multiple linear regression analysis. When all predictors are zero, the expected academic motivation score is indicated by the model's intercept, which stands at 14.357. With an unstandardized coefficient of 0.160 and a standardized coefficient of 0.195 for the communication variable, a rise in communication score of one unit is correlated with a rise in academic motivation of 0.160 units. Moreover, emotion has a standardized coefficient of 0.148 and an unstandardized constant of 0.160, suggesting, every single rise in emotion score, academic motivation increases similarly. With a standardized coefficient of 0.116 and an unstandardized coefficient of 0.104 for the mutual variable, there would be a 0.104 unit increase in academic motivation for every unit increase in mutual score. Academic motivation increases by 0.455 units for every unit increase in engagement score, which

has the highest un standardized coefficient (0.455) and a standardized coefficient (0.278). With p-values less than 0.05, all predictors are statistically significant, providing compelling evidence that engagement, communication, emotion, and mutual are important factors in determining academic motivation. According to the standardized coefficients, engagement has the biggest effect on academic motivation. Quality of communication, emotional support, respect for others, and engagement and interaction come next, in that order.

Conclusions

This study examined the relationship between teacher immediacy (TI), teacher-student rapport (TSR), and academic motivation (AM) among prospective teachers, with a particular focus on gender differences. The findings indicate that teacher immediacy and teacher-student rapport are important predictors of academic motivation in prospective teachers. Generally, participants reported positive perceptions of both teacher immediacy and rapport, with male participants perceiving higher levels of both. The study found a significant positive correlation between academic motivation, TI, and TSR, suggesting that stronger teacher-student relationships and higher levels of immediacy lead to greater academic motivation.

Gender differences were evident in the perceptions of teacher immediacy and rapport, with male participants reporting significantly higher levels of both. These gender differences align with prior research suggesting that males may perceive more social support and stronger connections with their teachers. Additionally, the correlations between these constructs and academic motivation were notably stronger for male participants, highlighting that males may benefit more from positive teacher-student interactions in terms of motivation.

These findings underscore the importance of fostering strong, supportive teacher-student relationships that emphasize immediacy and rapport, as these factors significantly contribute to academic motivation. The study also points to the need for tailored strategies that account for gender-specific perceptions and experiences in teacher training programs.

Recommendations

- **Teacher Training Programs:** It is essential to provide prospective teachers with training focused on improving their immediacy behaviors and developing positive teacher-student rapport. Such training can help future educators enhance their teaching effectiveness and motivate their students.
- **Promote Positive Teacher-Student Interactions:** Teachers should be encouraged to engage in frequent, meaningful interactions with students to build trust and support. Creating an environment where students feel valued and understood is crucial for fostering motivation.
- **Gender-Sensitive Approaches:** Given the gender differences observed in the perceptions of TI and TSR, teacher training programs should adopt gender-sensitive strategies that address the distinct ways male and female teachers may experience and implement immediacy behaviors and rapport-building techniques.
- **Enhancing Academic Motivation:** Educational programs should focus on promoting intrinsic motivation by supporting autonomy and competence in students. Teacher immediacy and rapport can play a crucial role in fostering these intrinsic motivators.
- **Focus on Teacher-Student Relationships:** Teacher-student relationships should be a central component of teacher evaluation and professional development programs. Evaluating and improving these relationships can significantly enhance the learning environment and increase academic motivation.

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