



## Teacher as Architect of Self-Esteem: Perceptions of Elementary School Students in Islamabad, Pakistan

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<p><b>Keywords:</b>          Self-esteem,          Active listening,          Elementary education,          Teacher-student interactions,          Supportive environment</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ABSTRACT</b></p> <p><i>This study examines elementary students' perceptions regarding teachers' roles in fostering self-esteem, with a particular focus on how educators' attitudes influence students' psychological well-being. Under the positivist paradigm cross-sectional survey research was conducted. The study sample was selected by employing a simple random sampling approach, and 400 elementary-grade students were selected as the sample. A self-developed validated questionnaire was used for data collection, and the dependability of the results was guaranteed by the instrument's good internal consistency (<math>\alpha = 0.83</math>). The survey shows a strong teacher-student rapport, with 82% feeling valued and 76% recognized. Yet, lower scores in active listening (62%) and acknowledging aspirations (66%) suggest areas for growth. These results emphasize how instructors' attitudes and actions have a significant effect on students' academic and psychological growth, underscoring the need for positive teacher-student relationships. Current research adds to the larger conversation about teacher influence in elementary school education settings by providing insightful information about the formative role of educators in fostering self-esteem in elementary school education. Recommendations include in-service training on empathetic communication, culturally appropriate student feedback systems, and regular teacher-student check-ins to address individual needs in Pakistan's diverse classrooms.</i></p>
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### 1 Introduction

Learning experience of any kind is built upon two fundamental components of the educational process: the student and the teacher. Because of their complementary and related functions, knowledge, skills, and values are effectively transferred. Essentially, students actively participate in

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the learning process, giving it life as the teacher builds the framework. Together, they create a dynamic cycle of growth and understanding that defines the educational process. In this process, teachers are individuals who are dedicated to guiding students toward achieving set objectives within the framework that has been established by the educational system to reach their academic goals. A teacher's role has evolved beyond this conventional understanding in modern times. Teachers today perform more than simply teach, deliver lectures, conduct exams, and assign grades: they organize, manage, counsel, observe, and evaluate (Peng, 2023).

A teacher today has a considerable impact on society and culture, placing a strong foundation for their future and helping to ensure the continuation of these constructive actions for decades to come. All philosophical schools of thought emphasize the teacher's role, although in varying ways. Despite their differing perspectives and objectives, the teacher's role remains essential in every educational approach. Societies need to develop according to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to survive in this global world. For this survival, students are one of the main instruments. There is no doubt about the role of teachers in shaping communities and enabling their advancement towards a brighter and better future ((Jan, 2017; Peng, 2023). For shaping communities and societies according to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the development of students accordingly is the responsibility of the teachers.

The primary objective of teaching is not merely to deliver lectures to students seated in rows, attentively listening, and taking notes (Loughlin & Lindberg-Sand, 2023). Instead, it is the positive behaviors and interactions shown by teachers that significantly contribute to students' well-being and development. Teachers who prioritize ethical conduct demonstrate characteristics such as openness to learning and respect for students, parents, and colleagues, and adherence to institutional rules (Karataş et al., 2019; Molla & Nolan, 2020). An educator's attitude plays an important role in the educational process. They foster a supportive learning atmosphere that affects students' motivation and performance. Consequently, the attitudes of educators are closely related to their teaching process and are crucial for both their personal and professional development. Teachers who show qualities such as hope, generosity, respect, and joy can significantly influence students' behavior, fostering improvements in their self-esteem (Mellom et al., 2018). In contrast, negative teacher behaviors—such as dismissing children who are impolite or uncooperative, keeping them out of the classroom, and ignoring their concerns and critical issues—can worsen behavioral challenges (Kahveci, 2023).

Students can suffer negative consequences from such encounters in terms of their academic performance as well as their well-being; teachers may experience feelings of stress and dissatisfaction as a result of such encounters. Therefore, cultivating a positive and supportive teacher-student relationship is essential. These relationships help in developing a conducive environment for learning that promotes both academic and emotional growth of students. By prioritizing constructive dialogues and offering consistent reinforcement, teachers can set up a balanced classroom atmosphere that enables students to excel and develop holistically (Shahzad & Naureen, 2017). The cultivation of a harmonious classroom environment not only fosters academic excellence in students, moreover this environment also helps in shaping students' self-perception, which influences their self-esteem.

Self-esteem is a critical variable in the research about adolescents, exerting a profound influence on the development of self-cognition, self-evaluation, and overall self-concept (Mruk, 2013). It represents a student's confidence in their inherent value and capabilities, encompassing not only cognitive assessments but also a range of emotional experiences, including pride, shame, despair, and triumph (Warner, 2021). Mwangi et al. (2022) highlighted that the concept of self is what one thinks about themselves. Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves, whether positive or negative. There is no doubt that self-esteem is an attractive psychological construct due to its ability to predict several outcomes, including academic achievement, contentment, marital satisfaction, and criminal and antisocial behavior (Erol & Orth, 2017; Kuster et al., 2013; Orth & Robins, 2022). Several research studies identified that high self-esteem enhanced psychological and physical health and reduced disruptive attitudes. The downside of low self-esteem is anxiety, loneliness, and greater vulnerability to substance abuse (Masselink et al., 2018; Sowislo & Orth, 2013).

Self-esteem is closely tied to an individual's ability to engage in activities such as dreaming, practicing self-care, applying critical thinking, and developing effective problem-solving strategies,

regardless of the challenges life presents. Skills like critical thinking have become a key focus in contemporary teaching and learning, both nationally and internationally, in relation to policies, practices, and teachers' perspectives (Fung, 2014; Ingram et al., 2016; Jamil et al., 2024; Jamil et al., 2021). Development of critical thinking among students may be beneficial for their self-esteem, and even higher self-esteem can positively affect the critical thinking of individuals, which is the need of the students in Pakistan and the need of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Educators hold a pivotal role in fostering the development of students' self-esteem. By cultivating an inclusive classroom environment that values diversity, celebrates individual differences, and promotes mutual respect and collaboration, teachers can create a foundation for positive self-perception. This process is also aided by giving students constructive feedback, acknowledging their accomplishments, and giving them the chance to discover and develop their interests and abilities. Teachers can build students' confidence and foster a stronger sense of purpose and self-efficacy by encouraging students to develop a growth mindset and equipping them with the tools to be responsible for their education (Leary & Tangney, 2011). Teachers as the change agent and having a strong influence on students' personality can build a positive personality in students through good behaviors and positive interactions with the students.

Researchers have previously explored this topic and found that teacher-student interactions lead to high self-esteem among students. In a study analyzing over 800 research studies, Hattie (2009) found that teacher-student relationships have an indirect influence on self-esteem by having an effect size of 0.72. Taking this idea further, Koca and Leadership (2016) found that positive behavior by teachers affects students' academic motivation and self-esteem significantly. In a similar vein, Slavin (2022) found that students' self-esteem can be boosted by collaborative learning environments. A positive learning environment, constructive feedback, and the encouragement of autonomy are predicted to increase student self-esteem (Shamsher Khan et al., 2024). Additionally, studies show that teachers' positive and courteous attitudes have a significant impact on students' judgments of their confidence and accomplishments. Weisskirch (2018) highlighted that although multiple elements influence a teacher's ability to accomplish educational objectives, the nature of the student and teacher relationship and the demeanor of a teacher are essential for encouraging the desired behaviors in the students. Especially for students who are struggling academically, teachers are vital in developing resilience, dignity, and self-worth. Research shows that students' hope and progress can be greatly impacted by simply one supporting adult. It has been demonstrated that positive teacher attitudes improve students' motivation, self-esteem, and general personality development, indicating that a teacher's duty goes beyond imparting knowledge to include influencing students' development over the course of their lives (Mbuva, 2016).

This study provided insightful information about how teachers' attitude affects students' self-esteem in the context of Pakistan. Pakistan's educational philosophy is gradually transitioning from "strictly teacher-centered" to a more "student-oriented" model, differing from practices commonly observed in Western countries. Pakistan, being a Muslim country, has a deeply rooted tradition of valuing education and holding teachers in high esteem. Particularly in Pakistan, where students spend a fair amount of their time in school, teachers have a crucial influence on the psychological and emotional health of their students. Teachers' attitudes significantly impact the self-esteem of students because they interact interdependently. Pakistan's education system is still primarily teacher-centered, so teachers and students must establish relationships that promote belonging so that students can become engaged and participate fully in the classroom. Asrar et al. (2018) demonstrated that positive and supportive interactions between students and faculty enhance students' motivation. Ahmed et al. (2017) note that students' confidence enables them to endure academic challenges and be ready for future success. Teachers showing trust, care, and high expectations to students as a way of building self-confidence and increasing their academic performance is discussed in research by Kashan et al. (2023). Polite behavior of teachers has a substantial influence on the academic achievement and self-esteem of students, concluded to Uzair-ul-Hassan et al. (2017).

Hostile dispositions may destabilize students' self-worth and discourage them from participating in class. Therefore, a good and positive attitude of teachers towards their students develops an environment of respect, peace, and harmony.

For a student's academic success and emotional well-being, teachers and students must interact respectfully and affirmingly due to Pakistan's hierarchical and usually exam-oriented education culture. Considering this, teachers are supposed to foster independent learners who can make contributions to the advancement of society. A teacher's ability to create a caring, empowering, and conducive environment for learning not only enhances students' self-esteem but also improves their quality of life. Recognizing the critical role of teachers, this research aims to contribute to the field of research that highlights the role of teachers' attitudes in fostering students' psychological growth. To fill this research gap, the study emphasizes the importance of teacher behavior in promoting the self-esteem of students, thereby supporting their development as confident and capable individuals. The main objective of this research was to examine students' perspectives on the impact of teachers' attitudes on enhancing self-esteem at the elementary level.

### 1.1 Research Question

1. What are elementary students' perceptions of the impact of teachers' attitudes on their self-esteem?

This study is crucial in the context of Pakistan, where teachers and parents overlook the emotional needs of children, focusing solely on education, shelter, and food. Emotional neglect leads to a lack of value and encouragement for students, as recognition is often limited to academic excellence, which is unattainable for every child. Consequently, many children feel unloved, unworthy, and inadequate, resulting in low self-esteem. Teachers contribute significantly to shaping students' self-esteem. Educators who show empathy, concern, and support positively influence students' self-image and boost their confidence, fostering a desire to learn and succeed. Conversely, strict and indifferent teaching approaches can harm students' self-esteem, hindering their path to success.

## 2 Research Methodology

The present research is grounded within the framework of the positivistic paradigm, employing a cross-sectional survey design. Quantitative research is characterized by the numerical representation and statistical analysis of observations, enabling the description and explanation of phenomena based on these observations. This approach is extensively applied across diverse disciplines in both natural and social sciences (Leavy, 2022). As a descriptive study, data collection was conducted using an adapted survey questionnaire.

### 2.1 Population and Sample of the Study

Elementary School students (8<sup>th</sup> grade) from federal government schools in Islamabad were the population of the study. Hirose and Creswell (2023) define population as a group of individuals with one or more similar characteristics that interest the researcher. As the study population was known, through simple random sampling, 400 students were chosen as the study sample.

**Table 01**

*Demographics of the Study Participants (N = 400)*

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	200	50.0
	Female	200	50.0
Age (in years)	12–14	195	48.8
	15–16	205	51.2

**Note.** *n* = number of participants; % = percentage of total sample.

## **2.2 Tool for Data Collection**

To answer the research question of the study, an adaptive survey questionnaire, which was developed and used by Ghazi et al. (2016), was used after making necessary changes according to the context and needs of the study. A five-point Likert scale consisted of 15 statements from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), specifically tailored to elicit students' views on how teachers' attitudes can help in building their self-esteem. Validity and reliability of the survey questionnaire were determined before final data collection. For the validity of the survey questionnaire, six subject matter experts were approached. Based on their comments, some changes were made to make it more relevant, clear, and comprehensive. To check if the survey was reliable, it was piloted (N=50) and its reliability coefficient was 0.83, which reflects good internal consistency of the survey questionnaire (Field, 2009; Taber, 2018). McMillan and Schumacher (2001) believe that questionnaire surveys are highly useful instruments that are utilized in exploring new phenomena and establishing characteristic responses that may be generalized for a larger population of people. They are also identified as cost-saving and convenient ways to collect data for a large number of samples (Rathi & Ronald, 2022).

## **2.3 Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered strictly to ethical guidelines, especially due to the involvement of minors. Informed consent was obtained from participants' parents and custodians on behalf of the students, and it was ensured that the content of the survey questionnaire was age-appropriate, and simplified language was used to ensure its understanding. Participation was entirely voluntary, with clear communication that participants could leave the research at any stage and ensure confidentiality. All participants were informed that their responses be used for this research, keeping the integrity and ethical standards of the research (Malhotra et al., 2020). Furthermore, each participant of the study was guaranteed that the information would be used only for this research purpose.

## **3 Results**

The study focused on understanding how elementary students in Federal Government schools in Islamabad perceive their teachers' role in boosting their self-esteem. A quantitative research approach for data collection was used. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to analyze the collected data. Inferential statistical analyses were not conducted in this study, as no research objective required hypothesis testing or examining differences or relationships among groups. Instead, descriptive statistics were applied to summarize the participants' responses regarding teachers' self-esteem. This approach was chosen because this study explores general trends and perceptions rather than testing specific hypotheses or drawing inferences about a larger population.

### **4.1 Teachers' Attitude in Building Self-Esteem of Students**

The survey reveals significant strengths in teacher-student interactions, with most students feeling their teachers create a positive and respectful environment by valuing individual qualities (82%), recognizing accomplishments (76%), and prioritizing educational needs (76%). These practices foster inclusiveness, motivation, and a strong academic focus, contributing to an overall supportive learning atmosphere. However, areas such as active listening (62%) and acknowledgment of student aspirations and challenges (66%) highlight opportunities for improvement, as a notable part of students feel their voices, goals, and struggles are not fully recognized.

Nearly half of the students (45%) reported that their teacher inadvertently reinforces negative self-talk or self-doubt. This finding is particularly concerning, as it indicates that certain teacher behaviors or language choices may unintentionally undermine students' confidence and self-worth. For instance, overly critical feedback, comparisons with peers, or dismissive comments may contribute to this belief. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive professional development focused on positive communication, emphasizing affirming language, and fostering a growth mindset in students. Teachers could benefit from strategies to provide constructive feedback that encourages improvement while preserving students' self-esteem.

**Table 02*****Students' perceptions of teachers' attitude in nurturing self-esteem***

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
My teachers greet me with a smile when I meet them.	20 5%	40 10%	60 15%	168 42%	112 28%	3.78	1.11
My teachers give me dignity.	12 3%	20 5%	60 15%	228 57%	80 20%	3.86	0.89
My teachers give me respect.	12 3%	32 8%	52 13%	212 53%	92 23%	3.85	0.96
My teachers try to reinforce the importance of my educational needs.	12 3%	44 11%	40 10%	220 55%	84 21%	3.80	0.99
My teachers actively listen to me.	32 8%	20 5%	100 25%	188 47%	60 15%	3.56	1.06
My teachers acknowledge my dreams and problems.	40 10%	32 8%	20 5%	216 54%	92 23%	3.72	1.19
My teachers have high expectations of me.	32 8%	32 8%	40 10%	236 59%	60 15%	3.65	1.08
I am given importance in educational problems.	40 10%	12 3%	20 5%	276 69%	52 13%	3.72	1.06
I can easily share my educational problems with my teachers.	40 10%	32 8%	20 5%	256 64%	52 13%	3.62	1.12
My teachers give importance to students' individual qualities.	12 3%	40 10%	20 5%	272 68%	56 14%	3.80	0.91
My teachers create a nurturing and supportive environment	20 5%	60 15%	40 10%	228 57%	52 13%	3.58	1.05
Highlight our strengths and accomplishments	12 3%	12 3%	72 18%	224 56%	80 20%	3.87	0.87
Using language that is affirming and empowering	32 8%	40 10%	52 13%	236 59%	40 10%	3.53	1.06
Provides opportunities for students to receive feedback from their peers	32 8%	32 8%	60 15%	200 50%	76 19%	3.64	1.12
My teachers inadvertently reinforce negative self-talk and self-doubt	60 15%	100 25%	60 15%	60 15%	120 30%	3.20	1.47

**4 Discussion**

According to the current study, teachers significantly contribute to enhancing the self-esteem of students at the elementary level, demonstrating the significant impact positive teacher attitudes have on the social and academic development of students. In their responses, students indicated that teachers who exhibited respect provided constructive feedback and fostered a supportive and nurturing classroom environment possessed a significant influence on their confidence and motivation to learn.

Students gain greater self-esteem when teachers promote participation, actively listen to their concerns, and address their individual educational needs. These study findings are supported by earlier conducted studies in the Pakistani context. Uzair-ul-Hassan et al. (2017) and Kashan et al. (2023) concluded that teachers' politeness, showing trust, encouragement, and high expectations, has a positive effect on the self-esteem and academic performance of students.

Findings of studies indicate that the academic performance of students is enhanced considerably with timely feedback and problem-solving offered by teachers, along with enabling them to do the same in the future. It has been observed that students' self-esteem is better strengthened by teachers who welcome and appreciate their individuality. Several studies have identified that students who are confident and motivated tend to have more school engagement, enhanced learning performance, as well as better peer relationships (Asrar et al., 2018; Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2003; Kashan et al., 2023; Schweiger, 2008). The study also identified the value of enabling students to receive peer feedback because it can help increase their resilience and self-awareness significantly. As indicated by Simel (2013), teachers who understand the value of self-esteem in school and the classroom create an environment where students can be themselves and experiment at school. Students can engage in the learning process and continue even when faced with failures in such a motivating environment, which ultimately enhances their academic outcomes and self-esteem. Ahmed et al. (2017) explained that the confidence of students allows them to persevere despite academic obstacles and sets them up for ultimate success.

It was also found that the amount of respect and empathy that teachers demonstrate towards students, as well as the amount of positive reinforcement they provide, greatly affects their self-perception. A study conducted by Simel (2013) suggests that to help students achieve their academic potential, teachers who respect self-esteem recognize the importance of understanding what students think about themselves. Teachers who listen attentively to students' needs and deliver individualized solutions are noted to be critical in fostering self-esteem. The methods are compatible with perspectives laid out by Ingram et al. (2016), which enumerate the significance of fostering teacher attitudes to create feelings of belonging and alleviate the fear of being judged in school settings.

## **5 Conclusion**

The study concluded that teachers' behavior, spanning respectfulness to students, active listening, timely feedback, and acknowledgment of special abilities, is the very starting point of building self-esteem. Through the establishment of a conducive and positive environment for learning in the classroom, teachers can initiate good growth in students' confidence, academic performance, and overall development, thus paving the way for future success. There is no doubt that teachers' attitudes have a profound impact on the self-esteem of undergraduate students. The self-esteem of students may be enhanced by a teacher's friendliness and willingness to assist them, resulting in increased confidence and belief in themselves. A teacher who trusts students' abilities and conveys high hopes will inspire them scholastically. Conversely, an unsupportive behavior may undermine the self-esteem of students and dampen their enthusiasm for learning. It follows, then, that teachers' attitudes affect the well-being, academic performance, and personal growth of their students.

### **5.1 Recommendations**

It is the responsibility of teachers to build good teacher-student relationships and establish an environment that fosters respect, support, and empowerment for students, for them to reach their potential through these areas. Schools and educators must take several key steps to maximize strengths while also addressing areas for improvement.

1. Implement professional development programs focused on active listening, empathetic communication, positive reinforcement, and inclusive teaching practices.
2. Establish safe and structured student feedback structures that let students share their anxieties and experiences openly and regularly.

3. Encourage the consistent use of affirming and empowering language in the classroom to support students' self-esteem, motivation, and identity.
4. Promote an inclusive and respectful school culture that values diversity and fosters meaningful teacher-student interactions.

## 5.2 Broader Implications and Future Research Recommendations

The research findings highlight the importance of embracing a balanced approach in teacher-student interactions. While teachers demonstrate high levels of proficiency in the identification of students' individuality, success, and learning goals, shortcomings in active listening and sensitivity towards students' goals can hinder the development of closer relationships with students. In addition, the inadvertent reinforcement of negative self-talk underscores the importance of reflective practice, ensuring the congruence of teachers' language and behavior with the psychological and emotional welfare of students.

Keeping in view the current research study, future research may be conducted to analyze perceptions of students across urban, rural, public, and private schools in Pakistan to identify contextual factors that influence teacher effectiveness. Another research may produce useful results with the purpose of having a more holistic understanding of the dynamic between teachers and students, and exploring teachers' perspectives on how they foster student self-esteem. Moreover, in elementary education, longitudinal studies may be conducted to examine how sustained teacher-student interactions affect students' self-esteem and psychological well-being.

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