

## Teacher-Learner Relationship and Academic Learning: A Correlational Study

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### Abstract

This study examined the relationship between teacher-learner relationship and academic learning among Senior High School students of Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. in Davao City. It was grounded in Self-Determination Theory, Bruner's Constructivist Theory, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which collectively emphasize the role of relatedness, scaffolding, and social interaction in promoting student learning. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, the study gathered data from 121 respondents selected through stratified equal allocation sampling from 11 Senior High School sections. Data were collected through adapted and modified survey instruments with reliability scores above 0.85, measuring teacher support, teacher communication, academic performance, and learning engagement. Mean, standard deviation, and Pearson product-moment correlation were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed a high level of teacher-learner relationship and a high level of academic learning among the respondents. Teacher communication obtained the highest mean among the relational indicators, while academic performance slightly exceeded learning engagement among the academic indicators. The study also found a significant moderate positive correlation between teacher-learner relationship and academic learning, with teacher support showing a stronger relationship with academic learning than teacher communication. These results indicate that positive interpersonal bonds between teachers and learners contribute meaningfully to student engagement and academic performance. The study concludes that academic learning is not only cognitive but also socially mediated through supportive and communicative classroom relationships. It recommends that learners strengthen rapport with teachers, that teachers provide relational scaffolding and encouragement, and that school leaders integrate relational pedagogy into supervision and professional development. The study aligns with SDG 4: Quality Education by supporting inclusive, effective, and meaningful learning environments. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational and institutional sustainability through improved teaching practices, student support systems, and long-term learner development.

**Keywords:** Academic Learning, Academic Performance, Learning Engagement, Teacher Communication, Teacher Support, Teacher-Learner Relationship

### 1. Introduction

The teacher-learner relationship is presented in the study as a central condition of effective schooling rather than a mere social feature of classroom life. The study argues that when classroom interaction is marked by mutual respect, supportive communication, and emotional safety, students tend to show stronger intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and deeper understanding, whereas negative or indifferent relationships may contribute to disengagement. In this sense, the teacher-learner relationship is treated as a fundamental academic variable that warrants systematic investigation. Liu et al. (2024), Desmet et al. (2023), Zhang (2021), and Eddy (2024) are used to support the position that teacher-student rapport influences emotional security, participation, and learning readiness.

The related literature converges around the idea that positive teacher-student interaction supports both engagement and academic learning. International studies cited in the paper show that strong teacher-student bonds can buffer academic stress and sustain motivation, while poor relational climates can weaken participation and increase avoidance. The literature also highlights that communication and support are not peripheral practices but important dimensions of learning environments. Liu et al. (2024) emphasized emotional support as a buffer against academic stress, Desmet et al. (2023) noted the motivational value of rapport across socio-economic backgrounds, Zhang (2021) framed teacher-student interaction as part of the affective pathway to learning, and Eddy (2024) warned that strained relationships may trigger academic avoidance.

Globally, the study notes that teacher-student rapport is widely recognized as important, yet its practical application remains inconsistent in systems that prioritize standardized outcomes over socio-emotional preparation for teachers. Nationally, the Philippine context reflects similar concerns, as Obenza-Tanudtanud and Obenza (2023) found that teacher-student interaction moderately predicts learning engagement but remains below ideal levels in many schools. Locally, the Davao

Region literature also points to the value of supportive teaching approaches. Velez (2024) observed that students in Davao del Sur perform better when teachers are supportive rather than purely authoritative, while Quines and Relacion (2022) found that teacher communication styles affect students' willingness to engage in demanding academic tasks. These perspectives situate the study within a broader educational concern while narrowing its relevance to the local setting of Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc.

The study is primarily anchored in Ryan and Deci's (2009) Self-Determination Theory, which explains that academic growth depends on the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In this study, relatedness is treated as especially important because a student who feels connected to and valued by teachers is more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and active classroom participation. The study is also supported by Jerome Bruner's Constructivist Theory, which frames learning as an active and social process and positions scaffolding as a key instructional practice. Within this view, effective scaffolding depends on trust and openness between teacher and learner. Finally, Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1934) reinforces the study by arguing that cognitive development is socially mediated through interaction with More Knowledgeable Others within the Zone of Proximal Development. Taken together, these theories explain why teacher support, communication, and positive interaction may shape academic performance and learning engagement.

Although existing literature already recognizes the importance of classroom climate and teacher-student interaction, the paper identifies a specific gap in recent quantitative evidence involving private secondary institutions in Mintal, Davao City. The introduction points out that much of the local literature is qualitative or descriptive, leaving limited measurable evidence on the exact strength of the relationship between teacher-learner relationship and academic learning. This gap justifies the use of a quantitative correlational approach to provide statistical evidence for the observed connection between relational quality and student learning outcomes in the specific setting of Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc.

The study aligns most directly with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it focuses on conditions that support inclusive, effective, and meaningful learning. The paper itself explicitly states this alignment by arguing that stronger teacher-learner relationships help create equitable and effective learning environments that reduce emotional distress and improve student success (Kusumawardani et al., 2025). Since the study examines how school relationships influence engagement and academic performance, it contributes to the broader goal of improving educational quality through better classroom interaction and teacher support systems.

The study is significant to educational sustainability because it addresses how schools can maintain high-quality learning through relationally responsive teaching. It is also relevant to institutional sustainability because its findings may guide teacher-training programs, student-support policies, and school-wide practices in Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. In addition, the study has value for socio-emotional and developmental sustainability within education, since it recognizes that emotional safety, belongingness, and support are linked to improved academic learning. By treating classroom relationships as strategic academic tools rather than incidental social encounters, the research supports long-term improvement in teaching practice and student success.

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## **2. Material and methods**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. This design was selected to determine the natural relationship between teacher-learner relationship and academic learning without manipulating the variables. It was intended to generate empirical evidence on how students' perceptions of teacher support and communication relate to their academic engagement and performance. The study also noted that correlational research is appropriate for identifying patterns and measuring the strength of association between variables, as emphasized by Cooper and Schindler (2013).

### **2.2 Locale of the Study**

The research was conducted at Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. (HCMI), a private sectarian institution located in the 3rd District of Davao City, Philippines. The study described Davao City as a regional center for education and business in Mindanao, making it a relevant setting for educational research involving diverse learners.

### **2.3 Respondents of the Study**

The respondents of the study were Senior High School students enrolled at Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. for the Academic Year 2025–2026. This group was chosen because of the importance of their developmental stage, where academic outcomes can influence future educational and career directions.

#### 2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study involved 121 respondents. A stratified equal allocation sampling technique was used to ensure representation from all 11 sections of the Senior High School department, consisting of 6 Grade 11 sections and 5 Grade 12 sections. From each section, 11 students were randomly selected, producing the final sample size.

#### 2.5 Research Instrument

Data were gathered using three adapted and modified survey instruments that underwent reliability testing through Cronbach alpha, with scores reported above 0.85. The teacher-learner relationship variable was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from Bin Abdulrahman (2007), Xu and Qi (2019), and Kiazai (2023), focusing on teacher support and teacher communication. Academic learning was assessed through a 6-item instrument proposed by Bai et al. (2022), covering academic performance and learning engagement. The instrument used a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, and mean scores were interpreted using descriptive levels from Very High to Very Low.

#### 2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection began only after formal approval was obtained from the school administration. The study followed ethical research procedures by securing informed consent from both the respondents and their parents or guardians before the administration of the survey. Participation was voluntary, and the respondents were assured that their answers would remain confidential and anonymous in compliance with the Data Privacy Act.

#### 2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to determine the overall level of teacher-learner relationship and academic learning among the respondents. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation or Pearson  $r$  was used to assess the strength and significance of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

#### 2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical standards by obtaining institutional approval before data collection, securing informed consent from students and their parents or guardians, ensuring voluntary participation, and protecting respondent confidentiality and anonymity. These measures were explicitly stated as part of the study's compliance with the Data Privacy Act.

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### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Levels and Patterns of Teacher-Learner Relationship and Academic Learning

##### 3.1.1 Teacher-Learner Relationship

The results showed that the overall teacher-learner relationship was at a High level, with an overall mean of 3.87 and a standard deviation of 0.60. Among the indicators, Teacher Communication obtained the higher mean of 4.12 with a standard deviation of 0.63, while Teacher Support posted a mean of 3.61 with a standard deviation of 0.83, and both were described as High. These findings indicate that the respondents generally perceived their relationship with their teachers at Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. (HCMI) as positive and evident. This finding suggests that the interpersonal dynamics between teachers and Senior High School students at HCMI are characterized by mutual respect and professional rapport. The high rating for teacher communication implies that teachers maintain open, clear, and transparent dialogue, while the high level of teacher support indicates that students perceive their teachers as providers of both academic and socio-emotional assistance. This interpretation is consistent with Hafen et al. (2025), Bao et al. (2022), Graham and Misiti (2024), Xie and Derakhshan (2021), Wang and Eccles (2023), and Roorda et al. (2021), which all emphasize the value of rapport, communication, and support in strengthening school climate, student confidence, and academic adjustment.

##### 3.1.2 Academic Learning

The results also revealed a High overall level of academic learning, with an overall mean of 3.99 and a standard deviation of 0.66. Among its indicators, Academic Performance registered the higher mean of 4.04 with a standard deviation of 0.73, while Learning Engagement obtained a mean of 3.95 with a standard deviation of 0.76, and both were interpreted as High. These findings show that the respondents perceived themselves as academically productive and meaningfully engaged in their studies. This result indicates that the Senior High School students at HCMI view themselves as cognitively and behaviorally active within their academic strands. The high rating for academic performance suggests strong perceived competence in meeting subject requirements, while the high learning engagement score reflects active participation and sustained interest in lessons. This discussion agrees with Mercer and Dörnyei (2024), Holliman et al. (2022), Zhu and Zhang (2023), Fredricks et al. (2024), and Bond et al. (2021), which associate academic learning, self-efficacy, and engagement with persistence, motivation, and readiness for higher-level learning and future challenges.

##### 3.1.3 Relationship Between Teacher-Learner Relationship and Academic Learning

The results showed a significant moderate positive correlation between teacher-learner relationship and academic learning, with an overall  $r$ -value of 0.521 and  $p$ -value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 level of significance. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. A closer look at the indicators showed that Teacher Support had a stronger correlation with academic learning at  $r = 0.505$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , while Teacher Communication also had a significant relationship at  $r = 0.329$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . These findings indicate that better teacher-learner relationships are associated with higher academic learning among students. This finding confirms that academic learning is closely connected to the social environment of the classroom and that the interpersonal bond between teachers and learners contributes significantly to student performance and engagement. The stronger influence of teacher support suggests that socio-emotional and instructional scaffolding has a more direct effect on academic learning than communication alone, although both remain significant. This interpretation is supported by Li and Yang (2024), Harrigan and Abid (2022), Rather and Hollebeek (2022), and Chen et al. (2023). It also reinforces the study's theoretical grounding by showing that relatedness, emotional safety, and scaffolding are essential to learning success.

### **3.2 Cross-Cutting Patterns in the Findings**

#### **3.2.1 Dominance of Teacher Communication and Support as Core Relational Dimensions**

The findings showed that both teacher communication and teacher support were rated High, with teacher communication obtaining the highest mean among the indicators of teacher-learner relationship, while teacher support also remained strongly evident. At the same time, both dimensions showed significant relationships with academic learning, although teacher support demonstrated the stronger correlation. These results indicate that the teacher-learner relationship in HCMI is not one-dimensional but is shaped by both the clarity of interaction and the quality of assistance students receive from their teachers. This pattern suggests that communication and support function together in sustaining academic learning, but they do not contribute in exactly the same way. Communication appears to establish openness, clarity, and accessibility in the classroom, while support appears to provide the stronger motivational and instructional push that directly strengthens learning outcomes. This interpretation is consistent with Graham and Misiti (2024), who emphasize relational transparency in instructional communication, and with Wang and Eccles (2023), who describe teacher support as a multidimensional source of encouragement and instrumental help. The finding also supports Xie and Derakhshan (2021) and Roorda et al. (2021), who underscore the role of positive teacher-student relationships in shaping student well-being, engagement, and achievement.

#### **3.2.2 Balance Between Academic Performance and Learning Engagement**

The findings further showed that academic performance and learning engagement were both rated High, with academic performance receiving a slightly higher mean than learning engagement. The small difference between the two indicators suggests that the respondents do not only associate learning with grades or outcomes, but also with active participation and meaningful involvement in classroom activities. This indicates a generally balanced academic experience among the students of HCMI. This pattern is important because it suggests that academic learning in the study is both outcome-oriented and process-oriented. Students appear to value achievement while also remaining behaviorally and cognitively involved in their lessons. Such a result reflects a learning environment where classroom participation supports achievement rather than functioning separately from it. This interpretation aligns with Mercer and Dörnyei (2024), who connect high learning with academic flow, as well as with Fredricks et al. (2024) and Bond et al. (2021), who emphasize that engagement is essential to meaningful and sustainable learning. In the same way, Holliman et al. (2022) and Zhu and Zhang (2023) support the idea that perceived competence and active involvement contribute to long-term academic persistence and self-efficacy.

### **3.3 Broader Meaning of the Findings**

#### **3.3.1 The Teacher-Learner Relationship as an Academic Mechanism**

The overall findings demonstrated that teacher-learner relationship and academic learning were both High and that these variables were significantly and positively related. More specifically, the moderate positive correlation indicates that stronger relational quality is accompanied by stronger academic learning among the respondents. This means that the teacher-learner relationship is not simply a classroom condition surrounding learning, but an observable factor associated with how students perform and engage academically. This makes the study more meaningful because it positions relational quality as an academic mechanism rather than a peripheral social issue. The findings support the view that students learn more effectively when they feel emotionally safe, guided, and valued within the classroom. This is consistent with Li and Yang (2024), who describe positive teacher-student relationships as an emotional safety net, and with Harrigan and Abid (2022), who connect belongingness and support with commitment to study. The result also reinforces the discussion that academic success is socially mediated, and that teacher presence matters not only in instruction delivery but also in sustaining learner confidence and participation.

### 3.3.2 Theoretical and Educational Significance of the Study

The data showed that teacher support had a stronger association with academic learning than teacher communication, although both were statistically significant. This suggests that while communication remains necessary in classroom instruction, the more influential factor in this study is the actual experience of being supported by the teacher through guidance, encouragement, and relational scaffolding. The findings therefore highlight which part of the teacher-learner relationship is most closely tied to academic learning in this setting. This strengthens the research worth of the study because it gives a clearer conceptual explanation of why teacher-learner relationship matters. The result is consistent with Rather and Hollebeek (2022), who argue that support is often interpreted as a direct investment in student growth, and with Chen et al. (2023), who emphasize that the quality of interaction with the teacher affects the efficiency of scaffolding. In this sense, the study does not only confirm that a relationship exists; it also shows which relational dimension may have greater academic value. This reinforces the manuscript's theoretical grounding in relatedness, scaffolding, and socially mediated learning, while also giving schools a practical direction for teacher development and learner support programs.

## 4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. (HCMI) demonstrates a strong instructional environment marked by a High level of teacher-learner relationship and a High level of academic learning. The findings confirm that students perceive their teachers as communicative and supportive, while also viewing themselves as academically engaged and competent. Most importantly, the rejection of the null hypothesis establishes that teacher-learner relationship is significantly associated with academic learning, with teacher support emerging as the stronger correlate. Overall, the study affirms that academic learning at HCMI is not only cognitive in nature but also socially mediated through the quality of the interpersonal bond between teachers and learners.

Based on the findings, learners are encouraged to build positive rapport with their teachers and actively seek support and feedback to strengthen their academic learning. Teachers are encouraged to go beyond information delivery by providing relational scaffolding through personalized feedback, emotional encouragement, and a classroom climate that allows students to take academic risks. Program and subject coordinators should integrate relational pedagogy into instructional supervision and curriculum planning, while school administrators should sustain these relational standards through professional development focused on socio-emotional learning and relational competency. Future researchers are encouraged to extend the study through qualitative, mixed-methods, or longitudinal approaches and to examine how digital and face-to-face interactions may influence the teacher-learner relationship and academic learning.

The study was limited to Senior High School students of Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. (HCMI) during the Academic Year 2025–2026 and used a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, which focused only on determining the level of the variables and the relationship between them without establishing causality. The data were drawn from student perceptions using adapted survey instruments and were confined to the dimensions of teacher support, teacher communication, academic performance, and learning engagement. The sample was limited to 121 respondents selected from the 11 sections of the Senior High School department, which also bounds the findings to the specific school context of the study.

## Compliance with ethical standards

This study adhered to institutional ethical standards and was conducted only after obtaining formal approval from the school administration of Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was secured from all respondents as well as from their parents or guardians prior to data collection. The researchers ensured that all information gathered was treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity in compliance with the Data Privacy Act, and the data were used solely for academic and research purposes.

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