

Positive Teacher-Student Relationship as a Motivator to the Learning of Grammar among Senior Secondary School Students: A Critique

Rachel Oluwafisayo Aluko
Lead City University, Ibadan.
alukorechel@lcu.edu.ng

&

Ajao, Rasheed A.
Lead City University, Ibadan.
Ajaorasheed19@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the role of positive teacher-student relationships as motivation for grammar learning among senior secondary school students in Nigeria. Drawing from educational effectiveness research and social capital theory, this study examined how interpersonal dynamics between educators and learners influence grammatical competence development. Through a comprehensive review of literature spanning, teacher-student interaction patterns, classroom climate effects, and peer relationship dynamics, the study revealed that while positive teacher-student relationships demonstrate significant correlation with improved grammar learning outcomes, the relationship is more complex than simple cause-effect mechanisms suggest. However, the critique identified several limitations in current research, including methodological inconsistencies, cultural context neglect, and oversimplification of the relationship between interpersonal dynamics and academic achievement. The study concludes that while positive teacher-student relationships serve as important motivational frameworks for grammar learning, their effectiveness depends heavily on contextual factors, instructional quality, and broader educational system support. Recommendations include developing culturally responsive relationship-building strategies, implementing systematic teacher training programmes, and conducting longitudinal research to better understand the temporal dimensions of teacher-student relationship impacts on grammar competence.

Keywords: *Teacher-student relationships, grammar learning, motivation, secondary education, educational effectiveness, Nigeria*

Introduction

The mastery of English grammar represents effective communication and academic success, particularly within Nigeria's educational landscape where English serves as the primary medium of instruction across all educational levels. However, persistent challenges in grammar competence among senior secondary school students have raised concern about the effectiveness of traditional pedagogical approaches and the broader environmental factors that influence language learning outcomes (Hamdy & Zehmi, 2021).

Recent educational research has increasingly recognised the pivotal role of interpersonal relationships in educational settings, with teacher-student relationships emerging as particularly influential factors in academic achievement and student motivation (Nur, 2020). The significance of these relationships extends beyond mere classroom management to encompass fundamental aspects of learning motivation, emotional safety, and academic engagement that directly impact students' willingness and ability to master complex grammatical structures.

Within the Nigerian educational context, where linguistic diversity presents unique challenges for English language instructions, the quality of teacher-student relationships assumes heightened importance (Mazhar, 2020). Students from diverse linguistic backgrounds must navigate the complexities of English grammar while often managing potential conflicts between their native languages and English structural patterns. In such contexts, supportive teacher-student relationships may serve as crucial mediating factors that either facilitate or hinder grammatical competence development.

The theoretical foundation for examining teacher-student relationships as motivational factors draws from multiple educational and psychological frameworks, including the social capital theory, which emphasises the value of social connections in educational achievement, and educational effectiveness research, which identifies relationship quality as among the most significant factors influencing learning outcomes (Cahyan & Tiarsiwi, 2021). These frameworks suggest that positive interpersonal dynamics create conducive environments for risk-taking, error correction, and sustained engagement with challenging academic content such as English grammar.

However, despite growing recognition of the importance of teacher-student relationships, critical examination of this phenomenon reveals several areas requiring deeper investigation. Current research often treats teacher-student relationships as uniformly beneficial without sufficient attention to the mechanisms through which these relationships operate, the conditions under which they are most effective, or the potential negative consequences of over-reliance on interpersonal factors at the expense of instructional quality.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a critical examination of positive teacher-student relationships as motivators for grammar learning among the senior secondary school students. Through systematic analysis of existing research and theoretical frameworks, the investigation seeks to illuminate both the potential and limitations of relationship-focused approaches to grammar instructions, ultimately contributing to more nuanced understanding of effective pedagogical practices in language education.

Objectives

This non-empirical study aims at identifying whether positive teacher-student relationship is a motivating factor to the learning grammar among secondary school students and examining the extent positive-teacher student relationship is a motivating factor to the learning of grammar among secondary school students.

Literature Review

Teacher-Student Relationships in Educational Context

Teacher-student relationships encompass the complex interpersonal dynamics that develop between educators and learners within formal educational settings. These relationships are characterised by patterns of interaction, communication, emotional connection, and mutual influence that extend beyond the mere transmission of academic content (Javier et al., 2020). In the context of language education, particularly grammar instruction, these relationships assume particular significance due to the inherently challenging and often anxiety-provoking nature of language learning.

The conceptualisation of positive teacher-student relationships typically includes several dimensions: trust and mutual respect, effective communication, emotional support, and academic guidance. Trust represents the foundation upon which meaningful educational interactions are built, enabling students to take risks necessary for language learning, such as attempting complex grammatical constructions or asking questions about confusing rules (Pirani, 2021). Effective communication involves not merely the transmission of grammatical information but the creation of dialogic spaces where students feel heard, understood, and valued as individuals.

Research indicates that positive teacher-student relationships are characterised by teachers who demonstrate genuine care for students' wellbeing, maintain high but achievable expectations, provide consistent and constructive feedback, and create emotionally-safe learning environments (Miftachul & Gozali, 2023). These characteristics are particularly relevant for grammar instructions, which often require sustained practice, error correction, and gradual competence building over extended periods.

Grammar Learning and Motivational Factors

Grammar learning remains a multifaceted educational challenge that requires integration of explicit rule knowledge, implicit linguistic intuition, and practical application skills. The complexity of English grammar, with its numerous exceptions, irregular patterns, and contextual variations, presents particular difficulties for learners, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds (Roshy & Manoj, 2020).

Motivation in grammar learning operates through multiple mechanisms including intrinsic interest in language patterns, extrinsic rewards for grammatical accuracy, social approval for communication effectiveness, and personal satisfaction from mastery achievement. Research suggests that motivation for grammar learning is

significantly influenced by the learning environment, teaching methods employed, and the quality of relationships students develop with their teachers (Arni & Suryania, 2022).

The relationship between motivation and grammar learning effectiveness is mediated by several factors including anxiety levels, self-efficacy beliefs, persistence in the face of difficulties, and willingness to engage in meaningful practice. Students who develop positive relationships with their teachers often demonstrate reduced anxiety, increased self-confidence, and greater willingness to engage with challenging grammatical concepts (Harun et al., 2024).

Empirical Evidence for Teacher-Student Relationship Effects

Multiple studies have documented significant associations between teacher-student relationship quality and various educational outcomes, including language learning achievement. A comprehensive meta-analysis examining over 800 educational interventions found that teacher-student relationships ranked among the most effective factors for improving academic performance, with effect sizes exceeding those of many popular educational reforms (Muhammad & Abdollah, 2020).

Specific research on language learning has demonstrated that students who report positive relationships with their English language teachers show improved performance on grammar assessments, increased participation in classroom activities, and greater persistence when encountering difficult grammatical concepts. However, it is important to note that these studies often employ correlational designs that cannot definitively establish causal relationships between teacher-student interactions and grammar learning outcomes (Nurbiana, 2022).

Longitudinal research provides somewhat stronger evidence for causal effects. A study following students over multiple academic years found that improvements in teacher-student relationship quality preceded improvements in grammar test scores, suggesting that relationship enhancement may indeed contribute to better learning outcomes rather than simply reflecting existing achievement differences (Sophie & Cislighi, 2020).

Mechanisms through which Relationships Influence Learning

Research has identified several mechanisms through which positive teacher-student relationships may influence grammar learning outcomes. The emotional support mechanism suggests that caring teacher relationships reduce students' anxiety and stress, which can interfere with the cognitive processes required for grammar acquisition. When students feel emotionally safe, they are more likely to take the risks necessary for language learning, such as attempting complex sentence constructions or asking questions about confusing rules.

The instructional mechanism emphasises how positive relationships enable teachers to provide more effective, personalised instruction. Teachers who know their students well can tailor grammar instructions to individual learning styles, provide culturally relevant examples, and adjust pacing to meet student needs. This personalisation may significantly improve the effectiveness of grammar instructions (Agus, 2020).

The motivational mechanism focuses on how positive teacher relationships increase student motivation and engagement with grammar learning. Students who feel valued and supported by their teachers demonstrate greater intrinsic motivation to master grammatical concepts, increased persistence when facing difficulties, and more positive attitudes towards English language learning generally (Mohsin *et al.*, 2020).

The feedback mechanism highlights the role of relationships in enabling effective corrective feedback. Students who trust their teachers are more likely to accept and act upon grammar corrections, view errors as learning opportunities rather than failures, and seek additional help when needed. This creates a positive cycle of improvement in grammatical competence over time.

Classroom Climate and Peer Relationship Factors

Research indicates that teacher-student relationships operate within broader classroom climates that include peer relationships, classroom management approaches, and overall school culture. Positive teacher-student relationships contribute to more positive classroom climates, which in turn support better peer relationships and collaborative learning opportunities that can enhance grammar instruction effectiveness (Dewiana *et al.*, 2020).

Studies have shown that classrooms characterised by positive teacher-student relationships also tend to have better peer interactions, reduced bullying, and increased collaborative learning. For grammar instructions. This means students have more opportunities to practise grammatical structures through peer interactions, receive peer feedback on their language use, and engage in collaborative grammar-focused activities (Chaolin *et al.*, 2022).

However, research also suggests that the relationship between teacher-student relationships and classroom climate is complex and bidirectional. While positive teacher relationships can improve classroom climate, negative peer relationships or disruptive classroom environments can undermine even strong teacher-student connections.

Cultural and Contextual Considerations

A critical gap in existing research concerns the limited attention to cultural and contextual factors that may influence the relationship between teacher-student interactions and grammar learning outcomes. Most research on teacher-student relationships has been conducted in Western, individualistic educational contexts,

with limited investigations of how these relationships operate in collectivistic cultures or in multilingual educational environments.

Nigerian educational contexts present unique considerations including linguistic diversity, resource constraints, large class sizes, and cultural norms regarding teacher-student interactions that may differ significantly from contexts where most research has been conducted. These factors may significantly influence both the formation of teacher-student relationships and their impact on grammar learning outcomes.

Research conducted in similar African educational contexts suggests that cultural expectations regarding teacher authority, student deference, and communication patterns may create different dynamics than those observed in Western educational settings. This raises questions about the generalisability of findings from predominantly Western research to Nigerian educational contexts.

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding how teacher-student relationships influence educational outcomes, including grammar learning competence. Originally developed by sociologists to explain how social networks and relationships create value for individuals and communities, Social Capital Theory has been successfully adapted to educational contexts to illuminate the ways interpersonal connections contribute to academic achievement.

In educational settings, social capital manifests through the relationships, trust, reciprocity, and shared norms that exist between teachers, students, families, and communities. Teachers serve as crucial sources of social capital for students, providing not only academic instructions but also social and emotional support, access to resources, and connections to broader educational opportunities (Wahyuni et al., 2022). The theory suggests that students with access to positive teacher relationships possess greater social capital, which translates into improved academic outcomes through multiple pathways.

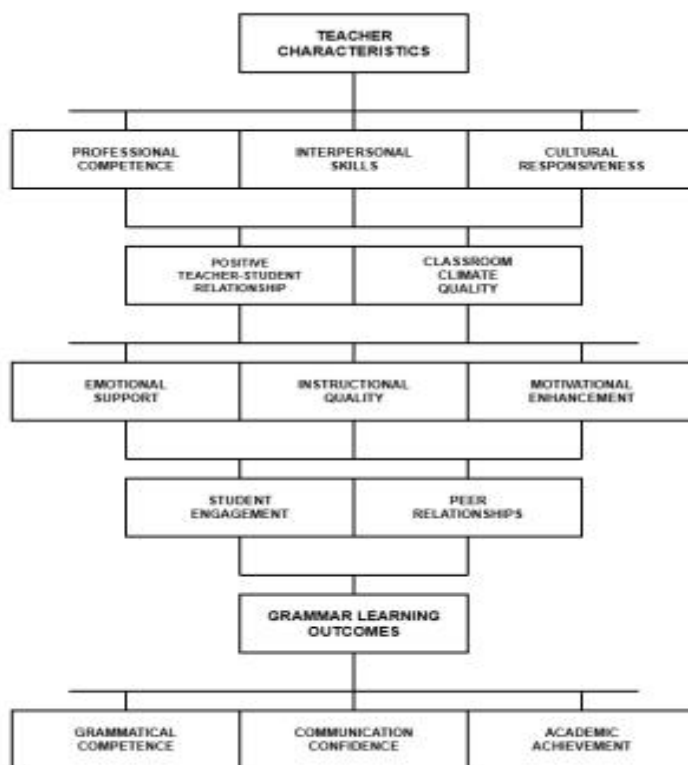
For grammar learning specifically, Social Capital Theory explains how positive teacher-student relationships create conditions that facilitate language acquisition through increased access to linguistic models, enhanced feedback opportunities, reduced anxiety barriers, and improved motivation for sustained practice. Teachers who establish strong relationships with students can provide personalised instruction, culturally responsive pedagogy, and emotional support that directly impact students' willingness and ability to engage with complex grammatical structures.

The theory also emphasises the cumulative and transferable nature of social capital. Students who develop positive relationships with one teacher often demonstrate improved capacity for forming similar relationships with other educators, creating a

positive feedback loop that enhances their overall educational experience and academic achievement (Nurbaiti et al., 2023).

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model illustrating the relationship between positive teacher-student relationships and grammar learning motivation demonstrates the complex pathways through which interpersonal dynamics influence educational outcomes.



This model demonstrates how teacher characteristics influence the development of positive teacher-student relationships, which operate through multiple mechanisms to affect student outcomes. The model emphasises the interconnected nature of these factors and their cumulative impact on grammar learning.

Content Analysis

Analysis of existing literature reveals several critical insights regarding the relationship between teacher-student dynamics and grammar learning outcomes. The evidence consistently demonstrates positive correlations between relationship quality and academic achievement yet, the strength and consistency of these relationships vary significantly across studies and contexts.

Methodological Limitations: A substantial portion of research relies on correlational designs that cannot establish causal relationships between teacher-student interactions

and learning outcomes. While longitudinal studies provide stronger evidence, they remain limited in number and scope. Many studies also suffer from small sample sizes, limited demographic diversity, and inadequate control for confounding variables such as socioeconomic status, prior achievement, and school quality.

Cultural Context Neglect: The overwhelming majority of research has been conducted in Western educational contexts, with minimal attention to how cultural factors may influence the formation and impact of teacher-student relationships. This limitation is particularly problematic when attempting to apply findings to diverse educational settings such as those found in Nigeria.

Mechanism Identification: While research has identified multiple mechanisms through which teacher-student relationships may influence learning outcomes, the relative importance of these mechanisms and their interaction effects remain poorly understood. This makes it difficult to develop targeted interventions that maximise the positive impact of relationship-focused approaches.

Individual Variation: Studies often report average effects without sufficient attention to individual differences in how students respond to various relationship approaches. Some students may benefit significantly from close teacher relationships whilst others may prefer more formal interactions, yet this variation is rarely systematically examined.

Temporal Dynamics: Limited research has examined how teacher-student relationships develop over time and how their effects on learning outcomes may change across different developmental periods or academic years. This temporal dimension is crucial for understanding optimal timing and duration of relationship-building interventions.

The evidence regarding positive teacher-student relationships as motivators for grammar learning presents a complex picture that requires careful interpretation. While the research consistently demonstrates positive associations between relationship quality and learning outcomes, several critical considerations emerge from this analysis.

The theoretical frameworks of Social Capital Theory and Educational Effectiveness Research provide compelling explanations for why positive teacher-student relationships should enhance grammar learning. These relationships create conditions that reduce anxiety, increase motivation, enable personalised instruction, and facilitate effective feedback - all factors that should theoretically improve grammatical competence development. However, the empirical evidence, while supportive, reveals significant limitations that warrant cautious interpretation.

One critical concern involves the potential oversimplification of the relationship between interpersonal dynamics and academic achievement. Many studies treat

teacher-student relationships as uniformly positive influences without adequate consideration of the conditions under which these relationships are most beneficial or the potential negative consequences of certain relationship approaches. For instance, overly protective teacher relationships might reduce students' independence and resilience, while inappropriate boundary crossing could create ethical concerns.

The cultural context limitation represents a particularly significant challenge for applying existing research to Nigerian educational settings. Western individualistic approaches to teacher-student relationships may not translate effectively to collectivistic cultural contexts where different norms govern teacher authority, student deference, and appropriate interpersonal interactions. This cultural mismatch could lead to ineffective or potentially counterproductive interventions if not carefully considered.

Furthermore, the mechanisms through which teacher-student relationships influence grammar learning require more sophisticated examination. While emotional support, instructional personalisation, and motivational enhancement all appear important, their relative contributions and interaction effects remain poorly understood. This limitation makes it difficult to develop evidence-based strategies that maximise relationship benefits while minimising potential costs.

The individual variation in student responses to different relationship approaches also demands attention. Some students may thrive in warm, nurturing teacher relationships whilst others may perform better with more formal, task-focused interactions. Understanding these individual differences is crucial to developing responsive pedagogical approaches that meet diverse student needs.

Conclusion

This critical examination of positive teacher-student relationships as motivators for grammar learning amongst senior secondary school students reveals both significant potential and important limitations. The evidence supports the conclusion that positive teacher-student relationships can indeed serve as important motivational catalysts for grammar learning, operating through multiple mechanisms including emotional support, instructional personalisation, and enhanced feedback effectiveness.

However, the relationship between teacher-student dynamics and grammar learning outcomes is considerably more complex than simple cause-effect models suggest. The effectiveness of relationship-focused approaches depends heavily on cultural context, individual student characteristics, instructional quality, and broader educational system factors that are often inadequately considered in existing research.

The predominance of Western-based research creates particular challenges for understanding how these relationships operate within Nigerian educational contexts, where different cultural norms, linguistic diversity, and resource constraints may significantly influence both relationship formation and learning outcomes. This

limitation necessitates careful adaptation of relationship-building strategies to local contexts rather than uncritical adoption of Western approaches.

Critical gaps in current understanding include inadequate attention to individual variation in student responses to different relationship approaches, limited investigation of temporal dynamics in relationship development and effects, and insufficient examination of the mechanisms through which relationships influence learning outcomes. These gaps suggest important directions for future research that could enhance both theoretical understanding and practical applications.

The analysis also reveals potential risks associated with over-emphasis on relationship factors at the expense of instructional quality, content knowledge, and systemic educational improvements. While positive teacher-student relationships clearly contribute to educational effectiveness, they cannot compensate for inadequate curriculum, poor instructional methods, or systemic resource deficiencies.

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