

A Study on the Impact of Perceived Teacher Support on English Academic Achievement among Senior Elementary School Students

Yingxin Li¹, Xindi Yang^{2*}

¹Department of Foreign Language Teaching and Research, Hebei Normal University, Shijiazhuang 050024, China

²College of Teacher Education, Hebei Normal University, Shijiazhuang 050024, China

*Corresponding author: Xindi Yang, yangxindi20020103@163.com

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of perceived teacher support on the English academic achievement of senior elementary school students. A total of 239 fifth-grade students from a primary school in Hebei Province participated in the study. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative questionnaires and qualitative semi-structured interviews, the research examined the level of students' perceived teacher support and its relationship with English academic achievement. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between perceived teacher support and English academic achievement, indicating that higher levels of perceived support are associated with better English performance. Regression analysis further confirmed the positive predictive effect of perceived teacher support on academic achievement. The study underscores the importance of fostering positive teacher-student relationships and offers practical insights for English teaching in primary schools.

Keywords: Perceived teacher support; English academic achievement; Senior elementary school students; Teaching environment

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1. Introduction

The elementary school years represent a critical period in which students transition from family-based education to formal schooling. This stage is vital for cultivating effective learning habits and attitudes, laying the groundwork for future academic pursuits. During this phase, teachers are among the most influential figures in students' lives. Because of their young age and limited capacity for independent reasoning, elementary school students often rely heavily on their teachers, who play a significant role in shaping both academic and everyday experiences. Students are more likely to trust and internalize knowledge and values imparted by teachers whom they respect and with whom they have a close relationship. Therefore, examining students' perceptions of teacher support is essential for understanding and enhancing their academic outcomes.

This study collects data on fifth-grade students' perceived teacher support and their final English examination scores to explore the relationship between these variables. By analyzing how perceived teacher support influences English academic achievement, we can gain deeper insights into the psychological and instructional factors affecting student learning. The findings may serve as a reference for English teachers seeking to adapt their instructional strategies, support student learning, and improve academic performance.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definitions of perceived teacher support

Teacher support, as a key form of social support, originates from the broader concept of social support, which refers to an individual's perception of assistance available within their social network ^[1]. Social support may take various forms, including emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support ^[2].

Perceived teacher support refers to students' views on the attitudes and behaviors of teachers towards their learning and daily life ^[3]. It is also defined as the extent to which students trust their teachers' values and perceive a positive interpersonal relationship with them ^[4]. Teacher support can be considered both as a global construct and as a multidimensional variable encompassing emotional, academic, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support ^[5-7].

Based on the above research, this study defines perceived teacher support as the behaviors and attitudes of English teachers that students can perceive during the process of learning English.

2.2. Relationships between perceived teacher support and academic achievement

Early experimental research on teacher support dates back to 1968, when Rosenthal and Jacobson introduced the "Pygmalion effect" based on a primary school experiment ^[8]. They demonstrated that when educators maintain high expectations and offer encouragement tailored to students' individual characteristics—such as smiling, affirming strengths, and communicating patiently—students tend to feel more accepted and respected, which can enhance their motivation, self-confidence, and academic achievement. In recent years, the academic community has gradually focused on the impact of perceived teacher support on students' academic performance. Studies suggest that a supportive school environment can indirectly affect students' academic performance through learning motivation and academic self-efficacy ^[9]. In elementary school mathematics classrooms, teacher support is often directed towards lower-achieving students, and it has a positive impact on their academic achievement ^[10]. In addition, teacher support has a positive correlation and predictive effect on college students' English oral performance and grades, and it also reveals the mediating role of classroom engagement, positive academic emotions, basic psychological needs, and classroom participation ^[11,12].

In summary, perceived teacher support has been well-validated in theory and has been proven to have a significant positive impact on students' academic achievement in practice. However, most existing research focuses on middle school students, with limited attention paid to primary school students' perceived teacher support in English classrooms and their impact on English grades.

2.3. Research questions

This study focuses on the perceived teacher support among senior elementary school students and its impact on their English academic achievement. The following research questions are proposed:

- (1) What is the current status of perceived teacher support among senior elementary school students?
- (2) What is the relationship between perceived teacher support and English academic achievement?

(3) How does perceived teacher support influence their English academic achievement?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

This study employed convenience sampling. The participants were 259 fifth-grade primary school students from five classes in a primary school in Hebei Province. After excluding 20 invalid responses, 239 valid questionnaires were retained (effective response rate: 92.27%). The sample included 126 boys (52.7%) and 113 girls (47.3%). The five classes were taught by two English teachers, both aged between 40 and 45 years old, with teaching experience of 23 and 25 years respectively. Both followed the same curriculum and maintained a relatively strict classroom management style.

3.2. Instruments

The research instruments included a perceived teacher support questionnaire and the final English examination for Grade 5. Consent was obtained from both the students and their class managers before the survey. The filling requirements and precautions were explained to the students before the survey began. With the help of the class managers, the questionnaires were distributed to the students in the class, and the participants were asked to fill them out carefully. The perceived teacher support questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot), and the final English examination was scored out of 100.

(1) Perceived teacher support

The teacher support subscale of the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS) developed by Malecki and Demaray was used^[13]. The CASSS has two versions. The Level 1 version, suitable for Grades 3–6, includes 10 items across three dimensions: emotional support, academic support, and informational support. The original English version was translated by the author and reviewed by two primary English teachers to ensure clarity and appropriateness. The scale used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = a lot). In this study, the internal consistency reliability of the perceived teacher support scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.888$) was satisfactory.

(2) English academic achievement

The English academic achievement in this study was measured using final exam scores from the spring 2024 semester. The exam included listening, grammar choice, cloze tests, reading comprehension, sentence construction, vocabulary, and writing sections, providing a comprehensive assessment of English proficiency. Grading was conducted jointly by multiple schools within the same municipal unit to ensure fairness and validity. Scores were categorized into four levels: A, B, C, and D.

(3) Semi-structured interview

To further explore the perceptual characteristics of senior elementary school students regarding teacher support and to supplement the quantitative data, this study also conducted semi-structured interviews. Five primary school students and one Grade 5 primary school English teacher were selected for interviews randomly. The students' interviews were accompanied by their class managers throughout. Before the interviews, the author informed the interviewees of the purpose and precautions to ensure the objectivity of the interviews as much as possible.

3.3. Data analysis

The collected questionnaires were used for the quantitative research in this study. To ensure the authenticity

and validity of the study, questionnaires with incomplete information or careless responses were excluded. The cleaned data were then entered into a computer and analyzed using SPSS 27.0. Firstly, descriptive statistical analysis, independent-samples T-tests, and one-way analysis of variance were conducted to investigate the current status and characteristics of perceived teacher support among senior elementary school students. Subsequently, Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between perceived teacher support and English academic achievement among primary school students. Finally, univariate regression analysis was employed to further test the impact of perceived teacher support on English academic achievement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. The interview content was recorded and subsequently transcribed for the purpose of qualitative coding analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Results of descriptive statistics

The data of this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS 27.0. The results show that the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis for all variables were less than 1, indicating that the data of the variables generally followed a normal distribution. Preliminary descriptive statistics are conducted on perceived teacher support of the sample, and the results are shown in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of PTS ($n = 239$)

	Mini	Max	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
PTS	1.60	5.00	3.50	0.81
ES	1.00	5.00	3.08	0.98
AS	1.67	5.00	3.98	0.86
IS	1.00	5.00	3.58	0.92

Notes: PTS = Perceived teacher support; ES = Emotional support; AS = Academic support; IS = Informational support. The same as below.

According to the authoritative standard, on the Likert five-point scale, an average score between 1.0 and 2.4 is considered a low score, between 2.5 and 3.4 is considered a moderate score, and between 3.5 and 5.0 is generally regarded as a high score^[14]. As shown in the table, the overall perceived teacher support among senior elementary school students ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.81$) is at a high level, and emotional support ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.98$) is at a slightly above moderate level, while academic support ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.86$) and informational support ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.92$) are at relatively high levels.

The results of the independent-samples t -test are shown in **Table 2**. The results show that there are no significant differences in the overall and dimensional levels of perceived teacher support between different genders ($P > 0.05$). However, compared to male students, female students in senior elementary school still have a slightly higher level of perceived teacher support ($t < 0$).

Table 2. Gender differences analysis of PTS ($n = 239$)

	Male ($n = 126$)		Female ($n = 113$)		<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
PTS	3.46	0.84	3.55	0.78	-0.858	0.392
ES	3.05	1.02	3.11	0.93	-0.500	0.617
AS	3.93	0.87	4.03	0.85	-0.906	0.366
IS	3.52	0.98	3.64	0.84	-0.976	0.330

The results of the one-way analysis of variance are shown in **Table 3**. There are significant differences in overall perceived teacher support among students with different grade levels. Students with English grades in the A level have significantly higher perceived teacher support than those in the B level ($MD = 0.137, P > 0.05$), and significantly higher than students in the C level ($MD = 0.491, P < 0.05$) and D level ($MD = 0.476, P < 0.05$).

Table 3. Grade levels differences analysis of PTS ($n = 239$)

Grade levels	A ($n = 113$)	B ($n = 47$)	C ($n = 38$)	D ($n = 41$)	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
	M ± SD	M ± SD	M ± SD	M ± SD		
PTS	3.686 ± 0.845	3.549 ± 0.768	3.195 ± 0.665	3.210 ± 0.763	5.879	<0.001

4.2. Results of correlation analysis

To examine the correlation between perceived teacher support and English academic achievement among senior elementary school students, this study employed Pearson correlation analysis. The results are shown in **Table 4**.

According to the results of the data analysis, there are significant positive correlations between overall perceived teacher support and its dimensions and English academic achievement among senior elementary school students ($P < 0.01$). The correlation coefficients show that overall perceived teacher support ($r = 0.242$), emotional support ($r = 0.209$), academic support ($r = 0.238$), and informational support ($r = 0.195$) have low positive correlations with English academic achievement. That is, the more support students perceive from their English teachers in various aspects, the higher their English academic achievement is.

Table 4. Correlation results between PTS and EAA ($n = 239$)

	1	2	3	4	5
PTS	1				
ES	0.907**	1			
AS	0.824**	0.583**	1		
IS	0.894**	0.714**	0.669**	1	
EAA	0.242**	0.209**	0.238**	0.195**	1

Notes: EAA = English academic achievement; The same as below. ** $P < 0.01$

Moreover, overall perceived teacher support is highly significantly positively correlated with its different dimensions ($r > 0, P < 0.01$), indicating that the various aspects of teacher support perceived by students develop consistently. This reveals the intrinsic consistency and synergy of the behavior of teacher support.

4.3. Results of regression analysis

To further verify the impact of perceived teacher support and its dimensions on English academic achievement among senior elementary school students, this study employs univariate regression analysis. The results are shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Regression analysis results of PTS and EAA ($n = 239$)

	R	R²	SE	Adjusted R²	F	B	Beta	t	sig
PTS	0.242	0.059	18.846	0.055	14.782	5.770	0.242	3.845	<0.001
ES	0.209	0.044	18.994	0.040	10.847	4.147	0.209	3.294	<0.05
AE	0.238	0.057	18.864	0.053	14.292	5.362	0.238	3.780	<0.001
IE	0.195	0.038	19.051	0.034	9.388	4.124	0.195	3.064	<0.05

According to the results in **Table 5**, overall perceived teacher support and its dimensions all have a significant impact on English academic achievement among senior elementary school students ($P < 0.01$). Specifically, overall perceived teacher support ($t = 3.845$, $P < 0.001$), emotional support ($t = 3.294$, $P < 0.05$), academic support ($t = 3.780$, $P < 0.001$), and informational support ($t = 3.064$, $P < 0.05$) all positively predict English academic achievement among senior elementary school students. That is, the more support students perceive from their teachers in various aspects, the higher the learners' grades will be.

5. Discussion

5.1. The general profiles of perceived teacher support

The results of descriptive statistics and the analysis of the current situation reflect the overall characteristics of perceived teacher support among senior elementary school students. This study finds that the overall level of perceived teacher support among the participants is relatively high. This is consistent with the findings of Bru's study on perceived teacher support of primary school students^[15], indicating that primary school students have a strong dependence on teachers and are very sensitive to the support and encouragement provided by teachers. Teachers can also provide the necessary help and support to students in academic, emotional, and informational aspects. In different dimensions, perceived teacher support shows different levels, as detailed below.

Firstly, academic and informational support were perceived at high levels, indicating student recognition of teachers' instructional competence and commitment. Teachers are also responsible and can provide help and support for students' English learning and personal growth.

Interview data revealed that teachers were perceived as patient and accessible, both in and out of class. Teachers viewed elementary school as a critical period for English learning and emphasized foundational skills and active engagement. They should teach students the correct learning methods, encourage them to think actively and ask questions, and lay a solid foundation for their English learning as much as possible.

Secondly, emotional support is at a medium level, relatively low. This is related to the role of the English teachers in this study. According to the interviews of the participants, neither of the two English teachers involved in this study serves as the class manager. They are only responsible for the English teaching tasks of the class and have limited contact with students outside of class time. Moreover, their classroom styles are both relatively strict. Therefore, most students are reluctant to seek help from their English teachers when they are in a bad mood and find it difficult to perceive emotional support from their English teachers.

The results of the independent-samples *t*-test show that there are no significant differences in overall perceived teacher support and its dimensions between male and female students. However, female students still have higher levels of perceived teacher support in all aspects compared to male students. This is consistent with previous research findings^[16]. The reason for this result is speculated to be related to the developmental stage-specific characteristics. Children aged 10–12 are in a period of intensified gender role identification^[17]. Boys are expected to be independent and strong and may downplay their perception of teacher support to demonstrate their independence. In contrast, girls have more exquisite emotions and stronger comprehension abilities, and their sensitivity to interpersonal relationships is particularly prominent at this stage. Therefore, in the same classroom environment, girls are more likely to perceive the support and encouragement from teachers.

The results of the one-way analysis of variance show that there are significant differences in perceived teacher support among students with different academic achievement levels. Although English teachers treat all students equally in class, students in the level A ($M = 3.686$) still have higher perceived teacher support than those in the level B ($M = 3.549$), level C ($M = 3.195$), and level D ($M = 3.210$). This is because students with higher English grades are more actively engaged in English learning, interact more frequently with English teachers both in and out of class, actively answer and think about the questions, and also proactively seek comfort and help from teachers due to fluctuations in learning and English grades. Therefore, students with higher English grades perceive more support from their English teachers, which is also consistent with the correlation results between perceived teacher support and English academic achievement.

5.2. Correlations between perceived teacher support and English academic achievement

According to the research results, perceived teacher support and its dimensions among senior elementary school students are significantly correlated with English academic achievement. That is, students who perceive more support from their English teachers tend to have higher English grades, which is consistent with the findings of a previous study^[18]. According to Social Support Theory, supportive environmental factors can interact with positive social behaviors. In this case, a high level of perceived teacher support can enhance students' personal factors, such as learning engagement, academic emotions, second language grit, and expected effort^[19,20], thereby affecting their academic performance. On the other hand, students with excellent grades can also receive more attention and encouragement from English teachers, which promotes the construction of a positive and good teacher-student relationship.

Moreover, overall perceived teacher support and its three dimensions are significantly correlated with English academic achievement. Compared to individual dimensions, when emotional support, academic support, and informational support are combined, the correlation with academic achievement is higher. This indicates that in this case, students can not only perceive feedback from teachers on subject knowledge and learning, thereby improving their cognitive abilities, but also maintain a good mood and enhance their self-learning abilities, promoting their overall development and significantly contributing to effective learning.

In addition, overall perceived teacher support and its different dimensions are significantly positively correlated, indicating that perceived teacher support is an integrated and systematic psychological structure. In practice, a teacher who is perceived as highly supportive by students often exhibits multidimensional and comprehensive supportive behaviors, rather than being confined to a single dimension. For example, a teacher who provides effective academic support is also good at offering emotional care and encouragement.

5.3. Analysis of the impact of perceived teacher support on English academic achievement

This study demonstrates that perceived teacher support among senior elementary school students has a positive predictive effect on English academic achievement, indicating that students who perceive more support from their English teachers tend to have higher English grades. This is consistent with previous research ^[21], suggesting that when schools create a supportive environment and positive teacher-student relationships, students are more actively engaged in learning, leading to greater knowledge acquisition and better grades. According to Social Support Theory, the support that individuals perceive from their social networks can promote pro-social behavior, reduce individual stress, and foster a healthy psyche ^[22]. Teacher support, as a crucial source of support within a complex social structure, directly affects students' academic performance and psychological well-being ^[23].

This study compares the impact of three different dimensions of perceived teacher support on English academic achievement, showing that all three have significant but varying effects. Among the three dimensions, academic support has the greatest impact on academic achievement, followed by emotional support. The reason for this phenomenon may be that primary school students' daily contact with English teachers mainly comes from the classroom, and providing academic support is a fundamental responsibility of teachers. Primary school students also lack the ability to think more deeply about the learning content, and their understanding of knowledge is limited to what is presented in the classroom. Their learning is highly dependent on the teacher's guidance. Moreover, students' learning is largely related to their closeness with teachers. If students perceive respect and care from teachers, they will feel psychologically closer to the teachers, become more engaged in the classroom, and thus affect their academic performance. Therefore, compared to informational support, academic and emotional support have a greater impact on English academic achievement.

Through interviews with participants, this study further reveals that teachers believe primary school students are highly dependent on them during school hours and value their attitudes and opinions. The more support students perceive from teachers, the more they feel valued and praised, and the more they believe their hard work is recognized by the teachers. This, in turn, stimulates students' interest and motivation to learn, thereby affecting their English grades. Conversely, if primary school students do not perceive teacher support, they may feel neglected or constantly criticized, which can lead to fear of the teacher and negatively impact their listening efficiency and interest in learning, resulting in a decline in English grades.

6. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that senior elementary school students can perceive a high level of support from their English teachers, which not only has a significant positive correlation with students' English academic achievement but also positively predicts it. In summary, this study confirms that perceived teacher support among senior elementary school students has an important impact on English academic achievement. These findings enrich the theoretical understanding of teacher support and provide empirical support for cultivating supportive learning environments and positive teacher-student relationships. Meanwhile, the findings also offer references for educational policymakers in strengthening teacher support, behavior training, and guidance. However, the study is limited by its sample scope and cross-sectional design. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, incorporate longitudinal designs, and control for additional variables to better understand the long-term effects of teacher support on academic and personal development.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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