

Research Article

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The Role of Social Relations in the Academic Performance of Primary School Students in Vietnam

Thanh Ha Le , Thi Hong Nhat Nguyen , Minh Duc Bui , Phu Thong Thai Nguyen

Abstract

Background/purpose. Students' social relationships have a significant impact on their academic performance. This study aimed to examine the predictive impact of teacher-student, student-student relationships, and parental involvement on student academic performance.

Materials/methods. This study was conducted with 309 students, using the academic performance, relationships with teachers, perceptions of class relationships, and parental involvement scales as the data collection tools, employing multiple regression analysis.

Results. Results showed that good relationships with teachers, peers, and parental involvement positively predicted students' academic performance. Among them, relationships with peers had the most significant influence ($\beta=0.268$, $p<0.01$). Results also showed that having intimate friends in class, good relationships with parents, and participating in extracurricular activities have positive impacts on students' academic performance.

Conclusion. The findings suggested recommendations for educational policies.

1. Introduction

Entering primary school is a significant milestone in a child's educational journey. It marks the transition from the playful environment of kindergarten to a more structured, knowledge-focused learning environment. During this important period, children adapt to more disciplined routines, acquire new knowledge, and develop important skills that lay the foundation for their future success.

During this period, children's learning tasks gradually increase, and their time spent studying and playing at school also increases. As a result, they spend more time with their classmates and teachers than with their parents and family.

The academic success of primary school students is intricately connected to a multitude of social factors. Relationships with teachers form the backbone of a supportive learning environment, where positive interactions can foster a child's enthusiasm and commitment to their studies. Likewise, peer relationships play a crucial role; friendships and peer acceptance significantly contribute to a student's sense of belonging and motivation, thereby enhancing their learning experiences. Parental involvement is another cornerstone, where engaged and supportive parents can significantly impact a child's educational journey by reinforcing learning at home and actively participating in school activities. In Vietnam, studies primarily focus on the impact of social relations on the mental health and life satisfaction of primary school students, with a notable lack of research on academic performance. This highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of the role of social relations in students' academic performance.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do primary school students' social relationships affect their academic performance?
2. Are primary school student demographics related to academic performance?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Primary school students' social relationships and academic performance

Most previous studies have indicated a correlation between the quality of social relationships and students' academic performance; positive relationships can predict good academic performance, while conflicted relationships can predict poor academic performance. Research to date has primarily focused on the impact of various types of social relationships on academic performance.

Regarding the relationship between parents and students, previous studies have found that parental support is a predictor of students' academic performance (Castro et al., 2015; Igbo et al., 2015; Wentzel, 1998). For example, Igbo et al. (2015) discovered that the relationship between parents and students has a significant impact on mathematics and English test scores. Castro et al. (2015) found that the frequency of students' interactions with family members has a positive impact on academic outcomes. This study shows that parents influence students by building positive educational values through directing children toward learning activities.

Teacher-student relationships have been shown to significantly impact academic outcomes (Hajovsky et al., 2020; Ly et al., 2012). Positive teacher-student relationships can contribute to the development of students' cognitive skills. For example, Ly et al. (2012) described teacher-student relationships as intimacy, conflict, or warmth. They found that warmth scores in relationships with students (rated by teachers) had a significant and positive correlation with children's mathematics and reading outcomes. Hajovsky et al. (2020) studied two types of teacher-student relationships, intimacy and conflict, and found that while intimacy (rated by teachers) only had an indirect impact on mathematical achievement, conflict affected mathematical achievement both directly and indirectly.

Relationships between students and their peers are significantly related to students' academic performance (Espelage et al., 2013; Li et al., 2020; Vignery & Laurier, 2020). For example, using both cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis, Espelage et al. (2013) showed that bullying and being a victim of bullying are associated with low academic outcomes. In a study by Gremmen et al. (2018), a longitudinal social network analysis revealed that students' academic performance improved when their close friends scored higher, and vice versa, regardless of the students' seating position in the classroom. Complementing this, Vignery and Laurier (2020) identified selection effects (i.e., students tending to form friendships with peers of similar academic levels) and socialization processes (i.e., the influence of friends' academic achievements on students' future performance) as key mechanisms underlying the association between academic performance and friendship relationships.

2.2. Primary school students' social relationships and academic performance prediction

Identifying the type of social relationship most closely related to academic performance helps inform future educational planning. Only a few studies have compared the degree of correlation between different types of personal relationships and students' academic performance (Altermatt, 2019; Chen, 2005; Vargas-Madriz & Konishi, 2021; Wentzel, 1998).

Altermatt (2019) found that academic support from peers, not parents or teachers, could predict academic effectiveness. Gao and Xue (2020) found that parental involvement has a greater impact on students' academic performance compared to peer influence, and it better explains the differences in students' academic achievement. Vargas-Madriz and Konishi (2021) found that parental support shows a direct relationship with academic engagement, while students' sense of school belonging moderates the relationship between peer/teacher support and academic engagement.

Other studies found that some personal relationships are less correlated with academic performance than others. Some studies found that student-parent and student-peer relationships are more related to academic performance than student-teacher relationships. For example, Leung et al. (2021) reported that while the quality of student-parent and student-peer relationships at time 1 was significantly related to academic performance at time 2 after controlling for academic performance at time 1, student-teacher relationships were not related to academic performance. Conversely, other studies found that student-parent and student-teacher relationships are more related to academic performance than student-peer relationships. For example, Wentzel et al. (2016) examined emotional support and perceived expectations from parents, teachers, and peers related to social behavior and academic activities in Mexican-American adolescents. Research results indicated that teacher and parent variables were important predictors of academic outcomes, while peer variables were important predictors of social behavior. Lam et al. (2012) demonstrated that it was not the perception of peer support, but rather teacher and parent support, that was indirectly related to academic performance through student engagement. According to previous research findings, the differences in the role of each social relationship on academic performance may stem from variations in social culture.

Previous studies have shown that parental involvement in children's learning has a positive impact on their academic performance at school (Parcel & Dufur, 2001; Tam & Chan, 2009). Parental involvement is also positively related to children's academic competence and attachment relationships (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005). Attachment relationships represent the degree to which children feel connected to their parents. Consistent with attachment theories (Furrer & Skinner, 2003), children with high attachment relationships can internalize their parents' values and expectations as their own (Marchant et al., 2001). The internalization process can increase children's learning motivation because good academic performance is a recognized means to repay or honor

parents' investment and sacrifice (Urdan & Maehr, 1995) as well as to gain relationships and approval from parents (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012).

This study evaluates primary students' academic achievement with key social relations, including teacher-student, student-student, and parent-student. The originality of this study lies in the joint evaluation of social relations and academic achievement variables within the context of Vietnam.

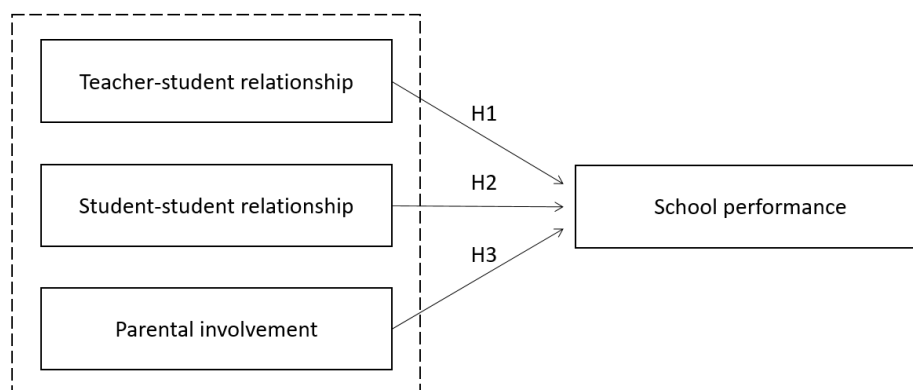


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the study

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and survey method

We used a convenience sampling method through a direct survey. The survey took place from October 7 to 18, 2024, at two primary schools in Tam Duong district (Vinh Phuc province) and Soc Son district (Hanoi) in the Northern part of Vietnam. The survey will only take place if the school, parents and students agree to participate. Before the survey, teachers and students were provided with full information about the content and purpose of the study, as well as a commitment to personal information confidentiality. Participation in the survey is completely voluntary and students may stop answering questions at any time. A total of 309 students filled the questionnaire.

3.2. Research instrument

Dependent variable

Academic Performance: To measure students' academic performance, we used the School Performance subscale of the Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale (CASAFS) (Spence et al., 2000). The scale includes 5 items (e.g., I get good marks in Math; I study well at school). Items are scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = Never; 4 = Always). Higher scores indicate better academic performance.

Predictor variables

To measure the relationship between “students and teachers”, “students and peers” and “parental involvement in school”, we used three subscales of the Socio-ecological school environment (John-Akinola & Nic Gabhainn, 2015).

Relationship with teacher: The scale comprises 5 items, using a 5-point Likert-type rating scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure student-teacher relationships. The items in the scale include: My teacher(s) make me feel a part of my school; My teacher(s) make me feel comfortable; My teacher(s) encourage us to say what we think in the class; My teacher(s) are nice; I like my teacher(s).

Perceptions of class relationships: The scale consists of 8 items, using a 5-point Likert-type rating scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure student-student relationships. The items in the scale include: friends are important in making me feel a part of my class, students encouraged to write down ideas, students support each other, students help each other, students enjoy working together, like reading together with other students class, it is important not to leave anybody out in class and classroom is a nice place for learning.

Parents participation in school: The scale assesses parents participation in students' school life with 3 items using a 4-point Likert-type rating scale from 1 (never) to 4 (always) to measure parents participation in students' school life (parents involved in school activities, parents made to feel a part of school and parents encouraged to talk about things that concern child in school).

3.3. Data analysis

The data collected from the survey were processed using SPSS version 26.0 software. We employed descriptive analysis, including the calculation of mean scores, standard deviations, frequencies, and proportions (Tables 1 & 2).

We used the T-test and ANOVA analysis to compare the learning performance between groups of students with different characteristics (Table 2). In this study, multiple regression analysis was performed with the dependent variable being self-assessment of academic performance, and the independent variables being relationships with peers, relationships with teachers, and parental involvement in students' learning activities.

4. Results

4.1. Characteristics of the sample and scales

Characteristics of the study sample are presented in Table 1. In our study, 309 participants completed the questionnaire, comprising 149 males (48.2%) and 160 females (51.8%). The group grade 3 comprises 74 students (23.9%), the group grade 4 comprises 138 students (44.7%), and the group grade 5 comprises 97 students (31.4%). Students without a title include 48 students (15.5%), students with a title of outstanding include 124 students (40.1%), and students with a title of excellent include 136 students (44%). Students having close friends in class include 293 students (94.8%), students having no close friends in class include 12 students (3.9%). More than half of the students ($n = 172$; 55.7%) felt that they had a good relationship with their parents, 139 students (39.8%) had a normal relationship, and 10 students (3.2%) felt that they had a poor relationship with their parents. Three-quarters of students said that their parents often encourage and motivate them to study ($n = 201$; 65%), 90 students (29.1%) said that their parents sometimes encourage and motivate them to study, only 15 students (4.5%) said that their parents do not encourage and motivate them to study. The majority of students in the study sample participated in sports and cultural activities outside of school hours (regularly: 39.5% and sometimes: 46.3%), 49 students (15.9%) did not participate in these activities outside of school hours.

Table 1. Characteristics of Sample (N = 309)

Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Grade	3	74	23.9
	4	138	44.7
	5	97	31.4
Gender	Female	158	51.1
	Male	149	48.2
Title	(1) No	48	15.5
	(2) Outstanding students	124	40.1
	(3) Excellent student	136	44.0
Having close friends in class	No	12	3.9
	Yes	293	94.8
Relationship with parents	(1) Not good	10	3.2
	(2) Normal	123	39.8
	(3) Very good	172	55.7
Parents encourage and motivate learning	(1) No	14	4.5
	(2) Yes, sometimes	90	29.1
	(3) Yes, regularly	201	65.0
Participate in sports, cultural activities outside of school hours	(1) No	49	15.9
	(2) Yes, sometimes	143	46.3
	(3) Yes, regularly	111	35.9

Table 2. Mean score of Academic performance, Perceptions of class relationships, Relationship with teacher, Parental involvement

Measure	Obs	Mean	SD
Academic performance	309	12.29	2.84
Perceptions of class relationships	309	25.82	6.12
Relationship with teacher	308	16.21	2.53
Parental involvement	309	7.69	1.91

4.2. Relationships between student characteristics and academic performance

There is a statistically significant difference between academic performance and grade ($p = 0.006$), gender ($p = 0.018$), having close friends in class ($p = 0.042$), relationship with parents ($p = 0.009$), parents' encouragement and motivation of learning ($p = 0.004$), and participation in sports and cultural activities outside of school hours ($p = 0.000$).

According to this finding, females' academic performance is significantly higher than males'; students who have close friends in class have better academic performance than students who do not have close friends in class; students who have good relationships with their parents and are

frequently encouraged by their parents to study have better academic performance than students who do not have good relationships with their parents and are less encouraged by their parents; students who regularly participate in cultural and sports activities outside of school hours have better academic performance than students who do not participate in these activities (Table 3).

Table 3. Characteristics of academic performance with demographic variables

		M(SD)	p - value
Grade	3	12.97(3.28)	0.006 [#]
	4	11.74(2.68)	
	5	12.54(2.58)	
Gender	Female	12.67(2.88)	0.018*
	Male	11.85(2.69)	
Having close friends in class	No	10.66(3.39)	0.042*
	Yes	12.35(2.78)	
Relationship with parents	(1) Not good	11.10(3.31)	0.009 [#]
	(2) Normal	11.81(2.50)	
	(3) Very good	12.73(3.00)	
Parents encourage and motivate learning	(1) No	10.78(2.35)	0.004 [#]
	(2) Yes, sometimes	11.71(2.40)	
	(3) Yes, regularly	12.68(3.00)	
Participate in sports and cultural activities outside of school hours	(1) No	11.61(2.42)	0.000 [#]
	(2) Yes, sometimes	11.83(2.57)	
	(3) Yes, regularly	13.21(3.17)	

Note: [#]One-way ANOVA

*Two-sample t test with equal variances

4.3. The influence of teacher-student, student-student relationships and parental involvement on academic performance

Linear regression analysis for multiple variables influencing students' academic performance showed that: Academic Performance = 0.111*Teacher-student relationship + 0.268*Student-student relationship + 0.132*Parental involvement. The teacher-student relationship, Student-student relationship, and Parental involvement factors explained 13% ($R^2_{adj} = 13\%$) of the students' academic performance changes, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Multiple regression of Academic performance change with teacher-student, student-student relationships and parental involvement

Academic Performance	Beta	t	p_value	Tolerance	VIF	R^2_{adj}
Teacher-student relationship	0.111	2.003	0.046	0.919	1.088	13%
Student-student relationship	0.268	4.743	0.000	0.889	1.125	
Parental involvement	0.132	2.390	0.017	0.935	1.070	

Table 4 shows the variables in the regression model meet the acceptance criteria (Tolerance > 0.2) (Weisburd & Britt, 2014). Furthermore, the t-test results evaluate the hypothesis of the significance of the regression coefficients and the coefficients of the independent variables in the model with VIF < 5, which proves that the model does not violate the multicollinearity assumption (Kutner, 2004). The standard regression values of the independent variables in the model are statistically significant.

5. Discussion

This study had two main purposes. Firstly, we investigated three factors —teacher-student relationship, student-student relationship, and parental involvement — that predict primary students' academic performance. Secondly, we investigated the impact of primary students' demographic characteristics on their academic performance. The key findings of the study are as follows:

The current study confirmed our hypothesis that three factors, Teacher-student relationship, Student-relationship, and Parental involvement, statistically influence their academic performance. Better relationships with friends had the most positive contribution to students' academic performance, better relationships with teachers had a positive association with students' academic performance, and parental involvement had a positive association with students' academic performance. The finding of a positive association with students' academic performance is consistent with previous studies of teacher-student relationships, student-student relationships, and parental involvement. Parents' involvement, as manifested in homework assistance and encouraged learning, in primary academic adjustment, makes children pay attention to school work (Barger et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2022). When a teacher has a strong relationship with students, they can experience a better school environment and achieve greater growth in cognitive and academic outcomes (McCormick & O'Connor, 2014; Quin, 2017; Sankalaite et al., 2023). Peer relationships play a crucial role in children's development, particularly for primary school students. Consistent with previous studies, positive relationships with peers were associated with primary school students' academic performance (Tepordei et al., 2023), and among relationships with friends, teachers, and parents, the relationship with friends is the most closely related to academic achievement (Yu et al., 2023).

The t-test results showed that students who have close friends in class have better academic performance than those who do not. Having close friends in the class can provide psychological comfort, as students who come to school with familiar friends exhibit more positive attitudes toward school (Yu et al., 2023) and higher life satisfaction (Le & Nguyen, 2025). Friendships can positively impact students' academic performance by providing emotional support, reducing stress and knowledge sharing, thus improving their learning motivation and ultimately contributing to improved academic performance (Alotaibi et al., 2023).

ANOVA results showed that children who have good relationships with their parents and are encouraged to study by their parents have better academic performance. Multiple studies indicate that parental engagement in children's education, both at home and school, enhances academic achievement (Barger et al., 2019; Castro et al., 2015; Jeynes, 2005). Parental expectations play a significant role in a child's academic performance, particularly during the early years of primary education. Higher parental expectations, especially when communicated positively and supported by involvement, are generally associated with better academic outcomes for children (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017). Good relationships and encouragement of students' learning, such as checking homework and staying in contact with teachers, can influence parents' expectations of their children's academic performance. This promotes children's interest in school work and academic performance.

In line with previous studies, extracurricular activities outside of school hours have a positive impact on primary academic performance (Alvariñas-Villaverde et al., 2024). Students who participate in extracurricular activities have positive associations with school achievement, social-emotional well-being, and positive behavior (Ferris et al., 2013). Moreover, sports and cultural activities outside of school hours help students balance their lives and relieve stress. These activities make students have a good attitude toward school activities and thus have a positive impact on their learning performance.

To maximize students' academic performance, education policies should not only focus on curriculum and testing but also on strengthening social relation support systems (peer networks, teacher-student bonds, and parental engagement). Investing in these areas will create a more supportive and effective learning environment. In addition, education policymakers must also note that students thrive when they have a balance between academics and cultural and sporting activities outside of school hours.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

All three social relationships (with teachers, peers, and parents) predicted the impact on primary school students' academic performance. Among them, relationships with peers predicted the most significant impact. In addition, the study results also indicated that extracurricular activities, having a good relationship with parents, and owning immediate friends in class also showed a positive association with students' academic performance.

The findings of this study suggest some applications in primary school education to enhance students' academic performance: parents and educators need to pay attention to their emotional relationships with their children; homes and academies should pay attention to the balance between schoolwork and sports and cultural activities outside of school hours; educators should pay attention to each student's social relationships in the classroom; and parents' participation and cooperation with the school activities are important in the process of educating children at this age.

Declarations

Author Contributions. T.H.L.: Literature review, conceptualization, methodology, data analysis. T.H.N.N.: review-editing and writing, original manuscript preparation. M.D.B.: review-editing. P.T.T.N.: Supervision, review and discussion of results.

All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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