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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS' WORKLOAD AND STUDENT-TEACHER INTERACTION: INSIGHTS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between university teachers' workload and student-teacher interaction in higher education. By administrating standardized questionnaires which had five positioned Likert scale, data was collected from 406 university teachers in public and private universities in Lahore. Teachers' Workload Scale (TWS) developed by Dr Rani Gul and Role Overload Scale developed by Reilly were used to measure teachers' workload. And Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) developed by Robert C Pianta was used to measure student-teacher interaction in higher education. Content validity of the questionnaires was maintained by taking consultant advise from three experts from institution of Education and Research, University of the Punjab. Reliability analysis confirmed strong internal consistency 0.82, whereas the "alpha" values for the subscales varied from 0.72 to 0.83. the "alpha" values indicates that the data set possesses an adequate level of reliability.

A multistage sampling technique was employed, starting with the random selection of four universities, followed by identifying the education discipline in each university. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and independent sample t-test were performed to analyzed the data. Findings indicate a negative correlation between teachers' workload and student-teacher interaction, with increased workload associated with poorer interaction. No significant gender differences were found in perceived workload, though female teachers reported slightly higher scores. t-tests examined differences across institutions and gender, while Pearson correlation assessed relationships between variables. The study recommends mitigating workload impact through redistribution, technology use, reduced class sizes, and training on effective interactions. Institutional changes should foster a supportive academic culture, valuing teachers' contributions and encouraging collaboration. Findings highlight the need for coherent policies to address workload concerns while enhancing student-teacher relationships.

Keywords: *University Teachers' Workload, Student-Teacher Interaction*

INTRODUCTION

University teachers play a multifaceted role, not only managing the learning process but also engaging in research, performing administrative tasks, and mentoring students. In recent years, concerns have grown regarding the increasing workload of university faculty, especially in developing countries. This workload—comprising instructional, administrative, and research duties—affects teacher health, performance, and the overall quality of education (Rose & Sika, 2019). As a result, researchers are examining how teacher workload impacts crucial academic aspects such as student-teacher interaction, performance, and productivity.

Globally, faculty members report feeling overwhelmed by excessive responsibilities. Research from both developed and developing nations confirms that university teachers face pressure from large class sizes, administrative obligations, and research expectations (Hester, Bridges & Rollins, 2020; Mullen et al., 2020). These pressures lead to stress and burnout, which in turn reduce meaningful teacher-student interactions (Afzal & Rafiq, 2022). The consequence is a decline in students' academic achievement, motivation, and engagement (Balang, 2021).

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In Pakistan, the rapid expansion of higher education has led to a dramatic rise in student enrollment without a corresponding increase in infrastructure, staff, or funding. Public universities, in particular, are facing major strain as faculty members juggle large teaching loads, administrative tasks, and high research expectations. This overload reduces their ability to focus on individual student needs, prepare quality lessons, or interact positively in class. Teachers may not be physically or mentally present, affecting the quality of instruction.

Student-teacher interaction is vital to student achievement and motivation. Studies show that strong teacher-student relationships lead to improved academic performance and classroom inclusion (Košir & Tement, 2014). According to Furrer and Skinner (2003), when teachers invest time in building relationships, it fosters a positive learning environment. However, a heavy workload often prevents teachers from engaging deeply with students, reducing instructional quality and academic outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Extensive literature links high teacher workload with stress and burnout. Beehr (1995) identified work overload as a major source of occupational stress. In higher education, workload extends beyond teaching to include research, administrative duties, and curriculum development. Faculty in Pakistani public universities face time constraints while handling large classes, administrative issues, and research obligations (Ahmad & Gul, 2021). Teachers in private universities often face similar challenges, with limited time and resources to manage multiple tasks (Khan et al., 2019). These demands can hinder their ability to foster lasting relationships with students, negatively affecting learning and performance.

In countries like Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, growing enrollments place additional stress on institutional resources. In private Bangladeshi universities, teachers are burdened with excessive responsibilities and have limited autonomy for research or career advancement (UGC, 2016). Faculty are often required to spend more time on administrative duties than on teaching or research, reducing the time and energy available for student engagement (Kang & Sidhu, 2015).

Despite growing concern, the relationship between teacher workload and student-teacher interaction is still underexplored in many developing countries, including Pakistan. While some studies have addressed workload's impact on teacher performance and student outcomes, few have directly examined its effect on the quality of teacher-student relationships. More research is needed to understand how increasing workloads compromise interpersonal engagement and educational effectiveness.

Understanding this connection is essential for improving teaching quality in Pakistan's higher education sector. This study aims to explore how workload affects student-teacher interactions and how institutional policies can better support faculty. The findings could guide reforms to reduce teacher stress and burnout, enhance student outcomes, and ensure more meaningful engagement in higher education.

Ultimately, high class sizes, administrative burdens, and research pressure limit the ability of Pakistani university teachers to build strong relationships with students—relationships that are vital for academic success and student well-being. Addressing these challenges is key to fostering supportive learning environments and improving higher education standards.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workload

Workload refers to the volume and complexity of tasks assigned within a timeframe. In education, teachers often juggle responsibilities like grading, administration, mentoring, and research. Ksenia (2012) highlights that excessive workload can cause frustration, anxiety, and stress. Marina (2012) adds that it leads to emotional exhaustion, low morale, and reduced institutional effectiveness.

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Workload includes both the number and difficulty of tasks, impacting mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Proper workload distribution improves efficiency, while uneven loads create stress and fatigue. Time constraints intensify workload, especially with fixed deadlines, whereas flexible timelines reduce perceived pressure. Cognitive, emotional, and physical efforts also contribute—careers in education, healthcare, or social work require significant emotional labor.

Types of Workloads

Workload can be quantitative (volume of work) or qualitative (task complexity). Teachers often face mental/emotional loads from tasks like decision-making and student interactions, which impact health and job performance.

Factors Influencing Workload

Complexity, time constraints, and unclear roles increase workload stress. Supportive environments ease this burden, while disruptions heighten it.

Impact on Health

Excessive workload leads to stress, anxiety, burnout, and physical ailments. Poor time management reduces rest opportunities and harms overall well-being.

University Teachers' Workload

University faculty balance teaching, research, and administrative duties. Kinman & Wray (2018) note teaching stresses due to diverse student needs. Baird & Riddle (2019) argue research demands and grant-seeking create role conflict. Ramsden (2013) notes that administrative duties can detract from teaching and research, increasing stress and reducing productivity. Bakker & Demerouti (2007) link heavy workload with burnout, affecting job satisfaction and teaching quality.

Lack of institutional support further worsens stress, as many institutions fail to recognize or reward faculty contributions. A balanced approach is needed to improve academic environments.

Empirical Evidence

In Pakistan, Shazia et al. (2018) found heavy workloads harmed teachers' performance and increased burnout. Ali et al. (2021) and Haroon & Uzma (2019) noted negative effects on student outcomes. International studies (Spoel & Velden, 2020; Spector et al., 2019; Antoniou et al., 2017) echo these findings across the Netherlands, USA, Australia, China, and India—linking workload with low job satisfaction and reduced teaching quality.

Key Reasons for Workload

1. **Teaching Hours**: Planning, grading, and instructing take time and may cause burnout (Evers et al., 2002; Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009).
2. **Administrative Duties**: Extra roles beyond teaching create imbalance and emotional fatigue (Valli & Buese, 2007).
3. **Research Expectations**: Pressure to publish can compromise teaching quality.
4. **Energy and Time**: Teachers struggle with limited time and energy, affecting effectiveness and morale (Friedman, 2000; Day et al., 2006).
5. **Student Support**: Individualized attention and advising increase workload.
6. **Institutional Demands**: Faculty must meet high expectations despite limited resources.
7. **Work-Life Balance**: Academic duties often interfere with personal life, worsening stress.

Student-Teacher InteractionA positive classroom relationship between teacher and student is built on trust, respect, and consistent support. When teachers understand their students, offer choices, and encourage learning, it fosters connection. Caring and attentive teachers create a safe, motivating classroom environment. At the university level, communication

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between teachers and students is vital, but academic overload may reduce a teacher's ability to offer guidance, affecting student engagement and performance. Productive interaction, grounded in trust and mentorship, contributes to academic and personal development.

Studies show that good student-teacher relationships help students take academic risks, develop social skills, and improve performance. Respect plays a key role; setting clear expectations fosters mutual growth. Teachers must be responsive to diverse learners and promote participation to boost confidence and mental well-being. When professors serve as mentors, students gain pride in their achievements and build resilience through social and problem-solving skills (Bondy et al., 2017).

Such relationships benefit both students and teachers. Educators strengthen their social and professional skills and can manage stress more effectively. A positive school climate supports these outcomes.

Heavy teacher workload, however, can limit student interaction. Overburdened teachers may seem less approachable, reducing student motivation and trust. According to positive psychology (Seligman, 2011), well-being enhances relationships and performance. Modern university professors are not just lecturers—they mentor and help students grow intellectually and emotionally (Sebastian & Olden, 2023). Mentoring programs aid students in coping with academic and personal challenges.

Research shows early teacher-student relationships (Hamre & Pianta, 2001) have lasting effects. Supportive interactions can enhance mental health and academic success, particularly for vulnerable students (Huang et al., 2018). While more studies focus on young learners, teacher-student closeness remains key across education levels (Roorda et al., 2011; Davis, 2003). Teachers shape classroom climate and student behavior (Ladd et al., 1999).

Key Components of Effective Student-Teacher Relationships

- **Trust & Support**: Students must trust teachers and feel safe seeking help. Teachers must also trust students' learning abilities.
- **Respect & Empathy**: Mutual respect for each other's experiences, knowledge, and needs fosters meaningful engagement.
- **Effective Communication**: Clear, open dialogue encourages students to share concerns and understand expectations.
- **Personalized Learning**: Adapting instruction to students' abilities and preferences strengthens learning outcomes.
- **Motivation & Commitment**: Supportive teachers boost students' confidence and commitment to academic goals.
- **Set Expectations**: Clear goals and conduct guidelines create structure and build self-esteem.
- **Role Modeling**: Teachers inspire positive behavior and values through professionalism and enthusiasm.

Significance in Higher Education

In universities, strong student-teacher relationships contribute to:

- **Improved Learning Environments**: Engaging and inclusive settings make students more active and confident.
- **Better Academic Performance**: Supportive professors inspire persistence and excellence.
- **Personalized Support**: Understanding students' strengths and needs enables targeted assistance and improved educational outcome

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Methodology

Research Design

A co relational quantitative research design was utilized to establish empirical evidence regarding the association between teachers' workload and student-teacher interaction.

Population and Sample

This study employed a multistage sampling technique. First, four universities were randomly selected from Lahore. Then, the education discipline within each university was identified. Finally, 406 university teachers (238 female, 168 male) from various departments and specializations were conveniently selected and consented to participate.

Instruments

Adapted questionnaires were used to examine teachers' workload and student-teacher relationships in higher education. Each item employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) by Robert C. Pianta measured student-teacher interactions, while the Teachers' Workload Scale developed by Dr. Rani Gul and the Role Overload Scale by Reilly assessed workload. The demographic section included the type of university and the gender of participating teachers. Content validity was confirmed by three experts from the University of the Punjab, ensuring the instrument measured the intended variables. Reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 for the overall instrument, with subscale values ranging from 0.71 to 0.83. These values indicate strong internal consistency, confirming that the instrument was reliable for data collection.

Data Collection

The data were collected using adapted surveys on Teachers' Workload and Student-Teacher Interaction. These questionnaires were distributed to university teachers in Lahore with varying levels of expertise. Permission was first obtained from the university administrations to conduct the study. Subsequently, the questionnaires were distributed to teachers along with a request for **1**their informed consent.

Research Question 1: What is the nature of teachers' workload in higher education?

Table 1

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers' workload	406	3	5	4.22	.329

Table 1 showed teachers' workload. The lowest workload score reported is 3. The highest workload score reported is 5. The average workload score is 4.22, suggesting that most teachers perceive their workload as being on the higher side of the scale. The standard deviation is 0.329, indicating relatively low variability in the workload scores among participants.

Research Question 2: What are the dynamics of student-teacher interaction in higher education?

Table 2

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Student teacher interaction	406	3	5	4.20	.322

Table 2 showed student-teacher interaction. The lowest score for student-teacher interaction is 3. The highest score is 5. The average score is 4.20, suggesting that student-teacher interactions are perceived as generally strong and positive across the sample. The standard

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deviation is 0.322, indicating low variability, meaning that most participants rated student-teacher interaction similarly.

Research Question 3: Is there any relationship between teachers' workload and student-teacher interaction in higher education?

Table 3

Variables	*'r'*	*'p'*
Teachers' workload and student teacher interaction	-.485	.001

Table 3 describes that the correlation between teachers' workload and student-teacher interaction is -0.485, with a p-value of 0.001. This indicates a moderate negative relationship between the two variables. As teachers' workload increases, student-teacher interaction tends to decrease. The p-value of 0.001 is highly significant (typically, a p-value less than 0.05 is considered statistically significant), confirming that this negative relationship is not due to chance.

Discussion

The study reveals a negative relationship between teacher workload and student-teacher interaction in higher education. Responsibilities such as teaching hours, administrative duties, extracurricular activities, and service obligations consume significant time and energy, often limiting meaningful engagement with students. This aligns with prior research, such as Collie et al. (2012), who reported that high workloads reduce emotional engagement due to time constraints and mental fatigue.

Excessive workload diminishes opportunities for one-on-one supervision, guided learning, and informal communication, all vital for effective student-teacher relationships. Friedman (2000) emphasized that administrative burdens compromise teachers' ability to focus on relational roles, leading to reduced academic and personal interactions that impact the overall educational experience.

Although the study identified only a modest negative correlation between workload and student-teacher rapport, it underscores that high workloads often compel teachers to prioritize task completion over relationship-building. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) similarly noted that role overload can lead to emotional exhaustion, weakening relational engagement with students. This is particularly significant in higher education, where student-teacher connections support academic success, personal development, and well-being.

Nonetheless, workload is not the sole factor influencing these relationships. Personal traits, institutional climate, and role expectations also play critical roles. Day et al. (2007) found that intrinsic motivation and adaptability enable some teachers to maintain strong connections despite workload pressures. Klassen and Chiu (2010) further observed that self-efficacy and time management help educators balance duties while sustaining positive interactions.

Administrative and non-teaching duties—such as report writing, regulatory compliance, and community service—further reduce time for instruction and student contact. Nguyen et al. (2018) confirmed that such responsibilities negatively affect teaching quality and hinder student development.

The findings are consistent with prior research (Kyriacou, 2001; Wijaya & Prastuti, 2021), which shows that overloaded environments lead to fatigue, stress, and reduced communication effectiveness. This not only limits teachers' ability to support students emotionally and academically but may also lower students' access to mentorship. Hargreaves

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(1998) warned that teacher burnout, if unaddressed, can degrade the classroom environment and educational outcomes.

Despite these challenges, some teachers manage to maintain positive relationships through institutional support, collaboration, and effective scheduling. Taris et al. (2001) highlighted the importance of organizational strategies—like workload management and dedicated student interaction time—to improve these dynamics.

In conclusion, while workload significantly affects student-teacher interaction, it is one of many influencing factors. A holistic approach that considers institutional constraints, cultural context, and individual teacher attributes is essential. As Johnson et al. (2005) suggest, addressing these factors collectively can enhance both education quality and the well-being of students and teachers.

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