

Teacher Support as a Predictor of Learning Motivation among Secondary School Students: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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Abstract. Teacher support has been widely discussed in relation to student motivation, yet limited studies synthesize its multidimensional role through Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in the Indonesian post-pandemic secondary school context. This article examines teacher support as a predictor of learning motivation by integrating evidence from PISA 2022, peer-reviewed studies, institutional reports, and educational films. The documentary sources were selected purposively based on their relevance to teacher support, learning motivation, secondary education, and SDT concepts. The data were analyzed through thematic content analysis by mapping forms of teacher support onto the SDT needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The analysis shows that emotional, instrumental, autonomy-supportive, and individualized support do not function as separate pedagogical actions, but as an interconnected need-support system that strengthens students' engagement and internalized motivation while reducing amotivation. The study contributes by framing teacher support as a strategic motivational mechanism rather than a supplementary classroom factor. Theoretically, it extends the application of SDT in post-pandemic learning recovery. Practically, it recommends teacher professional development that integrates autonomy support, structured feedback, emotional care, and individualized assistance.

Keywords: *academic engagement; learning loss; learning motivation; self-determination theory; teacher support*

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Introduction

Learning motivation is a central psychological construct in secondary education because it determines not only whether students participate in classroom activities, but also how deeply they process knowledge, persist when tasks become difficult, and regulate their own learning over time. In adolescence, motivation becomes increasingly complex because students are developing stronger needs for agency, social recognition, competence, and personal meaning. For secondary school students, learning is rarely driven by cognitive ability alone. Students may possess adequate intellectual capacity, yet still disengage when they perceive school as irrelevant, emotionally unsafe, excessively controlling, or disconnected from their everyday experiences. This makes motivation a crucial explanatory variable in discussions of academic engagement, learning persistence, and educational resilience. Earlier studies have shown that motivated students tend to demonstrate greater effort, more active participation, stronger classroom involvement, and better academic achievement than students whose motivation is weak or unstable (Jang et al., 2010; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Conversely, low motivation is associated with academic withdrawal, school burnout, and reduced persistence in learning tasks (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009, 2022).

The problem of learning motivation has become more urgent in the post-pandemic educational context. COVID-19 disrupted classroom routines, peer interaction, teacher-student relationships, and students' sense of academic continuity. Although schools have reopened and instructional delivery has returned largely to face-to-face formats, the psychological consequences of prolonged disruption remain visible in students' learning behavior. Learning loss should therefore not be understood merely as the loss of instructional time or curriculum coverage. It also involves weakened learning habits, reduced academic confidence, fragmented attention, and declining emotional connection with school. Kuhfeld et al. (2020) warned that school closures could widen achievement gaps and create long-term losses in academic growth. In Indonesia, the post-pandemic transition has intensified concerns about students' academic stamina and motivational readiness, especially among secondary school students who are expected to meet increasingly complex cognitive and social demands. In this context, recovery efforts cannot rely solely on remedial lessons or additional assignments; they must also restore the motivational foundations that allow students to re-engage meaningfully with learning.

The urgency of this issue is reflected in Indonesia's recent performance in international assessment data. The OECD's PISA 2022 results show that Indonesian students scored below the OECD average in mathematics, reading, and science (OECD, 2023). Indonesian students obtained 366 points in mathematics compared with the OECD average of 472, 359 in reading compared

with 476, and 389 in science compared with 485. These gaps indicate a persistent challenge in learning quality and academic readiness. However, such data should not be interpreted narrowly as evidence of curricular or infrastructural weakness alone. Academic performance is shaped by a wider ecology of learning that includes classroom climate, teacher expectations, feedback practices, students' perceived competence, and the extent to which students experience school as meaningful. PISA 2022 also documents a broader global decline in student performance after the pandemic, with average scores in OECD countries decreasing particularly in mathematics and reading (OECD, 2023). This suggests that academic recovery requires attention to the psychosocial conditions of learning, including how teachers rebuild students' confidence, curiosity, persistence, and sense of belonging in school.

Teacher support is especially important because teachers occupy a unique social and pedagogical position in students' daily learning environment. Teachers are not merely transmitters of content; they are also interpreters of academic demands, regulators of classroom climate, providers of feedback, and significant adults who shape students' beliefs about their own competence. Through everyday interactions, teachers communicate whether students are capable, valued, respected, and trusted. Supportive teacher behavior can transform learning tasks from external obligations into personally meaningful activities, whereas controlling or emotionally distant teacher behavior may reinforce avoidance, anxiety, and disengagement. This is particularly salient in secondary education, where students increasingly seek autonomy but still require structure, guidance, and relational security. Therefore, the quality of teacher support can be conceptualized as a predictive condition for learning motivation because it influences the psychological processes through which students interpret academic challenges and decide whether to invest effort.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a strong theoretical framework for explaining why teacher support can predict students' learning motivation. SDT argues that high-quality motivation emerges when the social environment satisfies three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). Autonomy refers to the experience of volition, choice, and personal endorsement in learning. Competence refers to the feeling of being effective and capable of mastering academic challenges. Relatedness refers to the feeling of being cared for, respected, and meaningfully connected to others. In educational settings, these needs are not abstract psychological ideals; they are shaped directly by classroom practices. Teachers support autonomy when they acknowledge students' perspectives, provide meaningful rationales, allow appropriate choices, and avoid unnecessary control. Teachers support competence when they provide clear expectations, constructive feedback, and optimally

challenging tasks. Teachers support relatedness when they show warmth, empathy, respect, and consistent interpersonal availability.

Within SDT, motivation is not treated as a simple distinction between motivated and unmotivated students. Rather, motivation exists along a continuum from amotivation, through controlled forms of extrinsic motivation, toward autonomous extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This distinction is essential for educational analysis because students may appear behaviorally compliant while remaining psychologically disengaged. For example, a student may complete assignments only to avoid punishment or gain grades, but this does not necessarily indicate deep engagement or durable motivation. By contrast, students who internalize the value of learning are more likely to persist, regulate their learning strategies, and experience academic tasks as meaningful. Teacher support plays an important role in this internalization process. When teachers combine structure with autonomy support, students are more likely to experience academic demands as understandable, manageable, and personally relevant. Recent syntheses of SDT-based educational research indicate that autonomy support, structure, and involvement contribute to students' need satisfaction, autonomous motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Bureau et al., 2022; Guay, 2022; Howard et al., 2021; Patzak & Zhang, 2025).

Teacher support is multidimensional, and each dimension may influence motivation through a different psychological pathway. Emotional support refers to teachers' warmth, empathy, sensitivity, patience, and willingness to recognize students' personal struggles. This form of support is closely related to students' need for relatedness because it helps students feel accepted and safe in the classroom. Instrumental support refers to practical assistance that helps students overcome barriers to learning, such as clarification of difficult material, guidance in completing tasks, coordination with parents, or referral to counseling support. This dimension can strengthen competence by reducing confusion and making academic demands more manageable. Autonomy support refers to instructional practices that invite student voice, provide choices, encourage independent thinking, and reduce excessive pressure. This dimension is central to students' experience of agency. Individualized support refers to teachers' ability to adapt their responses to students' unique needs, learning difficulties, emotional conditions, or developmental characteristics. This dimension is particularly relevant for inclusive and differentiated education because it recognizes that students do not enter the classroom with identical capacities, histories, or motivational profiles.

The empirical literature provides strong support for the motivational relevance of these dimensions. Skinner and Belmont (1993) demonstrated that teacher involvement, structure, and

autonomy support are associated with students' engagement across the school year. Reeve (2009) argued that autonomy-supportive teaching is a learnable orientation that enables teachers to shift from controlling practices toward more need-supportive instruction. Jang et al. (2010) further showed that autonomy support and structure should not be treated as opposing strategies; rather, students benefit when teachers provide both meaningful agency and clear instructional guidance. More recent evidence strengthens this conclusion. Hornstra et al. (2021) found that profiles of teacher need support involving autonomy support, structure, and involvement predicted student motivation and learning outcomes. Patzak and Zhang (2025) likewise emphasized that autonomy support and structure are mutually supportive conditions for optimal student motivation. These findings suggest that effective teacher support is not permissiveness, overprotection, or emotional friendliness alone. It is a coherent pedagogical pattern that combines care, clarity, agency, and responsiveness.

In the Indonesian secondary school context, this issue has particular significance. Indonesian classrooms often operate within examination-oriented expectations, curriculum targets, and hierarchical teacher-student relations. These conditions can provide order and discipline, but they may also reduce opportunities for student voice when implemented in overly controlling ways. At the same time, students in many schools face diverse barriers, including unequal access to learning resources, family pressures, digital fatigue, academic anxiety, and weakened study routines after the pandemic. These conditions make teacher support especially consequential because teachers are often the most immediate institutional actors who can identify motivational decline and respond before disengagement becomes chronic. Maulana et al. (2016) showed that teacher support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in Indonesian classrooms was positively related to students' autonomous motivation. This indicates that SDT is not limited to Western educational settings; it can illuminate motivational processes in Indonesia when interpreted with sensitivity to local classroom norms and relational expectations.

Despite the growing international literature on SDT, teacher support, and academic engagement, several gaps remain in the Indonesian discussion. First, many studies of learning motivation continue to focus primarily on student-level variables such as self-efficacy, goal orientation, self-regulation, or personal interest. These variables are important, but they do not fully explain how the school environment shapes students' motivational development. Second, research and institutional discussions often refer to teacher support in general terms without separating its emotional, instrumental, autonomy-supportive, and individualized dimensions. As a result, practical recommendations may become too broad to guide teacher training or school intervention. Third, post-pandemic learning recovery is frequently framed in academic or

administrative terms, while the motivational and relational dimensions of recovery receive less systematic attention. This gap is important because students who have experienced repeated failure, isolation, or learning loss may need more than curriculum reinforcement; they may require renewed experiences of competence, relatedness, and autonomy before academic improvement can become sustainable.

This study responds to those gaps by examining teacher support as a predictor of secondary school students' learning motivation through the lens of SDT. The term predictor is used conceptually rather than statistically because the study is based on qualitative documentary review and content analysis rather than primary quantitative measurement. Nevertheless, the concept remains useful because it highlights teacher support as an antecedent condition that can explain variations in motivational quality. The analysis integrates several types of secondary data, including international reports, peer-reviewed studies, institutional case examples, and educational film representations. The use of different sources allows the study to examine the issue at multiple levels: the macro level of educational performance and learning loss, the meso level of school-based support practices, and the micro level of teacher-student interaction. Through this synthesis, the study aims to show not only that teacher support matters, but also how specific forms of support may satisfy students' basic psychological needs and strengthen motivation.

Methods

This study used a qualitative descriptive design based on documentary review and content analysis. The design was selected because the study did not collect primary field data from students or teachers; instead, it synthesized existing documents to interpret how teacher support operates as a motivational resource in secondary education. Qualitative documentary analysis is appropriate for examining educational and psychological phenomena when the objective is to identify meanings, patterns, and relationships across published or institutional sources (Fadli, 2021; Pradiri et al., 2021).

The data sources were grouped into four categories. First, the study used PISA 2022 reports and country notes to contextualize Indonesian students' academic performance and the broader post-pandemic learning challenge (OECD, 2023). Second, peer-reviewed articles were reviewed to establish the theoretical and empirical basis of SDT, teacher support, engagement, learning motivation, and academic burnout. Third, two institutional cases were used to illustrate teacher support in Indonesian secondary schools: the home-visit counseling practice at SMAN 77 Jakarta and the collaboration between guidance counselors and homeroom teachers at SMK

Negeri 5 Batam (SMAN 77 Jakarta & Kurniasih, 2022; SMK 5 Batam, 2021). Fourth, two educational films, *Dead Poets Society* and *Taare Zameen Par*, were used as illustrative media texts to represent autonomy support, individualized attention, and emotionally responsive teaching (Khan, 2007; Weir, 1989).

The analysis followed three stages. First, relevant information was selected from the source materials based on its connection to learning motivation, teacher support, academic engagement, SDT, and post-pandemic learning loss. Second, the material was coded into thematic categories: emotional support, instrumental support, autonomy support, individualized support, need satisfaction, student engagement, and motivational quality. Third, the themes were interpreted through SDT by mapping each form of teacher support onto the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The aim was not to estimate statistical effect sizes but to build a theoretically grounded synthesis of how teacher support can function as a predictor of student motivation.

To improve analytical credibility, the study used source triangulation by combining international reports, peer-reviewed literature, Indonesian institutional cases, and educational film representations. This strategy enabled the analysis to connect macro-level educational data, meso-level school practices, and micro-level teacher-student interaction. Nevertheless, because the study relied on secondary sources and illustrative cases, the findings should be interpreted as conceptual and interpretive rather than causal in a strict experimental sense.

Results

The documentary synthesis produced three major findings. First, Indonesia's PISA 2022 profile indicates a persistent academic performance gap that strengthens the relevance of motivational analysis. Second, teacher support appears in four recurring forms: emotional, instrumental, autonomy-supportive, and individualized. Third, these forms of support can be theoretically linked to the three SDT needs and to different qualities of student motivation.

PISA 2022 and the motivational context of secondary education

PISA 2022 provides a macro-level context for interpreting the motivational challenge in Indonesian education. Indonesian 15-year-old students scored below the OECD average across mathematics, reading, and science (OECD, 2023). The performance gap suggests that instructional recovery cannot rely only on curricular acceleration; it also needs conditions that rebuild students' engagement, confidence, and perceived relevance of learning.

Table 1.
Indonesian and OECD Mean Scores in PISA 2022

Domain	Indonesia	OECD average	Gap
Mathematics	366	472	106 points
Reading	359	476	117 points
Science	389	485	96 points

Forms of teacher support identified across the sources

The reviewed sources show that teacher support is not a single behavior but a cluster of pedagogical and interpersonal practices. The institutional cases emphasize emotional and instrumental support through home visits and collaboration with families. The film analyses provide illustrative representations of autonomy support and individualized pedagogical attention. The peer-reviewed literature provides empirical justification for linking these support dimensions to motivation and engagement (Banerjee & Halder, 2021a; Bureau et al., 2022; Guay, 2022; Hornstra et al., 2021).

Table 2.
Thematic Synthesis of Teacher Support and Motivational Effects

Source	Support dimension	Concrete form	SDT need supported	Motivational implication
SMAN 77 Jakarta & Kurniasih (2022)	Emotional and empathic support	Home visit by guidance counselor; personal attention to students with declining motivation	Relatedness	Trust, psychological safety, and renewed classroom involvement
SMK 5 Batam (2021)	Instrumental and collaborative support	Home visit involving counselor, homeroom teacher, and family coordination	Competence and relatedness	Reduction of practical learning barriers, improved attendance, and learning readiness
Weir (1989)	Autonomy support and cognitive stimulation	Non-conventional teaching, freedom of expression, and respect for students' ideas	Autonomy	Stronger intrinsic motivation, creativity, and personal meaning in learning
Khan (2007)	Individualized attention and methodological flexibility	Adaptation of teaching strategies to a student with learning difficulties	Competence and autonomy	Restoration of academic self-esteem, resilience, and willingness to learn
Teacher motivation literature	Need-supportive teaching as a comprehensive role	Warmth, structure, feedback, classroom climate, and meaningful learning goals	Autonomy, competence, and relatedness	More internalized motivation and academic engagement

Mapping teacher support onto SDT needs

Emotional support most directly satisfies relatedness. When students perceive teachers as caring, available, and respectful, they are more likely to feel that school is a psychologically safe environment. This finding is consistent with research showing that affective teacher-student relationships predict school engagement and reduce academic withdrawal (Engels et al., 2021; Roorda et al., 2011; Wentzel, 1997). In the Indonesian cases, home visits illustrate how teachers can extend care beyond formal classroom interaction and rebuild trust when students disengage from school routines.

Instrumental support contributes to competence and relatedness. Students who face attendance problems, family communication barriers, digital learning fatigue, or academic confusion often need concrete assistance before they can re-engage psychologically. Teacher collaboration with homeroom teachers and parents can reduce these barriers and make learning demands feel more manageable. From an SDT perspective, such assistance supports competence because students receive clearer pathways for action and relatedness because they experience the school as responsive rather than punitive.

Autonomy support is especially relevant for the internalization of motivation. SDT distinguishes controlled motivation, in which students act because of pressure, from autonomous motivation, in which students learn because they value or enjoy the activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Guay, 2022). Teachers can support autonomy by giving meaningful choices, acknowledging students' perspectives, providing rationales, and avoiding excessively controlling language (Reeve, 2009; Reeve & Jang, 2006). Recent synthesis suggests that autonomy support and structure are not opposites; they can be combined to produce stronger learning motivation and engagement (Hornstra et al., 2021; Patzak & Zhang, 2025).

Individualized attention supports competence by helping students experience success at an appropriate level of challenge. It also supports autonomy because students feel that their learning pathways are recognized rather than standardized rigidly. The representation in Taare Zameen Par illustrates how flexible pedagogy can restore a student's academic self-esteem after repeated failure. In empirical terms, such support is consistent with the role of informative feedback and adaptive instruction in building perceived competence (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Mouratidis et al., 2008).

Table 3.

Predictive Model of Teacher Support and Learning Motivation

Teacher support type	Primary SDT need	Motivational quality formed	Long-term educational effect
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Emotional support	Relatedness	Internalized extrinsic motivation	Academic engagement and trust in school
Instrumental support	Competence and relatedness	Identified regulation	Attendance, discipline, and learning readiness
Autonomy support	Autonomy	Authentic intrinsic motivation	Creativity, independent learning, and long-term goal orientation
Individualized support	Competence and autonomy	Integrated motivation	Learning resilience, academic self-esteem, and adaptive persistence

Discussion

The findings support the argument that teacher support can be understood as a significant predictor of secondary students' learning motivation. This predictive role should be interpreted conceptually because the present study used documentary analysis rather than a primary quantitative design. Even so, the pattern is consistent with international SDT literature showing that need-supportive teaching predicts students' autonomous motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Banerjee & Halder, 2021a; Bureau et al., 2022; Guay, 2022; Howard et al., 2021).

The strongest theoretical implication is that teacher support should not be treated as a peripheral classroom factor. Within SDT, teacher behavior is part of the social-contextual condition that either supports or frustrates psychological needs. When teachers provide warmth, meaningful structure, autonomy-supportive communication, and individualized assistance, students are more likely to experience school tasks as personally meaningful and achievable. This explains why the same instructional content may produce different motivational outcomes depending on the relational and psychological climate in which it is delivered (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The Indonesian post-pandemic context gives these findings practical urgency. PISA 2022 points to a performance gap that requires systemic response, while learning loss literature indicates that academic recovery cannot be reduced to additional instructional hours (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; OECD, 2023). Students who return to school after disrupted learning may need help reconstructing competence, confidence, and belonging before academic interventions can work effectively. Thus, teacher support is not a soft supplement to learning recovery; it is a psychological precondition for sustained academic re-engagement.

Emotional support appears especially important in collectivist and relational educational contexts where students' willingness to participate may depend strongly on perceived care and acceptance from adults. The home-visit cases from SMAN 77 Jakarta and SMK 5 Batam illustrate that when students disengage, teachers can respond not only through classroom sanctions but also through empathic outreach and family-school collaboration (SMAN 77 Jakarta & Kurniasih, 2022; SMK 5 Batam, 2021). This approach aligns with evidence that positive teacher-student relationships are related to higher engagement and lower disengagement, particularly during adolescence (Engels et al., 2021; Roorda et al., 2011).

At the same time, emotional care alone is insufficient if it is not accompanied by structure and autonomy support. Students need to feel cared for, but they also need clear learning pathways, feedback that explains how to improve, and opportunities to exercise agency. Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasize that effective feedback answers where learners are going, how they are going, and what the next step should be. SDT adds that feedback is most motivational when it is informational rather than controlling, because informational feedback strengthens perceived competence without undermining autonomy (Mouratidis et al., 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The autonomy dimension is particularly important for secondary school students because adolescence is marked by increasing sensitivity to agency, identity, and personal meaning. Teacher-centered instruction, excessive exam pressure, and controlling classroom language may produce compliance but not necessarily autonomous motivation. Autonomy-supportive teaching does not mean laissez-faire instruction. Recent research clarifies that autonomy support and structure can be mutually supportive: students benefit when teachers provide choice and voice while also clarifying expectations, routines, and learning goals (Hornstra et al., 2021; Patzak & Zhang, 2025).

Individualized support has clear implications for inclusive education. Students with learning difficulties, low self-esteem, or repeated academic failure may experience school as a space of threat rather than growth. The film *Taare Zameen Par* is not empirical evidence in itself, but it illustrates a psychologically plausible mechanism: when teachers recognize students' unique barriers and adapt instruction, students can recover competence beliefs and re-engage with learning. In future empirical research, this dimension could be measured through students' perceptions of teacher sensitivity, adaptive instruction, and constructive feedback.

For teacher professional development, the results imply that psychological and interpersonal competence should be developed alongside pedagogical and content knowledge. Training programs should help teachers identify students' motivational signals, provide autonomy-supportive rationales, design structured yet flexible learning activities, communicate

feedback effectively, and collaborate with parents or counseling staff when students show signs of disengagement. Teacher motivation also matters; autonomous teacher motivation is associated with more need-supportive teaching and stronger professional well-being (Liu et al., 2020; Slemp et al., 2020).

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied on secondary data; therefore, it cannot capture the lived perceptions of students and teachers in the way that interviews, surveys, or classroom observations could. Second, the Indonesian cases are illustrative rather than nationally representative. Third, the use of films is interpretive and pedagogical; films can illuminate mechanisms but cannot replace empirical classroom evidence. Fourth, the language of prediction should be understood as theoretical and pattern-based, not as a statistical claim derived from regression analysis.

Future studies should test the proposed model through quantitative or mixed-methods designs. Validated instruments such as teacher-support scales, need-satisfaction measures, and learning motivation questionnaires can be used to examine the relative contribution of emotional, instrumental, autonomy-supportive, and individualized support. Longitudinal designs would be especially useful for determining whether changes in teacher support predict changes in students' autonomous motivation, engagement, and achievement over time. Comparative studies across urban, rural, public, and private school contexts in Indonesia would also clarify how culture and school resources moderate the teacher support-motivation relationship.

Conclusion

This article concludes that teacher support is a central predictor of learning motivation among secondary school students when viewed through Self-Determination Theory. Emotional support strengthens relatedness, instrumental support helps students overcome practical and competence-related barriers, autonomy support promotes internalization and intrinsic motivation, and individualized support restores academic self-esteem and resilience. These four dimensions operate through the satisfaction of students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

In the Indonesian post-pandemic context, strengthening teacher support is particularly important because learning recovery requires both academic remediation and motivational reconstruction. Schools should therefore promote professional development that equips teachers to build caring relationships, provide clear structure, use autonomy-supportive communication, offer constructive feedback, and respond flexibly to diverse student needs. Further empirical

research is needed to test the proposed model using primary data across different Indonesian secondary school contexts.

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