

## Understanding Student-Teacher Relationships and the Passive-Aggressive Behavior of Students: Reduction of Malevolence in Pakistani Classrooms

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### Abstract

Effective student-teacher relationships lead to positive behavioral development of students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the influence of student-teacher relationships on the passive-aggressive behavior of students. A phenomenological research design was used to observe the classroom phenomena of two private sector schools that willingly agreed to participate in the study. Notes taken from twelve scheduled classroom observations, seven follow up interviews of selective students, and five teachers were used as sources of data. Data were audio recorded, transcribed, and an iterative process was employed to code responses in NVivo 10 which merged into some themes and sub-themes. The findings uncover several important ways in which student-teacher relationships might influence the passive-aggressive behavior of students in the classroom. It was revealed that the passive-aggressive behavior of students was driven by the fact that students were mainly dependent on teachers, disliked teachers' authority, lacked self-confidence, and wanted to avoid responsibility without confronting the teacher. While more warm, friendly, and welcoming behavior from teachers can ameliorate students' passive aggressive behavior, strict teacher behavior has the opposite effect exacerbating passive-aggressive behavioral issues among students. Traditional teaching should evolve with interactive pedagogies to develop interest, positive behaviors, and active learners.

**Keywords:** classroom interaction, student-teacher relationship, passive-aggressive behavior

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## **Introduction**

Passive-aggressive behavior is a way of expressing hostility, through typically muted and indirect channels (Dvorsky, 2015; Smith, 1995) of anger and confrontation to external control (Beck, 1999; Brophy, 2003). Passive-aggressive behavior does not alternate between passive behavior and aggressive behavior, but rather combines them simultaneously into one behavior that is both confounding and irritating to others (Long, Long & Whitson, 2009). Passive-aggressive behavior does not occur in a vacuum; it necessarily requires the inclusion of another person. The passive-aggressive relationship exists between people; the one who resists, the passive-aggressor; and the one who get frustrated, the victim (Namka, 1998).

Passive-aggressors show their anger by resisting the fulfillment of others' expectations, delaying others' orders and deriving secondary pleasure out of frustrating others (Archer & Coyne, 2005). It is a deliberate way of expressing covert feelings of anger toward others without revealing that anger (Buss, 1961). Passive-aggressive behavior is often seen in people who have not learned how to express their needs, feelings and desires to others (Johnson & Klee, 2007).

Passive-aggressive behavior prevails in every culture in different forms, irrespective of socioeconomic status, gender and age (Long, Long & Whitson, 2009). Gradually, passive-aggressive behavior creates confusion and eventually results in the destruction of interpersonal relationships. It can be conceived as a form of emotional abuse and can create immense pain to both individuals involved, namely, the one who is exhibiting the form of behavior and the one who is interacting with that person (Harn, 2011). Such behaviors are very common at homes, schools, and work places (Long, Long & Whitson, 2009) and turn out to be detrimental to personal freedom, comfort, and intimacy among family members, classmates and co-workers. Often undetectable, it can disrupt the psychological comfort of everyone, especially young children and students.

In contexts where there is authority and external control, passive-aggressive behavior can increase, resulting in discomfort. Parents in homes, and teachers and school administrators in schools exert this authority exposing children to structures of competence, power, and influence. For the purpose of avoiding resentment, one response is for children to exhibit covert resentment. However, with limited verbal capacity to assert themselves, children often revert to a passive-aggressive response (Long, Long & Whitson, 2009). As indicated by

Lerner and Johns (2014), there is a close connection between student-teacher relationships and students' passive aggressive behaviors in schools. The degree of such feelings among children and the degree to which the feelings manifest in outward behavior can vary due to family background, culture, and environment. Passive-aggressive behavior is rendered in different forms such as temporary compliance, intentional inefficiency, allowance of a problem to escalate, covertly-enacted revenge, and self-depreciation (Long, Long & Whitson, 2009). In all instances, anger is masked, hard to detect, and frustrating to experience for both students as well as teachers (Simpson, Patterson & Smith, 2011).

Passive-aggressive students deal with their anger and frustration by causing these feelings in others. They behave irrationally by hiding their feelings of hatred from their teachers and fellows (Whitson, 2011). Passive-aggressive students often do not comply with their teachers' authority, avoid responsibility (Murphy & Oberlin, 2005), and annoy their teachers by not doing what is expected of them (Lerner & Johns, 2014). However, passive-aggression brings harm to interpersonal relationships among students and teachers (Brandt & Rothschild, 2013) by creating challenges for both parties (Sun & Shek, 2012). Research has suggested that passive-aggressive behavior among students is mainly due to a lack of attention, little to no appraisal of their work, and a general lack of appreciation from teachers (Pianta, Steinberg & Rollins, 1995). Smith (1995) found a strong correlation between student-teacher relationships and passive aggressive behavior of students. He described the following behaviors as being typical of the characteristics of passive-aggressive students: passive listening (hearing only what they want), acting in slow-motion (moving very slowly when asked to go somewhere or complete a task), purposefully forgetting, accidentally destroying classroom objects, not sitting in the assigned seat, frequently engaging in behavior which is either inappropriate or exhibited at the wrong time, engaging in cruel put-downs, constant complaining, not completing work unless nagged continually. Students exhibit these behaviors for the purpose of getting attention and expressing anger. It may be the case that they are not reinforced for appropriate behavior or likely lack the skills necessary to elicit positive attention. Another reason student exhibit this behavior is that they lack self-esteem (Tucker, 2009). They underestimate their potential, as do their teachers and peers. This negative perception is reinforced every time they behave in this manner. This leads to more negative perception by self and others, which can continue to compound and reinforce maladaptive behaviors.

Student-teacher relationships in schools have a profound and radical influence on students' behavioral development (Levin & Nolan, 2007; Yasseen, 2010). A closely acquainted relationship between the student and teacher can be helpful for students who are shy, and have low self-confidence (Ghose, 1989; Muller, Katz & Dance, 1999). Although, teachers cannot control the behavior of individual students, they can adopt certain personal behaviors and pedagogical practices that reduce the likelihood of passive-aggressiveness in classrooms.

Teachers' encouraging, motivating and caring attitude towards students can have a positive effect on students and their developing abilities (Midgley, Feldlaufer & Eccles, 1989). As a consequence, students work harder and behave more positively towards those teachers who care for them (Capern & Hammond, 2014; Jeffrey, Auger & Pepperell, 2013). Students with strong relationships with teachers are empowered to experience more positive connections with peers and more often make better academic improvements (Brok & Levy, 2005; Haidet & Stein, 2006). In these instances, teachers can have a very influential role in the lives of students, and this is not necessarily confined to the classroom (Liu, 2013), as Bowlby (1980) argued that a warm and supportive student-teacher relationship may provide a child with a sense of security that promotes the child's open and active attitude.

Negative teacher behaviors can be exemplified by instances when teachers interrupt students, ignore their problems, and criticize them in front of their fellow classmates (Sun & Shek, 2012). These negative teacher behaviors can even lead to students' dropping out (Lee & Burkam, 2001). A negative student-teacher relationship could be the result of an unresolved conflict which happens when a teacher does not consider an individual student's personal needs and/or background (McTighe & Wiggins, 2007). From within this relational context, students often take revenge upon teachers who they feel mistreated by (Musser, Bray, Kehle & Jenson, 2001). More broadly, Kern and Clemens (2007) argued that teachers who refrain from praising students' efforts often results in students' lack of self-confidence and can cause disruptive behaviors.

In addition to poor student-teacher relationships, the disruptive behavior of students can also occur due to emotional challenges among students, and students' tendency to avoid teacher interactions (Ali & Gracey, 2013). Sometimes students may disagree with what teachers may have said or done, and, consequently, exhibit disruptive behavior. Moreover, some children experience a harsh and strict environment at home and have little opportunity to express their feelings, and,

eventually, lose confidence to speak in front of others due to such deficiencies (Brandt & Rothschild, 2013).

Pakistani schools have recently voiced their frustration with a lack of resources and general strategy for dealing with disruptive behaviors in schools (Ghazi, Shahzaha, Tariq & Khan, 2013; Soomro & Clabour, 2012) and have posited their concern for how such disruption negatively affects academic outputs (Sangawi, Adams & Reissland, 2015). To date there is a paucity of qualitative research undertaken for the purpose of identifying the teacher-student relational phenomena inside Pakistani classrooms. In the light of teachers' and other stakeholders' complaints about disruptive behaviors in schools, it is important to explore teachers' behavior and practices, student-teacher relationships, and the passive-aggressive behavior of students.

Three different approaches exist to study student-teacher relationships (Davis, 2003). These include student-teacher relationships from attachment perspectives, motivation perspectives, and socio-cultural perspectives. The phenomena of passive-aggressive behavior most coherently rest from within the attachment approach of student-teacher relationships. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) explained that students would be inclined to feel some affinity and attachment with their teacher. Attachment theory provides an explanation of how the teacher-student relationship emerges and influences the subsequent development of a child (Riley, 2010).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Since there is a lack of studies that explore the nature of student-teacher relationship and its influence on the passive-aggressive behavior of students in the local context, the study attempts to fill this gap in the literature by highlighting the issues and complexities involved.

### **Methodology**

The study is qualitative in nature and situated within the interpretative paradigm. This approach focuses on the socially constructed nature of reality. It addresses intimate relationship between the researchers and what is under investigation, along with contextual factors which shape the inquiry (Silverman, 2006).

Influenced by the interpretive paradigm, the researchers were mainly interested in exploring socially constructed everyday-life constructs and considered rich descriptions as a mode of exploration of the phenomena.

This approach provided an opportunity for the researchers to address the socially embedded reality, and to explore and communicate participants' experiences (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 1994). Consequently, the phenomenon under study was explored in two ways: first, the researchers developed a deep understanding of the students-teachers relationships through observations, and, second, the researchers assessed the passive-aggressive behavior of students which was best understood by means of close observation of participants through qualitative inquiry in real-life classroom.

### **Research Design**

The research study focused on the lived experiences of participants by incorporating mutual aspects of phenomenology and interpretation. Consistently, the phenomena was explored through the lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In this way, the inquiry involved more than a mere description of the participant account. Instead, it reported on the participants' experiences by way of the researchers' interpretations. The researchers' role was to experience participants' meaning of the events, conditions, and then interpret these experiences in the light of their own beliefs and experiences (Smith, Jarman & Osborne, 1999). This allowed an exploration of these experiences and how to make sense of them to understand participants' lives. Overall, IPA appeared suited for the exploration of classroom participants' relationships, behaviors and experiences (Fletcher & Milton, 2007).

### **Context and Nature of Participants**

The study involved two schools that agreed to participate and allowed their classrooms to be observed. The focus of the observations was to document student-teacher relationship and the passive-aggressive behavior of students. At the time of data collection, most of the schools were about to close for summer vacations and in a few other schools, exams were in process. Of the few schools that were approached by the research team, two schools agreed to be involved and therefore provided ease and accessibility (Given, 2008). The researchers explained the plan, scope, and objectives of the study to school administration and they mutually decided upon the classes and teachers to observe to meet the

objectives of the study. Both schools were from Grade 1 to 10<sup>1</sup> and were managed under private administration. The academic standard of both schools was almost the same (average for Pakistan) and were located in a middle-class catchment area.

Four classes (V, VI, VII & X Grades) were allowed to be observed by the school administration; and, five teachers (A, B, C, D & E) also agreed to be observed during classroom teaching. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were used for students and teachers throughout the paper. A coding reference was developed to identify the teacher, Grade, and subject area, for example, C (5-Computer Science), represents teacher C, Grade 5, and subject of Computer Science. The number of students in each class ranged from 25-30, with ages ranging between 9 and 15 years old. Twelve classroom observations were made in two weeks. Teachers A and B were observed three times each during the teaching of Mathematics (6) and English (5), respectively. Other teachers including C (7-Computer Science), D, and E (10-Science subjects) were observed twice for each class and aforementioned subjects. The duration of each class observed was 35 minutes that was in accordance with the school schedule. The school environment was structured, classrooms were spacious with rather traditional configuration, that is, desks arranged in separate rows and columns toward the front of the class. In Pakistan, there is often a shortfall of electricity, so it gets hot and humid during summers in the absence of electricity. The schools were homogeneous in terms of community, teaching staff and the overall environment.

#### Classroom Observation and Interviews

The phenomenon accentuating student-teacher relationship and passive-aggressive behavior were observed in the real-life classrooms during school hours. After an extensive literature review, a protocol was established to conduct classroom observations. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) was also consulted in order to identify phenomenological instances of passive-aggressive behavior. Observers were co-researchers in the project and were trained to record observations on the protocol. Classroom discussions were audio recorded. These were later transcribed, archived and used as a means for a review of classroom activities. Supplementary notes were made in conjunction with the

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<sup>1</sup>In Pakistan, these schools are known as high schools; some schools cater for students from grade 1 to 12 and are known as higher secondary schools

observation schedule to develop a deeper understanding of classroom interactions and relationships. The data generated through classroom observations were further probed in light of the lived experiences as described by the teachers and students during semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted to allow the participants to describe their experiences regarding the main features of their classrooms. It further allowed to establish trustworthiness of the interpretations through cross-checking claims from multiple sources of data.

The use of multiple sources to capture information regarding student-teacher relationships and the passive-aggressive behavior in the classroom enabled researchers to have better insight into the phenomena (Frenkel & Wallen, 2009). The students identified in the observation as exhibiting passive-aggressive behavior were later interviewed in order to gather their description of the classroom experiences and an observation and reflection on their own behavior. Data from classroom observations and interview transcripts were constantly compared and contrasted to determine areas of agreement as well as divergence (Majeed & Malik, 2016).

### **Procedure and Data Processing**

Four classes were involved in the classroom observation made by researchers within a two-week period. During observations, we identified instances of classroom behavior that fell directly into the domain and practice of passive-aggressive behavior. After completing the classroom observations, data were transcribed and expanded with field notes. An initial analysis at this stage revealed some major patterns in the data that needed further elaboration and clarification from participants.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven students identified as potential informants during the classroom observation. Informed consent was sought by their parents and school authorities. While the students were reluctant in the beginning, they opened up as the researchers developed rapport through brief interactions. Each student's interview lasted for 10 to 15 minutes, and was audio recorded. The teachers, were, also interviewed and asked to reflect on the classroom interactions and other pertinent issues raised during students' interviews. The interviews were conducted individually, were audio recorded, and lasted for about 10 to 15 minutes each. The researchers followed pre-decided protocols with the school administration throughout the data collection activity. Classes were observed during scheduled times, and the interviews of students were

conducted during recess when they were free. Similarly, interviews with teachers were conducted at a time convenient to them.

Data collected through classroom observations, student and teacher interviews were transcribed for meaning. Once the data was transcribed, it was then coded, analyzed, interpreted, and verified. The process of transcribing the interviews helped the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the subjects from repeatedly listening to and reading through the transcripts. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was undertaken in an iterative and cyclical fashion, moving from particular to shared, descriptive to interpretative and flexibly applied principles according to the analytic task (Reid, Flower, & Larkin, 2005). The interview data of students and teachers were not interpreted on an individual basis but were grounded in cumulative themes through the lens of the participants of the study in order to capture an overall sense of the phenomenon.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants in the study were treated with respect (Creswell, 2008). Informed consent was sought from the teachers and students before the beginning of the study. There were no identifiable risks for participating in the study. The use of collected data was discussed with the participants. Every caution was taken to ensure the comfort and confidentiality of the participants. The participants' names were not used in the study. There was no incentive for the participants to participate in the study. They were permitted to withdraw any time during the process of the study.

### **Results**

Transcribed data from audio recordings of classroom observations and field notes were analyzed in accordance with the guidelines provided by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). First, transcribed data was read several times and was then coded on the basis of initial reflections and interpretations. Later, these codes were converted into themes. The next stage involved seeking connections among themes and categorizing them on the basis of conceptual similarities and/or dissimilarities. The entire process was completed in NVivo 10, a software package used to analyze and synthesize qualitative data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The analysis led the researchers to identify the emerging patterns. The emergent themes, sub-themes, observations, and notes made during classroom teaching are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Analysis of Classroom Observation*

Sr.#	Main Theme	Sub Theme	Classroom Observations	Evidence from observation and notes
1.	Students working attitude	Dependent	<p>Observation focus</p> <p>Students ask for help from their teachers and peers</p> <p>Students are involved in a mutual discussion when given a task</p>	<p>Most often, students are dependent on their peers or teachers. They ask for help from their peers by asking what to write next</p> <p>Students do not try to solve the task independently but solve the task by mutually discussing it with each other and often copying from each other</p>
2.	Dislike of Authority	Procrastination Purposefully forgetting or deliberately poor job	<p>Students finish the task within the allotted time</p> <p>Whether complete their task as assigned by the teacher?</p> <p>Teachers response to student questions or their point of view</p>	<p>Most often, students do not finish their task within the allocated time because they are wasting their time by constantly moving and engaging in playful banter with each other</p> <p>Students often make lame excuses when teachers ask them about their home task; sometimes they complete it in an unreadable way, present dirty scrap paper, say that they forgot to do the work, or had some problem to do work</p> <p>Most often, students sit passively in the class and do not share anything when someone asks a question of them, or asks their point of view. The teacher does respond to the students' questions sometime but most often ignores the questions posed. Only on a few occasions does the teacher encourage students' points of view but mostly ignores them.</p>
3.	Self-confidence	Avoid eye contact/complaining	<p>Student-teacher contact</p> <p>eye-</p>	<p>Most often, students avoid making eye contact with their teacher. Most of the students are shy and have less confidence to speak in front of their teacher.</p>

Sr.#	Main Theme	Sub Theme	Classroom Observations	
			Observation focus	Evidence from observation and notes
		Student involvement	Equal importance afforded to each student	Teachers give importance to a very selective number of students by involving them in classroom activities and questions
4.	Confrontation	Showing a fake personality/ hiding their true feelings	Students confront their teacher when they are given some task	No confrontation existed between students and teachers even when it was obvious that the students were not happy with the task assigned to them. It is speculated that they hide their inner feelings of being annoyed even when the teacher gives attention to them
5.	Responsibility	Passive listening, slow-motion, "accidental" destruction, discipline	Role of students in class during lesson	The majority of the students were only passive listeners even not making a noise
			Students attitude during teaching in the class Teacher's reaction on inappropriate behavior	Some of the students leave their seats frequently for different excuses. They just find ways to leave the classroom The teacher sometimes ignores such behavior intentionally but often the teachers laps those students who behave inappropriately. Physical punishment was common in both schools

## **Looking through the Observers' Lens**

The classroom observation revealed how students were mainly passive listeners and largely dependent on their teachers or peers. If the teacher assigned students some task to do on their own, they often got confused and asked for help from their peers. Students were comfortable with their fellow classmates and far more inclined to seek help from them than their teachers. Most of the students sat idle in the class and avoided questioning whether they understood the concept or not. The teachers mostly discouraged questioning by students and even scolded them if they asked a question. Students appeared to be accustomed to the teacher-centered lecturing that they received and if a teacher tried to engage them in some activity, they got stuck and became confused.

They had little opportunity to participate in the class and often lacked the confidence to even talk in front of their teacher. On a few occasions, teachers involved selected students in discussion and ignored rest of the class. It appeared that when students resented teacher authority, they tried to disobey their teachers in a covert manner. Students were not willing to perform tasks assigned to them by teachers or generally performed poorly. They considered such tasks an undue burden and took little interest in performing them and were even not interested in participating in the classroom activities. Teachers used teacher-centered teaching methods where students had little or no role, and even in instances when there were activities, teachers were not effective in engaging students to participate. They seemed to be in a hurry and focused on the delivery of content within the scheduled time frame. The majority of the students did not care about what was going on in the class and showed little interest in class work. They remained busy in different kinds of activities such as gossiping, banter, and cracking jokes at each other. They did not like the authoritative nature of their teacher and developed a kind of covert hostility against them.

It appeared that the majority of students had low self-confidence. Few students had the courage to speak in front of the class and make eye contact with their teachers. Students sometimes purposefully ignored class work and showed resentment when teachers asked them to revise their previous lessons. They appeared less interested in doing the revision and remained off-task. Sometimes teachers also noticed students indulging in foul activities but they ignored.

Students did not confront their teachers but followed the instructions of their teachers unwillingly. In written work, they used poor handwriting and took an extended period of time to finish. Some of the

students did not make a single attempt to complete classroom work that they were not interested in. Other students were not willing to review or undertake any study as they made the case that they had already covered the content—however, when they were ultimately ordered to undertake revisions, they appeared to revise the lesson superficially, without interest.

Some students sat silently and tried to remain invisible during the class. These students considered it a good strategy to avoid responsibility. They did not even talk to their fellow classmates. There was also one exceptional case in the classroom in which a student remained silent and when the teacher asked something, he started trembling. He had high level of fear and he could not speak in front of others. There were some students who left their seats frequently by making different excuses like having to go to the wash-room or drink water. The classroom environment was disturbed due frequent movement of the students in and out of the class. In some classes, however for intermittent periods, teachers were effective in maintaining discipline and engaging students in class work. Although, the majority of the students in these instances were also passive—when teachers did interact with students, they focused on a few students who were confident, vocal, and active students in the class.

### **Looking through the Teachers' Lens**

Teachers' reflections on observed classroom phenomena were sought and presented cumulatively. They mainly ascribed family as a liable source of such passive-aggressive behaviors among students in their classes. The case was made that students' passive behavior was the result of some families having norms that do not allow children to speak in front of their elders. Others highlighted issues in families like disputes among parents, single parents, or bad socio-economic conditions that cause the passive behavioral problems among students. However, some teachers voiced the opinion that the passive-aggressive behavior was the result of the strict rules that they imposed on the classroom.

Overall, the teachers tended to make the case that there were two main drivers of the passive-aggressive behavior in their classes: family background and teachers' strict behavior. Nevertheless, it was also argued that students liked to sit passively; by their own choice, did not take interest in work or do work poorly; and, were mostly dependent on others.

Few teachers involved students in classroom activities through questioning, maintaining eye contact, and displaying caring attitude toward their students. It appeared that the majority of the teachers did not care for their students and only focused on the content delivery. There was a conformity among teachers to have more focus on content completion instead of student learning or engagement. The prevailing situation is that students are exposed to authority in the classroom and mostly resent authority through passive-aggressive behaviors. Students questioning during the lesson is sometimes partially allowed; some teachers allow it at the start of the lesson, some during the class, and some only at the end of the class. However, most often questioning was discouraged as it was considered to interrupt the lecture. One teacher said that she gave rewards for good work and provided punishment for poor work or a lack of effort put by the students to do work. The students who sit silently in the class were mostly ignored by the teachers. Only on a few occasions, did teachers involve students through questioning, establishing eye contact, and involving them in purposeful activities. In a few instances, as the teachers identified passive-aggressive behavior of some students, they encouraged them to solve problem on the board, and to share their work with other students.

### **Looking through the Students' Lens**

Students of the study were inclined to seek help from their peers when they faced a problem during the task completion. In contrast, they avoided to ask questions and or seek help from their teachers. They were afraid due to the harsh behavior of teachers because teachers often scolded them or punished them physically. They had little exposure to the classroom environment that afforded them the opportunity to participate and share their point of view. Consequently, they felt quite reluctant to express their ideas freely. Students mentioned different preferences for learning styles with some students preferring the teacher-directed lecture-based approach: [Student X]: "I feel ease in lecturing, as there is nothing to do but listen". On the other hand, other students preferred more engaging and student-directed classroom activities: [Student Y]: "I love to do activity work in my class, as I have more freedom with it". Despite students' willingness to be actively involved in their learning process, it was apparent that there was little opportunity for them to become engaged in this way, since teachers did not consider the interest of the students and were keen to apply their own methods of teaching in classrooms. Almost invariably, students sat passively with

little interest and did not follow through with the task completion. As a result, the teachers of the study were observed punishing the students, for example, one of teacher yelled, "Get out of my class!" [Teacher A]. In turn, students hesitated asking questions or sharing their interests. They rarely shared their thinking and ideas with the teachers, for example, one student [Student W], commented: "I share my interest with my friends". Students mostly avoided raising questions in the class even in instances when they did not understand the concept being taught. These students preferred a teacher with a more open and accepting attitude as evident in their comments: "the teacher should teach us with love" and "be more polite in nature" [Student C], and "teachers should avoid to scold us" [Student D].

## **Discussion**

The current study investigated two concepts i.e., student-teacher relationships, and passive-aggressive behavior. The results of the study highlight the importance of helping students in developing positive behaviors as well as instructing teachers about how their relationships with students may influence student behavior. Teachers cannot be solely responsible for the outcome of a two-sided relationship but knowing the various ways in which student-teacher relationships may influence students can help teachers to re-think the nature of the relationships that they are developing in their classrooms. In classrooms, students often exhibit passive-aggressive behavior as a means of exerting power over their teachers (Long, Long & Whitson, 2009). In fact, it is the opposite of aggression: instead of overtly threatening or yelling, a passive-aggressive student often simply doesn't say anything—this is one way for a student to have power.

The data from our study suggest that what the teachers said in their interviews did not cohere with their classroom behaviors and practices. While the teachers are explicitly encouraged foster active students' participation in their classrooms and provide opportunities for students to verbalize their thinking and opinions, the teachers of the study demonstrate little compliance. It was evident during classroom observations that teachers negatively responded to students with behavioral problems. They either scolded their students verbally or gave them physical punishments which seemed to exacerbate students' passive-aggressive behavior. Since the classroom environment was highly structured in which students' roles were predominantly passive,

they displayed resentment through covert means and do so through irrational, and arguably rational action.

We might also speculate that the passive-aggressive behavior among students of the study was due to some factors occurring inside and outside of the schools (Long, Long & Whitson, 2009). This study elucidated the phenomena within the context of the school and provided a rich description of implicated three factors which were discussed as follows.

First, classroom teaching in the observed classrooms was not geared toward student involvement and generally based on a lecturing approach to teaching in which the delivery of curricula content is paramount. This general framework has often led to one-way communication in which the teacher is active, but students are just passive recipients (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004) where they have little or no interest in the class at all.

Second, teachers' attitude towards students is very important as this also drives students' passive-aggressive behavior. We know that when a teacher shows a respectful and warm attitude toward students, students become more self-confidence and flexible to work independently. If this were to occur more often, students would be more likely to express their views, feelings and thoughts in the classroom. A friendly teacher can give a healthy boost to a child's personality development (Açıkgöz, 2005) when he/she maintains supportive relationships with students, they are likely to perform better in the class (Midgley, Feldlaufer & Eccles, 1989).

Third, teachers' harsh and strict behavior towards their students increases students' passive-aggressive behavior in the classroom. Students feel that their teachers never care about them and their feelings. This type of teacher behavior makes students more resistive and they show their aggression towards teachers in a covert manner. Teachers should encourage their students often so they feel more confident about learning and about the intentions of their teachers themselves. Teachers can achieve their objectives in the classroom by encouraging, motivating, and appreciating student input. Improved student motivation will have a positive impact on student learning, and with improved student learning, students will be more likely to flourish.

There were also some contradiction among students' views and behavior in the classroom as demonstrated by the data. Although they felt compelled to share their thoughts in the classroom during the lectures, they generally did not participate in classroom activities. They often avoided eye contact with their teacher, although the tendency to do

so could be a result of the cultural norms in Pakistan where it is considered a symbol of respect by youth not to maintain eye contact while talking to respected elders Ghazi, Shahzaha, Tariq & Khan, 2013). Nevertheless, teachers did not allow students to give their point of view in the class except on a few occasions when the confident students spoke. But the majority of the students avoided sharing their points of view with their teachers. Moreover, our education system is mainly teacher driven and students have little opportunity to speak during the class even from the first years of schooling. Therefore, students have had very limited opportunity in schools to be vocal during the class—this experience, in time, can manifest poorly in students' development and such maladaptive behaviors can become a more permanent feature of their personalities.

Literature suggests that some cultures discourage overt aggression (Cohen, Vandello, Puente & Rantilla, 1999). In the Pakistani culture the individuals often have an upbringing that they are not allowed to express their feelings. So, these individuals also keep their aggression within and thus act out their aggression in indirect ways. Despite this, teachers can manage classrooms more effectively, involve students in classroom activities and discussions, and foster an environment of shared ideas and discovery. Whilst implementing this cultural and pedagogical shift, teachers should limit their aggressive behaviors in an attempt to exert classroom control and focus on being assertive. A teacher who was showing anger in the classroom provides opportunity to passive-aggressive students to be furious and this reinforces such student behavior. Ultimately, stopping passive-aggressive behavior comes down to figuring out what students want, and tuning out all the rest (Tantleff-Dunn, Dunn & Gokee, 2002). Students are clearly aware of what other people think and expect of them, so they just go along with it.

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