

An Analysis of the Mechanisms Underlying the Impact of Teacher Support on the Development of Psychological Resilience in Adolescents



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Abstract: Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physiological, psychological, and social changes, and constitutes a key period for the formation of adaptive capacities. The level of psychological resilience directly influences adolescents' ability to cope effectively with adversity and setbacks. As the most primary and stable source of support within the school context, teacher support—encompassing emotional, instrumental, and informational dimensions—plays a significant protective role in the development of psychological resilience. Grounded in social support theory, self-determination theory, and ecological systems theory, this study systematically examines the underlying mechanisms through which teacher support influences adolescents' psychological resilience, including internal mediating processes, external environmental pathways, and moderating variables. The findings indicate that teacher support enhances psychological resilience by strengthening internal resources such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and positive emotions. It also exerts protective effects through external pathways, including the optimization of classroom climate, the promotion of peer support, and the mitigation of risks associated with adverse family conditions. Furthermore, these effects are moderated by factors such as gender, age, personality traits, and the degree of support matching. Based on educational practices in school settings, this study proposes targeted recommendations, providing both theoretical implications and practical pathways for promoting adolescent mental health and fostering psychological resilience.

Keywords: teacher support, adolescents, psychological resilience, underlying mechanisms, social support, self-efficacy

1. Introduction

Across the lifespan, adolescence is widely regarded as a distinctive developmental stage characterized by rapid changes, multiple challenges, and heightened potential risks. During this period, students not only undergo accelerated physical growth and physiological maturation, but also face a series of complex developmental tasks, including the emergence of self-awareness, immature emotion regulation capacities, the restructuring of interpersonal relationships, shifts in parent-child interaction patterns, and increasing academic pressure (Xiong et al., 2024).

Given that physiological maturation generally outpaces psychological development, adolescents tend to exhibit lower emotional stability and reduced tolerance for stress. When confronted with academic setbacks, interpersonal conflicts, or parent-child tensions, they are more likely to experience maladaptive responses such as anxiety, depression,

impulsive behavior, self-denial, and withdrawal. Notably, under similar stress conditions and adverse circumstances, adolescents demonstrate substantial variability in adaptation outcomes, which is largely attributable to differences in the level of psychological resilience.

Psychological resilience, also referred to as psychological elasticity or resilience capacity, denotes the ability of individuals to maintain relatively stable psychological functioning, adopt adaptive coping strategies, and achieve positive development when facing stress, adversity, trauma, or other major challenges. Recent research in developmental psychology and positive psychology has consistently demonstrated that psychological resilience is not a fixed innate trait; rather, it is a dynamic adaptive process shaped through continuous interactions between individuals and their environments. It is measurable, developable, and amenable to intervention (Chen et al., 2023). This theoretical shift

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has brought increased attention to external protective factors, among which social support is widely recognized as one of the most stable and critical environmental resources influencing psychological resilience.

Among the three primary sources of social support—family support, peer support, and teacher support—teacher support plays an irreplaceable role during adolescence due to its authority, professionalism, continuity, and optimal relational distance. Recent studies have shown that teacher support significantly enhances students' academic engagement, academic performance, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, while effectively reducing loneliness, anxiety, depression, and problem behaviors (Ji et al., 2023a). However, existing research has largely focused on examining direct effects, with limited attention to how teacher support is transformed into adolescents' internal psychological resilience, through which psychological pathways it operates, and under what conditions its effects are amplified. The underlying mechanisms remain insufficiently integrated and systematically articulated (Ji et al., 2023b).

Against this backdrop, the present study adopts a multidimensional theoretical perspective to comprehensively examine the pathways, mediating mechanisms, moderating factors, and practical implications of the impact of teacher support on the psychological resilience of adolescents. The aim is to provide both a theoretical foundation and actionable insights for school-based mental health education and resilience development.

2. The Dimensional Structure of Teacher Support and the Developmental Needs of Adolescents

Teacher support refers to the overall perception of care, understanding, respect, encouragement, assistance, feedback, and resource provision that students receive from teachers within the educational context. Its effectiveness depends fundamentally on students' subjective perception and acceptance. Drawing on mainstream research, teacher support can be conceptualized as comprising three interrelated yet distinct dimensions:

Emotional support centers on respect, attentive listening, empathy, encouragement, trust, and unconditional acceptance. It fulfills adolescents' needs for security, belongingness, and self-worth, and represents the most psychologically protective form of support.

Instrumental support involves concrete

assistance such as academic guidance, learning strategy instruction, provision of learning resources, and help in overcoming practical difficulties. It directly addresses challenges encountered in students' academic and daily lives.

Informational support includes feedback on learning, guidance on developmental directions, suggestions for coping strategies, clarification of rules, and goal setting, thereby helping students develop clear cognition and realistic expectations.

Among these dimensions, emotional support exerts the most profound influence on psychological resilience, as it directly addresses adolescents' urgent needs for belongingness and self-esteem. Empirical evidence indicates that teacher support not only directly affects students' academic adjustment, but also indirectly influences academic engagement and performance through psychological resilience as a mediating variable, highlighting the bridging role of resilience within school support systems (Jia et al., 2020).

From a developmental psychology perspective, adolescents are situated in Erikson's stage of "identity versus role confusion," a critical developmental crisis characterized by inherent psychological contradictions. On the one hand, adolescents strongly pursue autonomy, independence, and respect, striving to establish a stable self-concept and value system while resisting excessive adult control. On the other hand, their capacities for emotional regulation, problem-solving, and risk management remain underdeveloped, making them reliant on stable and reliable adult support when facing uncertainty.

Teachers occupy a unique position in this process: they provide authoritative guidance while maintaining rational and objective emotional support. Unlike parents, who may exhibit overprotection, control, or emotional involvement, and unlike peers, whose support may be unstable, partial, or conformity-driven, teachers offer a balanced and consistent source of support (Li, 2024). Therefore, the extent to which teacher support accurately responds to adolescents' core psychological needs directly influences their identity development, emotional well-being, and level of psychological resilience.

3. Internal Mediating Mechanisms Linking Teacher Support to Psychological Resilience

Teacher support does not directly "endow" adolescents with psychological resilience; rather, it

operates by activating, strengthening, and consolidating students' internal psychological resources, thereby enhancing their capacity to cope effectively with stress. Based on recent empirical evidence, three relatively stable and consistently validated mediating pathways can be identified.

3.1 The bridging role of self-esteem

Self-esteem, defined as the overall evaluation of one's self-worth, is a central indicator of self-development during adolescence and a foundational component of psychological resilience. Emotional support, positive attention, and fair evaluation provided by teachers constitute critical external sources of information for the construction of positive self-perceptions.

When students consistently experience respect, trust, encouragement, and affirmative feedback from teachers, they gradually internalize beliefs such as "I am valuable," "I am accepted," and "I am capable," leading to enhanced self-esteem. Adolescents with high self-esteem are more likely to adopt adaptive coping strategies—such as problem-solving, help-seeking, and reflective thinking—when facing adversity, and are less prone to self-denial, avoidance, or aggressive behavior. In contrast, those with low self-esteem are more likely to attribute failure to personal incompetence, resulting in feelings of helplessness, shame, and withdrawal, which in turn undermine their ability to cope with adversity (Wang, 2023).

Thus, teacher support contributes to psychological resilience by fostering a stable and positive self-evaluative foundation.

3.2 The bridging role of self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their capacity to successfully perform tasks or manage specific situations. As a core construct in Bandura's social cognitive theory, it represents a key motivational force underpinning the development of psychological resilience.

Through instrumental and informational support—such as instructional guidance, strategy training, and process-oriented encouragement—teachers provide students with mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion, all of which significantly enhance self-efficacy. Adolescents with high self-efficacy are more likely to perceive difficulties as manageable challenges rather than uncontrollable threats. They maintain goal orientation, persist in effort, and actively seek solutions.

Recent studies indicate that teacher support

influences students' achievement goal orientations through academic self-efficacy, thereby affecting academic engagement and the development of psychological resilience (Wang, 2023). This suggests that self-efficacy serves not only as a critical link between external support and internal motivation, but also as a key psychological resource driving sustained resilience development.

3.3 The accumulative and protective role of positive emotions

Positive emotions function as a crucial protective factor for psychological resilience. According to the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, such emotions expand individuals' attentional scope, enhance cognitive flexibility, and increase behavioral repertoires, while cumulatively building enduring psychological resources, including resilience, social connectedness, and coping strategies.

Teacher support fosters feelings of security, belongingness, and being understood, thereby reducing negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and anger, and enhancing positive emotional experiences such as joy, calmness, and pride. Positive emotions not only provide immediate buffering effects during stressful events but also contribute to an upward spiral of psychological growth over time, enabling adolescents to recover more rapidly from setbacks.

For students experiencing chronic adversity—such as family conflict, poor parent-child relationships, or peer rejection—the stable positive emotional experiences generated by teacher support carry compensatory and restorative significance, significantly enhancing their level of psychological resilience (Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, 2024).

4. External Environmental Mechanisms Linking Teacher Support to Psychological Resilience

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, individual development is shaped by the dynamic interactions among multiple environmental systems, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. As a core component of the school microsystem, teacher support not only operates at the individual level but also exerts its influence by optimizing external environmental systems, thereby generating a synergistic protective effect across multiple factors.

First, teacher support contributes to the formation of a positive, inclusive, and supportive

classroom climate. Teachers' supportive behaviors directly shape the emotional tone of the classroom. When teachers treat all students with respect, fairness, care, and patience, they can effectively reduce negative dynamics such as hostile competition, exclusion, and interpersonal tension, while fostering a collective culture characterized by mutual assistance, trust, inclusiveness, and support. A positive classroom climate itself functions as a critical contextual protective factor, providing students with a stable sense of psychological safety, reducing perceived interpersonal threats, and enabling them to draw on collective support in stressful situations. Recent research indicates that classroom climate plays a significant bridging role between teacher support and student mental health; students in highly supportive classrooms demonstrate higher levels of psychological resilience and fewer maladaptive behaviors (Li, 2024).

Second, teacher support facilitates the establishment and stabilization of peer support networks. It exhibits a notable spillover effect: teachers' prosocial behaviors, caring attitudes, and cooperation-oriented management styles are transmitted into peer interactions through modeling, norm reinforcement, and structured activities. Students who perceive high levels of teacher support are more likely to engage in helping behaviors, express concern for peers, and participate in collaborative activities. Public recognition and reinforcement of prosocial behavior by teachers further contribute to the development of stable supportive norms within the classroom, promoting the formation of a healthy and reliable peer support system. This teacher-guided peer support can continue to exert protective effects even in the absence of teachers, forming a virtuous cycle of "teacher–student support → peer support → overall enhancement of psychological resilience."

Furthermore, teacher support demonstrates significant compensatory and buffering effects in the context of family adversity. Risk factors such as dysfunctional family environments, frequent parent–child conflict, inappropriate parenting styles, and low socioeconomic status can substantially undermine students' psychological resilience. In such contexts, teacher support often exerts stronger protective effects. Through emotional care, teachers can compensate for the lack of warmth in the family; through academic guidance, they can enhance students' sense of control; through positive feedback, they can help rebuild students' sense of self-worth;

and through consistent presence, they can reinforce the belief that "reliable and caring adults exist." This mechanism not only mitigates the psychological harm associated with family adversity but also promotes educational equity by providing critical developmental opportunities for disadvantaged students (Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, 2024).

5. Moderating Factors in the Effects of Teacher Support

The impact of teacher support on psychological resilience is not uniform across all students; rather, it is contingent upon a range of moderating variables. Understanding these differences is essential for implementing more precise and effective support strategies.

In terms of gender differences, adolescent girls tend to be more sensitive to interpersonal climates, emotional cues, and relationship quality. They respond more strongly to emotional support—such as listening, understanding, encouragement, and comfort—and are more likely to derive a sense of security and belonging from such support. In contrast, boys are generally more task-oriented and place greater emphasis on competence development, responding more strongly to instrumental support such as academic guidance, strategy training, and problem-solving assistance. These differences are closely related to gender socialization processes that differentially shape relational versus task orientations.

Regarding age and grade level, the need for autonomy increases significantly as students grow older. Younger adolescents (e.g., lower secondary school students) tend to be more receptive to directive and care-oriented support. However, excessive control, frequent intervention, or overprotective forms of "support" may trigger resistance among older students (e.g., upper secondary school students), undermining intrinsic motivation and hindering the development of psychological resilience. Accordingly, teacher support should gradually shift from a "directive" approach to a more "facilitative, collaborative, and empowering" model as students mature.

Personality traits also play an important moderating role. Students high in neuroticism are more sensitive to negative feedback and exhibit greater emotional volatility; consequently, even when they receive moderate levels of support, improvements in psychological resilience may be

limited. Students high in conscientiousness are more likely to actively seek and effectively utilize teacher support, resulting in more stable outcomes. Those high in extraversion and openness are more inclined to accept support and translate it into actionable resources.

The degree of support matching constitutes a central determinant of support effectiveness. When the type of support provided by teachers aligns with students' actual needs, it is more readily accepted and leads to more substantial improvements in psychological resilience. Conversely, mismatches between support and need—such as offering abstract advice when students are emotionally distressed, or providing superficial comfort when they face academic difficulties—may not only reduce effectiveness but also provoke resistance and disengagement.

6. Educational Implications and Practical Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis of underlying mechanisms and in light of educational practice, this study proposes four actionable pathways.

First, schools should establish a comprehensive support system centered on teacher support. Psychological resilience development should be integrated into the overall educational mission, promoting a shift in teachers' roles from "knowledge transmitters" to "facilitators of student development." Systematic training should be provided on adolescent psychological development, theories of psychological resilience, effective support strategies, communication skills, and emotional guidance techniques. At the same time, the structure of teachers' workloads should be optimized to reduce non-instructional burdens, thereby creating institutional conditions that allow teachers to invest in emotional labor and provide individualized support.

Second, the sensitivity, specificity, and strategic implementation of teacher support should be enhanced. Teachers should develop the capacity to observe and accurately identify students' needs across different contexts, avoiding standardized or "one-size-fits-all" approaches. Emotional support should be prioritized for students with high anxiety and low self-esteem; instrumental and informational support should be strengthened for students facing academic difficulties; autonomy-supportive approaches should be emphasized for older students; and sustained, stable support should be provided for

at-risk students. Support behaviors should be characterized by sincerity, consistency, moderation, and authenticity, avoiding utilitarian, superficial, or emotionally reactive expressions.

Third, teacher support should be extended into a broader classroom culture of mutual support. Through strategies such as cooperative learning, group tasks, classroom mutual-aid agreements, role modeling, and peer-support systems, teachers can transform individual teacher–student support into a collective culture of support. This shift—from "teacher-to-student support" to "mutual support among all members"—can significantly expand both the scope and sustainability of protective effects.

Fourth, targeted and systematic interventions should be implemented for high-risk students. For students with limited family support, high exposure to adversity, or low levels of psychological resilience, a coordinated support system involving homeroom teachers, subject teachers, and school psychologists should be established. Through sustained, multidimensional support, these students can be guided to reconstruct maladaptive cognitions, enhance coping skills, build social connections, and reduce biased self-attributions, thereby preventing the accumulation and escalation of psychological difficulties.

7. Conclusion

The impact of teacher support on adolescents' psychological resilience constitutes a complex, multi-pathway, and multi-level process involving the interaction of multiple factors. It operates through internal psychological resources—such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and positive emotions—while simultaneously exerting systemic protective effects through external environmental mechanisms, including classroom climate, peer support, and compensation for family adversity. These effects are further shaped by moderating variables such as gender, age, personality traits, and the degree of support matching.

Future research may adopt longitudinal designs to examine long-term developmental effects, employ intervention-based methodologies to test the effectiveness of specific support strategies, and conduct cross-cultural comparisons to explore contextual variations. In addition, further investigation is warranted into how teacher–student interactions in digital environments influence psychological resilience in the contemporary era.

From a practical perspective, every word and

action of teachers carries the potential to shape students' psychological development. Teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge but also cultivators of psychological resilience, guardians of mental health, and companions in students' developmental journeys. Only by embedding the principles of support into everyday classroom practices, interpersonal interactions, classroom management, and evaluation systems can schools construct a stable, nurturing, and enduring psychological protective framework, enabling adolescents to maintain resilience and achieve healthy development in the face of stress and adversity.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest in this work.

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