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# LECTURER-STUDENT RAPPORT AS A PREDICTOR OF STUDENT LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

*Interpersonal rapport between the lecturer and the student plays a vital role in the teaching-learning process. This study investigated the effect of lecturer-student rapport on student learning. Particularly, it examined how the lecturer-student rapport as well as immediacy affect students' attitudes towards the instructor, the course, student motivation, and perceived learning. A quantitative, cross-sectional study design was employed for this study, and the data were obtained from a convenience sample of 159 medical undergraduates. Participants completed self-report measures including lecturer-student rapport, immediacy, students' attitudes toward the instructor and the course, student motivation, and their perceptions of learning. Results revealed that lecturer-student rapport significantly predicted students' attitude toward the course and the instructor, their motivation, and their perceptions of learning for the entire sample. Comparison between groups also revealed similar results in relation to lecturer-student rapport and student outcomes. The findings of this study highlight that the lecturer-student rapport and the lecturer's psychological availability significantly contribute to students' attitudes toward the course and the instructor, their motivation, and their perceived learning in a higher educational environment. This suggests that a supportive and positive relationship between the lecturer and students has a positive influence on educational outcomes and overall student success.*

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Interpersonal Rapport, Immediacy, Student Learning, Student Motivation

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## Introduction

Interpersonal rapport has a significant role in both student motivation and successful learning (Lowman, 1994; Bouras &Keskes, 2014). Rapport, a close or sympathetic relationship; agreement; harmony between individuals, comprises interpersonal relationships that are marked by friendliness and caring (Altman, 1990). Previously, rapport has been assessed in psychotherapy or in one-on-one relationships (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010); however, researchers have discovered that rapport is crucial in other contexts, like education.

Interpersonal rapport was acknowledged as a significant element of effective learning (Lowman, 1994). Interpersonal rapport plays a role, particularly in the teaching-learning process. It seems that the rapport between the lecturer and the student influences student learning (Murray, 1997) and has several beneficial effects (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010). According to previous research, for example, students who believe that they have a positive rapport with their instructors are more satisfied with both the lecturer and the materials or lectures completed in the course. Additionally, students have reported that they tend to attend lectures, communicate with their lecturers, and participate in other academic activities as a result of having a positive interpersonal rapport with their instructor (Benson, Cohen, &Buskist, 2005). Moreover, students who have positive interpersonal rapport with their lecturers tend to become more attentive in their classes (as cited in Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010). Another study has also revealed that the positive rapport between the lecturer and the students has many beneficial effects, including developing positive attitudes toward the course as well as the instructor, encouraging students to engage in academic activities that are beneficial for them and changing their perceptions on learning (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010). Thus, it appears that the instructor-student rapport can be a significant predictor of students' academic outcomes.

Importantly, interpersonal rapport, particularly in the context of teaching, seems to be associated with immediacy, that is, psychological availability of the instructor (Zhang, 2025). Several measures have been developed to assess immediacy in the context of teaching. Certain measures (e.g., Gorham & Christophel, 1990) consist of both verbal and non-verbal behaviors related to immediacy. The Gorham and Christophel (1990) immediacy scale, for example, includes items such as "Asks questions or encourages students to talk", and "Asks questions to solicit viewpoints or opinions" that are related to verbal behaviors of the instructor. Additionally, items such as "Smiles at the class as a whole, not just a few select students", "Moves around the classroom while teaching" (Gorham & Christophel, 1990), and "Look at the while talking" (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987) have been used to assess non-verbal behaviors of the instructor. Non-

verbal behaviors reveal the immediacy of the instructor. Non-verbal behaviors together with verbal behaviors assess a 'good teacher' (Negi, 2010; Sözer, 2019).

A considerable body of research has demonstrated that non-verbal behaviors significantly predicted student outcomes (e.g., motivation) (Christensen &Menzel, 1998; Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Negi, 2010), students' attitudes toward learning (Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Witt, Wheeless, & Allen, 2004) and their perceptions of the instructor, the course and the overall course experience (Addo, & Dodor, 2024; Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Solomon, et al., 2021). Prior research has revealed that verbal immediacy and student motivation are strongly correlated (Frymier, 1993; Velez & Cano, 2008; Wilson, 2006). Further, verbal behavior is linked with the attitudes of students toward learning (Menzel & Carrell, 1999; Witt et al., 2004), the instructor, and the course (Moore, Masterson, Christophel, & Shea, 1996; Wilson, 2006).

Although immediacy seems to be one strategy for fostering a positive interpersonal rapport between lecturer and student, it might not offer a comprehensive assessment of rapport. There were several concerns regarding the measures of immediacy. For example, it seems that the immediacy scale created by Gorham and Christophel (1990) only includes a limited number of instructor behaviors that measure rapport. Also, it was not specifically designed to assess the interpersonal rapport between the instructor and the student directly. In contrast to immediacy, rapport is considered a broader construct.

The professor-student rapport scale was developed by Wilson and colleagues (2010) in order to obtain a comprehensive evaluation of instructor-student rapport. Along with the immediacy scale, they have tested the 44-item rapport scale (Gorham & Christophel, 1990) to understand the effect of instructor-student rapport on student outcomes such as student motivation, their attitudes toward the instructor, and students' perceptions about the course as well as learning. The significant components of the scale were examined using exploratory factor analysis, and 10 items were excluded since they did not receive a minimum loading value. As a result, the final rapport scale includes 34 items rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Three primary components of the immediacy scale—instructor friendliness, flexibility during the lecture, and nonverbal behaviors— have been found to be significantly correlated with the instructor-student rapport. According to the study's findings, interpersonal rapport between the instructor and the student was a significant predictor of the students' attitudes toward the lecturer, student motivation, students' attitudes toward the course, and their perceptions about the learning. Accordingly, instructor-student rapport is a strong predictor of student outcomes compared to immediacy.

The a relative dearth of research attention on the influence of lecturer-student rapport and psychological availability of the lecturer on the academic performance of students in Sri

Lankan higher education institutions. This indicates the significance of understanding the impact of lecturer-student rapport and immediacy on student outcomes and their academic success. Wilson and colleagues (2010) developed and tested the instructor-student rapport scale using a sample of undergraduates enrolled in psychology courses at a US university. The present study focused on examining the lecturer-student rapport and immediacy of undergraduates in the Sri Lankan socio-cultural context and its impact on their educational outcomes. Firstly, it aimed to assess the interpersonal rapport between the instructor and the student as well as immediacy. Secondly, it examined whether lecturer-student rapport would be linked to immediacy. Thirdly, it assessed the effect of lecturer-student rapport and immediacy on other variables such as attitudes of students towards the instructor and the course, student motivation, and students' perceptions of learning.

## Method

### *Participants*

A quantitative, cross-sectional study design was employed for the data collection in this study. This study used a convenience sampling method and the data was obtained from 159 medical undergraduates (71% females, 29% males) from a non-state institute in Sri Lanka. The participants' ages vary from 18-25 years ($M_{age}$ = 22 years). Written consent was obtained from participants prior to conducting the study, and their participation was completely voluntary. The study was approved by the ethical review committee of the institute. The researchers explained the purpose of this study to the participants briefly, and they were given instructions before completing the questionnaire, which included measures of lecturer-student rapport, immediacy, students' attitudes toward the instructor, course, their motivation, perceptions of learning, and demographic information.

### *Materials*

***Professor-student Rapport Scale****: A* 27-item professor-student rapport scale was used to assess the interpersonal rapport between the lecturer and students. These items were selected from the Professor-Student Rapport Scale, which has 34 items (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010). The items were "my professor is receptive", "my professor encourages me to succeed", and they were rated using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Reliability of this scale was α = .96 (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010). Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was .89 in the current study for the entire sample.

***Immediacy Scale****:* Instructor immediacy was measured using the 23-item Immediacy scale (Gorham & Christophel, 1990). The items of this scale were "Asks questions or encourages students to talk", Praises students' work, actions, or comments", and were rated using a scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Very Often*). This scale consisted of 17

verbal and 6 nonverbal items. In the current study, the reliability of the scale was $\alpha = .84$ for the entire sample.

In addition, students' attitudes toward the instructor, course, their motivation, and perceptions of learning were assessed using four questions, and the students rated those items using a scale from 1 to 5. The students were asked to "rate the course as a whole" using the scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), and to rate two items related to students' attitudes toward the instructor and motivation; "overall, the instructor is an excellent teacher" and "instructor motivates me to do my best work", on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Also, they were asked to "rate how much you think you've learned in the course so far" using a scale from 1 (very little) to 5 (a great deal).

***Demographic Information***. Participants also provided the following demographic information in a separate questionnaire: gender, age, and academic year.

### *Procedure*

The participants were recruited from a non-state institute in Sri Lanka. The participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary. Written consent was obtained from the participants before the data collection. Data was collected from three groups who were following three modules. Before the questionnaires were distributed, the researchers gave a brief explanation of the purpose of the study, benefits and risks of participation, confidentiality, and other required instructions. Since the medium of instruction was English, the survey was administered in English. The researchers obtained approval from the ethical review committee of the institute before conducting the study.

## Results

### Reliability of Measures

Internal consistency of the two scales, the lecturer-student rapport scale and the immediacy scale, is presented in Table 1. Both the lecturer-student rapport scale and the immediacy scale have acceptable reliability for the entire sample as well as for each group. The Professor-Student Rapport Scale (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010) has 34 items; however, seven items were excluded by the panel of psychologists who carefully examined the face validity of the items since they were not relevant to the instructor-student relationship in the Sri Lankan socio-cultural context, and selected the ones that are more meaningful to this context. The final instructor-student rapport scale consisted of 27 items, and the reliability for the entire sample and each group is presented separately in Table 1. After removing seven items, reliability scores for the scale indicated that they were reliable and suitable for further analysis. The immediacy scale

comprised 23 items, and the reliability for the entire sample and the three groups is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Reliability for Each Scale within and across Groups*

| Scales | No. of items | Reliability Entire sample (*n*=159) | Reliability Group 1 (Anatomy) (*n*= 49) | Reliability Group 2 (Microbiology) (*n*= 57) | Reliability Group 3 (Pathology) (*n*=52 ) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Immediacy | 23 | .82 | .71 | .77 | .84 |
| Lecturer-student rapport | 27 | .89 | .88 | .87 | .91 |

**Descriptive Statistics**

Means and standard deviations of all measures for the entire sample and for the three groups are detailed in Table 2. The sample consisted of three groups of medical undergraduates following three modules (group 1 - anatomy, group 2 - microbiology, and group 3 – pathology). Considering the three groups, group 1 has scored higher on immediacy than the other two groups, suggesting that group 1 values immediacy more than the other two groups. In contrast, group 3 has scored higher on the lecturer-student rapport scale, attitudes towards the lecturer and the course, student motivation, and the perceptions of learning than the other two groups. This indicates that group 3 places a higher weight on the lecturer-student rapport scale, attitudes towards the lecturer and the course, student motivation, and the perceptions of learning in comparison to the other two groups.

**Table 2**
*Means and Standard Deviations for All Measures in Each Group*

| Measures | Entire sample N=159 | | Group 1 n=49 | | Group 2 n=57 | | Group 3 n=52 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Immediacy | 2.44 | 0.53 | 2.81 | 0.36 | 2.19 | 0.49 | 2.38 | 0.53 |
| Lecturer-student rapport | 3.63 | 0.45 | 3.61 | 0.42 | 3.54 | 0.45 | 3.74 | 0.46 |
| Attitudes toward the course | 4.23 | 0.75 | 3.96 | 0.71 | 4.25 | 0.89 | 4.45 | 0.54 |
| Attitudes toward the lecturer | 4.52 | 0.67 | 4.16 | 0.75 | 4.68 | 0.54 | 4.69 | 0.58 |
| Student motivation | 4.10 | 0.87 | 3.92 | 0.93 | 4.07 | 0.92 | 4.31 | 0.70 |
| Perceptions of Learning | 4.06 | 0.76 | 3.73 | 0.84 | 4.11 | 0.70 | 4.31 | 0.65 |

**Relationships among Lecturer-Student Rapport, Immediacy, and Other Variables for the Entire Sample**

Correlational analyses were used to examine the relationships among main variables—lecturer-student rapport, immediacy, student motivation, students' attitudes toward the instructor, and students' perceptions about the course and learning. As shown in Table 3, for the entire sample, immediacy was significantly correlated with lecturer-student rapport as well as motivation. Lecturer-student rapport was also significantly correlated with students' attitudes toward the course and the lecturer, student motivation, and their perceptions about learning. Additionally, the variable "students' attitudes toward the course" was positively related to students' attitudes toward the instructor, student motivation, and their perceptions about learning. The variable "students' attitudes toward the instructor" was also significantly correlated with student motivation and their

perceptions about learning. There was a significant positive correlation between student motivation and their perceptions about learning (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Correlations among Variables for the Entire Sample*

| Measures | Immediacy | Lecturer-student Rapport | Attitudes toward the Course | Attitudes toward the Lecturer | Student motivation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lecturer-student Rapport | .38** | | | | |
| Attitudes toward the course | .07 | .45** | | | |
| Attitudes toward the lecturer | .05 | .56** | .50** | | |
| Student motivation | .25** | .61** | .50** | .57** | |
| Learning | -.001 | .41** | .48** | .37** | .51** |

**$p < .01$

**Relationships among Variables in Each Group**

In this study, three groups of medical undergraduates who were following three modules (group 1 - anatomy, group 2 - microbiology, and group 3 – pathology) were the participants of the data collection. In order to gain a better understanding of lecturer-student rapport and learning, correlational analysis was conducted for each group. Accordingly, in group 1, lecturer-student rapport was significantly correlated with attitudes toward the instructor, the course, student motivation, and learning. Additionally, immediacy was significantly correlated with lecturer-student rapport and student motivation. There were significant correlations among attitudes toward the course and instructor, student motivation, and learning (see Table 4).

In group 2, there was a significant correlation between lecturer-student rapport and other variables, including attitudes toward the instructor, the course, student motivation and learning. Additionally, there was a significant relationship between immediacy and both lecturer-student rapport and student motivation. Attitudes toward the course and instructor, student motivation, and learning were all significantly correlated in group 2 (see Table 4).

In group 3, lecturer-student rapport was significantly correlated with attitudes toward the instructor, the course, student motivation, and learning. In contrast to groups 1 and 2,

immediacy was significantly correlated with all other variables, such as attitudes toward the instructor, the course, student motivation, and learning in group 3. In addition, significant correlations were found among attitudes toward the course and instructor, student motivation, and learning in group 3 (see Table 4). Overall, lecturer-student rapport was significantly correlated with other dependent variables (e.g., attitudes toward the course and instructor, student motivation, and learning) in all three groups.

**Table 4**

*Correlations among Variables by Group*

| Measures | Immediacy | Lecturer-student Rapport | Attitudes toward the course | Attitudes toward the instructor | Student motivation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Group 1 (*n*=49)** | | | | | |
| Rapport | .29* | | | | |
| Attitudes toward the Course | .01 | .56** | | | |
| Attitudes toward the instructor | .24 | .62** | .53** | | |
| Student motivation | .47** | .59** | .41** | .65** | |
| Learning | .05 | .37** | .48** | .21 | .35* |
| **Group 2 (*n*=57)** | | | | | |
| Rapport | .46** | | | | |
| Attitudes toward the Course | .19 | .43** | | | |
| Attitudes toward the instructor | .25 | .68** | .44** | | |
| Student motivation | .28* | .68** | .57** | .66** | |
| Learning | .06 | .35** | .47** | .37** | .60** |
| **Group 3 (*n*=52)** | | | | | |
| Rapport | .48** | | | | |
| Attitudes toward the Course | .35* | .39** | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attitudes toward the instructor | .35* | .54** | .46** | | |
| Student motivation | .37** | .54** | .41** | .34* | |
| Learning | .31* | .53** | .33* | .37** | .57** |

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

**Influence of Lecturer-Student Rapport and Immediacy on Other Variables in the Entire Sample**

Multiple regression analysis was used to examine whether lecturer-student rapport and immediacy significantly predict student attitudes toward the course and the lecturer, their motivation, and perceived learning in the entire sample. Lecturer-student rapport had significant positive regression weights, indicating students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport had positive attitudes toward the course as a whole (β = .50, *p* = .001), after controlling for immediacy (β = -.12, *p* = .115). The results of the regression indicated that the two predictors: Lecturer-student rapport and immediacy, explained 21% of the variability in student attitudes toward their course ($R^2$ = .213, F(2, 151) = 20.49, p < .001).

Furthermore, lecturer-student rapport was significantly predicted by positive attitudes toward the lecturer (β = .64, *p* = .001), as was immediacy (β = -.19, *p* = .05). Accordingly, students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport had positive attitudes toward their lecturer. Lecturer-student rapport and immediacy accounted for 35% of the variability in student attitudes toward their lecturer ($R^2$ = .347, F(2,154) = 40.96, p < .001).

Holding immediacy constant (β = .02, *p* = .81), lecturer-student rapport significantly predicted student motivation (β = .61, *p* = .001). This suggests that students rated higher on lecturer-student rapport were highly motivated to do their best work compared to those who rated lower on lecturer-student rapport. The results of the regression indicated the two predictors explained 37% of the variance in student motivation ($R^2$ = .374, F(2,154) = 46.05, p < .001).

In addition, controlling for immediacy (β = -.19, *p* = .02), lecturer-student rapport predicted perceived learning, indicating students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport believed that they learned more in their course than students with lower scores (β = .48, *p* = .001). Lecturer-student rapport as well as immediacy accounted for 20% of the variability in perceived learning ($R^2$ = .196, F(2,154) = 18.82, p < .001) (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Attitudes toward the Course and the Lecturer, Student Motivation, and Perceived Learning* (*n = 159*)

| | Attitudes toward the course | | | Attitudes toward the lecturer | | | Student motivation | | | Perceived learning | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* |
| Predictors | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Immediacy | -.18 | .11 | -.12 | -.24 | .09 | -.19* | .03 | .11 | .02 | -.26 | .11 | -.19* |
| Lecturer-student rapport | .84 | .13 | .50*** | .95 | .11 | .64*** | 1.18 | .14 | .61*** | .82 | .13 | .48*** |

*$p < .05$**$p < .01$***$p < .001$

**Influence of Lecturer-Student Rapport and Immediacy on Other Variables in Each Group**

**Group 1**

Multiple regression analysis was also used to examine whether the two predictors: lecturer-student rapport and immediacy, significantly predicted students' attitudes toward the course as well as the instructor, their motivation, and perceived learning in each group. In group 1, lecturer-student rapport significantly predicted student attitudes toward their course, indicating students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport had positive attitudes toward their course (anatomy), as a whole (β = .61, $p$ = .001), after controlling for immediacy (β = -.18, $p$ = .161). The results of the regression revealed that the two predictors accounted for 34% of the variance in student attitudes toward their course ($R^2$ = .338, F(2, 45) = 11.47, p < .001).

Further, lecturer-student rapport had significant positive regression weights (β = .60, $p$ = .001), indicating students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport had positive attitudes toward their lecturer, after controlling for immediacy (β = .06, $p$ = .623). Both lecturer-student rapport and immediacy explained 38% of the variability in student attitudes toward their instructor, $R^2$ = .384, F(2, 46) = 14.37, p < .001.

The results of regression indicated that lecturer-student rapport was significantly predictive of student motivation (β = .50, $p$ = .001), after controlling for immediacy,

suggesting that students who scored higher on lecturer-student rapport were highly motivated to do their best work compared to those who scored lower on lecturer-student rapport. The immediacy scale had a significant weight, indicating that those students with higher scores on immediacy scale were also motivated compared to those scored lower on immediacy scale ($\beta = .32$, $p = .01$). The two predictors explained 45% of the variance in student motivation ($R^2 = .447$, $F(2, 46) = 18.59$, $p < .001$).

Controlling for immediacy ($\beta = -.07$, $p = .641$), lecturer-student rapport had a significant predicated perceived learning ($\beta = .39$, $p = .01$). Accordingly, students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport believed that they learned more in their course than students with lower scores on lecturer-student rapport. The results of the regression indicated that lecturer-student rapport and immediacy explained 14% of the variability in perceived learning ($R^2 = .140$, $F(2, 46) = 3.74$, $p < .05$) (see Table 6).

**Group 2**

The results of regression indicated that lecturer-student rapport significantly predicted student attitudes toward the course (microbiology) as a whole ($\beta = .43$, $p = .01$) in group 2. This suggests that students in group 2 scored high on lecturer-student rapport, had positive attitudes toward the course, after controlling for immediacy ($\beta = .00$, $p = .992$). The two predictors: Lecturer-student rapport and immediacy accounted for 18% of the variance in student attitudes toward their course (microbiology) ($R^2 = .181$, $F(2, 52) = 5.77$, $p < .05$).

Controlling for immediacy ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .437$), lecturer-student rapport had a significant predicted positive attitude toward their lecturer ($\beta = .72$, $p = .001$), indicating students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport had positive attitudes toward their lecturer. Both lecturer-student rapport and immediacy explained 47% of the variability in student attitudes toward their instructor ($R^2 = .474$, $F(2, 54) = 24.32$, $p < .001$).

It was also found that lecturer-student rapport had a significant predicted student motivation ($\beta = .70$, $p = .001$), after controlling for immediacy ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .707$). Accordingly, students who scored higher on the lecturer-student rapport scale were highly motivated to do their best work compared to those who scored lower on lecturer-student rapport. The results indicated that lecturer-student rapport and immediacy accounted for 47% of the variability in student motivation ($R^2 = .466$, $F(2, 54) = 23.52$, $p < .001$).

Holding immediacy constant ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .370$), lecturer-student rapport significantly predicted perceived learning ($\beta = .41$, $p = .05$), indicating that students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport believed that they learned more in their course than students

with lower scores on lecturer-student rapport. The results also revealed that lecturer-student rapport and perceived learning explained 14% of the variability in student motivation ($R^2 = .138$, $F(2, 54) = 4.32$, $p < .05$) (see Table 6).

**Group 3**

In group 3, lecturer-student rapport or immediacy did not significantly predict student attitudes toward the course. Lecturer-student rapport had significant positive regression weights ($\beta = .48$, $p = .01$), suggesting students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport had positive attitudes toward their instructor, after controlling for immediacy ($\beta = .12$, $p = .390$). Both lecturer-student rapport and immediacy explained 30% of the variability in student attitudes toward their lecturer ($R^2 = .300$, $F(2, 48) = 10.31$, $p < .001$).

Controlling for immediacy ($\beta = .15$, $p = .297$), lecturer-student rapport significantly predicted student motivation ($\beta = .47$, $p = .01$), suggesting students who scored higher on the lecturer-student rapport scale were highly motivated to do their best work compared to those who scored lower on lecturer-student rapport. The results of the regression indicated that lecturer-student rapport and immediacy accounted for 31% of the variability in student motivation ($R^2 = .311$, $F(2, 48) = 10.84$, $p < .001$).

It was also found that lecturer-student rapport significantly predicted perceived learning ($\beta = .50$, $p = .01$), indicating student with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport believed that they had learned more in their course than those who scored lower on lecturer-student rapport, after controlling for immediacy ($\beta = .07$, $p = .606$). The two predictors: lecturer-student rapport and perceived learning, explained 29% of the variability in perceived learning ($R^2 = .287$, $F(2, 48) = 9.67$, $p < .001$) (see Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Attitudes toward Course and Lecturer, Motivation, and Perceived Learning* (*n = 159*) *by Group*

| | Attitudes toward Course | | | Attitudes toward the lecturer | | | Motivation | | | Perceived Learning | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* |
| Predictors | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Group 1 – | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Immediacy | -.38 | .26 | -.18 | .13 | .25 | .06 | .84 | .30 | .32* | -.16 | .34 | -.07 |
| Lecturer-student rapport | 1.03 | .22 | .61*** | 1.07 | .22 | .60*** | 1.11 | .26 | .50*** | .78 | .29 | .39* |
| Group 2 – | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Immediacy | .00 | .25 | .00 | -.10 | .12 | -.09 | -.08 | .21 | -.04 | -.18 | .20 | -.13 |
| Lecturer-student rapport | .84 | .28 | .43** | .88 | .14 | .72*** | 1.45 | .23 | .70*** | .65 | .22 | .41* |
| Group 3 – | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Immediacy | .21 | .15 | .21 | .13 | .15 | .12 | .19 | .18 | .15 | .09 | .17 | .07 |
| Lecturer-student rapport | .34 | .18 | .29 | .61 | .18 | .48** | .73 | .21 | .47** | .71 | .20 | .50** |

*$p < .05$**$p < .01$***$p < .001$

**Discussion**

The present study examined the lecturer-student rapport and immediacy of undergraduates in the Sri Lankan socio-cultural context, as well as how these factors affected student outcomes. Firstly, it examined interpersonal rapport between the lecturer and the student as well as immediacy. Secondly, it assessed the relationship between

lecturer-student rapport and immediacy. Thirdly, it investigated how attitudes of students toward the lecturer and the course, student motivation, and students' perceptions of learning were influenced by lecturer-student rapport and immediacy.

Lecturer-student rapport was assessed using the professor-student rapport scale developed by Wilson and colleagues (2010), and tested lecturer-student rapport among university students who enrolled in the psychology course. To better understand lecturer-student rapport and its relationship to other significant factors, including students' attitudes toward the lecturer and the course, students' perceptions of learning, and student motivation in other disciplines, the measure was employed with undergraduates from a non-state institute in Sri Lanka. Overall, findings revealed significant outcomes for the entire sample as well as three groups in terms of lecturer-student rapport, immediacy, and other variables.

**Relationships among lecturer-student rapport, immediacy, and other variables**

Results revealed that, for the entire sample, lecturer-student rapport was significantly correlated with students' attitudes toward the course and the lecturer, student motivation, and their perceptions about learning. Previous studies have indicated that students who have positive relationships with their instructors are more likely to be motivated, engaged and exhibit a genuine enthusiasm for learning (Froiland et al., 2019; Howe et al., 2019). Findings of the present study also provide evidence for the importance of lecturer-student rapport for student outcomes since it increases student motivation, engagement, and creates a safer learning environment, all of which can lead to improved academic performance, higher grades, and self-confidence. It encourages students to participate more readily and feel comfortable taking academic risks, which promotes deeper learning and greater success.

There was a significant correlation between immediacy and lecturer-student rapport as well as motivation for the entire sample. Additionally, there were significant intercorrelations among students' attitudes toward the lecturer, student motivation, and their perceptions about learning. Similar findings were also observed in each group. These findings supported the previous research evidence suggesting that interpersonal rapport between the lecturer and the student plays a significant role, especially throughout the teaching-learning process, and that it has beneficial outcomes (Murray, 1997; Negi, 2010; Wilson & Ryan, 2013; Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010).

Lecturer-student rapport plays a crucial role in student learning. It can enhance learning by increasing student motivation, active participation, which can lead to more positive attitudes toward the course and instructor and higher academic performance among students (Wilson & Ryan, 2013). A supportive environment created through a harmonious and trusting relationship between the lecturer and the student can encourage

students to express their views, ask questions, exchange their perspectives, and feel more comfortable in their learning environment, which allows them to maximize their learning benefits. The rapport between the lecturer and the student can create a positive emotional environment, which increases students' self-confidence (Wang & Jin, 2025). It encourages students to manage their emotions and complete their academic tasks successfully. This process is characterized by the Broaden-and-Build theory (Fredrikson, 2004), which explains that positive emotions help individuals develop self-efficacy and broaden their perspectives, both of which subsequently enhance their mental well-being.

**Impact of lecturer-student rapport and immediacy on student attitudes toward the course and the lecturer, student motivation, and perceived learning**

Findings of regression analysis revealed that lecturer-student rapport and immediacy significantly predicted student attitudes toward the course and the lecturer, their motivation, and perceived learning in the entire sample. Furthermore, after controlling for immediacy, lecturer-student rapport significantly predicted student attitudes toward the course and the lecturer, their motivation, and perceived learning, indicating that students with higher scores on lecturer-student rapport had positive attitudes toward the course and the lecturer, were highly motivated to do their best work, and believed that they learned more in their course than students with lower scores.

According to prior research evidence, students who have good interpersonal rapport with their lecturers are more likely to attend lectures, interact with them, and take part in other academic activities (Benson, Cohen, &Buskist, 2005). Additionally, lecturer-student rapport has several positive effects, such as fostering positive attitudes toward the course and the instructor, motivating students to participate in academic activities that benefit them, and enhancing their perceptions of learning (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010) and higher academic performance (Wilson & Ryan, 2013).

Similarly, immediacy, the presence of psychological availability of the lecturer, also leads to positive outcomes for students. Prior research has also revealed that the lecturer-student relationship contributes to improving the self-esteem of students (Joseph & De Silva, 2022) and intention to retain in higher education (Sewwandi & Ranasinghe, 2021). Findings of this study provide further evidence for the beneficial effects of lecturer-student rapport and immediacy on student outcomes. Further, it suggests that the instructor-student rapport is a strong predictor of student outcomes.

**Strengths and limitations**

Considering the strengths, this is one of the first studies that examined lecturer-student rapport and immediacy, and other outcome variables such as student attitudes toward the

course and the lecturer, their motivation, and their perceptions of learning with undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Second, it seems that the present study is one of the first studies that has used both the professor-student rapport scale (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010) and the immediacy scale (Gorham & Christophel, 1990) with a sample of undergraduate students in the Sri Lankan socio-cultural context. The professor-student rapport scale developed by Wilson and colleagues (2010) has provided evidence for the effect of it on student learning in psychology undergraduates in the US.

This is the first study we know of to include participants from another discipline other than psychology. Hence, this study has contributed to the literature addressing the aforementioned constructs of undergraduates in the Sri Lankan context. Third, results further supported the previous research on lecturer-student rapport and immediacy and other outcome variables (e.g., Benson, Cohen, &Buskist, 2005; Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010). Specifically, lecturer-student rapport significantly predicted other outcome variables in the entire sample and the three groups. Fourth, all the measures that were used in this study had acceptable reliability for the entire sample as well as for each student group.

There are several limitations of this study. The use of a convenience sample, which included only the undergraduate students from one higher educational institute, can limit generalizability. Also, the current study focuses on the influence of lecturer-student rapport and immediacy on factors such as student attitudes toward the course and the lecturer, their motivation, and perceived learning. Lecturer-student rapport and immediacy can affect other important psychological constructs, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, that can contribute to student learning. Hence, future research can focus on examining other important psychological constructs that are useful in understanding the impact of lecturer-student rapport on student learning. Future research can employ a representative and diverse sample from a broader range of higher education institutions and include measures of other important psychological constructs that influence lecturer-student rapport and student learning to reduce the impact of study limitations.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, findings of this study revealed the importance of lecturer-student rapport and immediacy that influence student outcomes such as student attitudes toward the course and the lecturer, their motivation, and their perceptions of learning. It is evidence that lecturer-student rapport is a better predictor of student outcomes. Teaching is considered a social endeavor. Hence, understanding the value of lecturer-student rapport is vital since it is the key component of both teaching and learning outcomes. Working toward establishing and maintaining rapport and making an effort to convey goodwill

will increase the benefits of positive outcomes of lecturer-student rapport for both lecturers and students in the teaching-learning process.

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