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EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER MOTIVATION AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN 21ST-CENTURY CLASSROOMS IN TAFT DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between teacher motivation and student engagement in 21st-century classrooms within the Taft District, Eastern Samar. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational design, data were gathered from 135 teachers (complete enumeration) and 344 students (random sampling using Slovin's formula). Teacher motivation was assessed in terms of salary and benefits, rewards and recognition, work environment and resources, and administrative support. Student engagement was measured across cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social domains. Results revealed high levels of both teacher motivation (M = 4.13, SD = 0.47) and student engagement (M = 4.01, SD = 0.52). Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship (r = .61, p < .001) between teacher motivation and student engagement. These findings suggest that motivated teachers contribute to a more engaging learning environment for students, particularly in rural, tech-transitioning contexts. Policy implications and recommendations for future research are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Teacher Motivation, Student Engagement, 21st-Century Education*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The evolving landscape of 21st-century education—characterized by technological advancement and student diversity—demands adaptive, motivated educators and engaged learners. In this context, teacher motivation and student engagement have emerged as critical determinants of classroom success. However, in rural settings such as the Taft District in Eastern Samar, the transition to technology-enhanced learning presents persistent challenges, including limited digital infrastructure, unequal access, and varying levels of digital literacy among teachers and students.

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) underscores the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in influencing teacher behaviors. Motivated teachers are more likely to adopt innovative, student-centered strategies that foster engagement (Richardson & Watt, 2016). Yet in districts like Taft, insufficient professional development, inadequate resources, and increasing workloads can undermine motivation. This variance in motivation affects not only instructional quality but also students' learning experiences, especially in tech-mediated classrooms.

Student engagement, encompassing cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004), is closely linked to academic achievement and persistence. While digital tools can enhance interactivity and personalization (Bond et al., 2020), they may also introduce distractions and exacerbate inequality (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017). In Taft, engagement levels vary widely depending on students' access to resources and the effectiveness of teacher-led strategies.

Despite extensive research on motivation and engagement, few studies have examined their direct relationship in rural, resource-constrained, and digitally transitioning contexts. Most existing literature centers on urban or well-resourced schools, leaving areas like Taft underrepresented.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the relationship between teacher motivation and student engagement in 21st-century classrooms in the Taft District. The findings aim to inform policy, guide teacher development, and support the creation of inclusive, technology-responsive learning environments where motivated teachers drive meaningful student engagement.

Objectives of the Study

This research will delve into the relationship between teacher motivation and student engagement in managing 21st-century classrooms in Taft District.

Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following research questions:

1. What is the level of teacher motivation in managing 21st-century classrooms in Taft District in terms of:
   - 1.1 salary and benefits;
   - 1.2 rewards and recognition;
   - 1.3 Work environment and resources; and
   - 1.4 administrative support?
2. What is the level of student engagement in classrooms in terms of:

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2.1 cognitive engagement;
2.2 behavioral engagement;
2.3 emotional engagement; and
2.4 social engagement?

3. Is there a significant relationship between teacher motivation and student engagement in the context of managing 21st-century classrooms in Taft District?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive-correlational research design to explore the relationship between teacher motivation and student engagement in 21st-century classrooms within the Taft District. This design was chosen for its capacity to both describe existing conditions and examine the statistical relationships between key variables without manipulating them—making it particularly appropriate for studies conducted in natural educational settings. The descriptive component allowed the researchers to capture and summarize the current levels of teacher motivation (in terms of salary and benefits, rewards and recognition, work environment and resources, and administrative support) and student engagement (across cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social dimensions). These insights were derived from the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students actively participating in technology-integrated classrooms. The correlational component enabled the researchers to determine whether a statistically significant association exists between the two variables. Rather than establishing cause-and-effect, this method assessed the strength and direction of the relationship—answering whether higher levels of teacher motivation are associated with increased student engagement. The use of Pearson's correlation coefficient facilitated this analysis by quantifying the degree to which the two sets of data move in relation to one another. This design was particularly suitable given the study's goals and context. First, it accommodated the constraints of conducting research in public schools where experimental manipulation is impractical and ethically sensitive. Second, it provided a foundation for generating data-driven insights that could inform administrative decision-making and educational policy, especially in under-resourced districts like Taft, where evidence-based planning is critical to maximizing limited resources.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in the Taft District of Eastern Samar,a predominantly rural area located in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines. The district encompasses a number of public elementary and secondary schools managed under the Department of Education (DepEd) and serves a diverse student population drawn from remote barangays and a town center. It is characterized by its geographic isolation, limited access to digital infrastructure, and resource-constrained school environments, making it an ideal setting for investigating the relationship between teacher motivation and student engagement in 21st-century classrooms.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study comprised public school teachers and students from the Taft District in Eastern Samar, Philippines, who were actively involved in teaching and learning during the School Year 2024–2025. This dual-respondent approach was employed to gather comprehensive insights into both the supply side (teachers' motivation) and the demand side (students' engagement) of the educational process within 21st-century classrooms.

Teacher Respondents

A complete enumeration of all classroom teachers in the district was conducted, totaling 135 teachers from various grade levels and subject areas across elementary and secondary public schools. This method ensured that the study captured a wide range of perspectives across different school types, years of teaching experience, and levels of exposure to digital teaching tools. The inclusion of the entire teaching population enhanced the validity of the data and allowed for a robust analysis of motivation-related factors.

Student Respondents

For the student population, which totaled 2,449 learners, a random sampling technique was used to select a representative group. Applying Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error, the final sample size was calculated to be 344 students. The respondents were proportionally drawn from elementary and secondary schools to ensure representativeness. These students provided data on their levels of engagement across cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social domains.

Research Instrument

To collect the necessary data, the study employed two structured, researcher-developed questionnaires tailored to assess the key variables: teacher motivation and student engagement. The first instrument, the Teacher Motivation Questionnaire, was designed to evaluate the motivational levels of public school teachers across four major domains—salary and benefits, rewards and recognition, work environment and resources, and administrative support. The questionnaire comprised 20 items, with each domain represented by five statements. Responses were rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The items were grounded in Self-Determination Theory, aiming to capture both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators relevant to the teaching profession in rural settings.

The second instrument, the Student Engagement Questionnaire, was intended to measure students' perceived levels of engagement in 21st-century classrooms. This tool also included 20 items categorized into four dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social engagement. Like the first instrument, it utilized a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always), with items adapted from established engagement frameworks and modified for age and cultural relevance. Examples included statements such as "I try hard to do well in school" and "I enjoy working with classmates during group tasks."

To ensure content validity, both questionnaires were subjected to expert review by educational researchers and practitioners, who evaluated each item for clarity, relevance, and contextual fit. A pilot test involving a small group of teachers and students from a neighboring district was conducted to assess comprehensibility and internal consistency. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded strong coefficients—0.88 for the

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teacher motivation questionnaire and 0.91 for the student engagement questionnaire—indicating high internal consistency and suitability of the instruments for the research context. These tools provided robust, quantifiable insights into how teacher motivation and student engagement manifest in rural, technology-adopting classrooms.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted systematically to ensure accuracy, reliability, and ethical compliance. Prior to distribution, permission was secured from the Department of Education (DepEd) Division Office and participating school heads within the Taft District. An orientation was conducted with school administrators to explain the purpose of the study, the instruments used, and the roles of the respondents. Informed consent was obtained from all teacher participants, and assent forms were secured from student respondents, with parental consent where necessary, in compliance with ethical research standards.

Questionnaires were administered using a combination of face-to-face and online formats, depending on the schools' accessibility and available infrastructure. For schools with limited internet access, printed copies of the questionnaires were distributed and collected in sealed envelopes to maintain confidentiality. In schools with adequate digital capacity, Google Forms were used to streamline data gathering.

Throughout the data collection period, the researchers maintained communication with focal persons in each school to monitor progress, provide clarifications, and ensure the completeness of responses. Once all responses were collected, the data were encoded, organized, and screened for accuracy. Incomplete or inconsistent responses were excluded from the final analysis. The collected data were then statistically processed using SPSS version 27 to generate descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients relevant to the study's objectives.

Data Analysis

The data collected from teachers and students were processed and analyzed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to determine the levels of teacher motivation and student engagement across their respective domains. To examine the relationship between the two variables, the study employed Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, with a significance level set at 0.05. This analysis identified the strength and direction of the relationship, enabling the researchers to determine whether higher levels of teacher motivation were significantly associated with increased student engagement in 21st-century classrooms.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical standards to ensure the rights, safety, and dignity of all participants. Prior to data collection, formal approval was obtained from the Department of Education Division Office and school administrators within the Taft District. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and written informed consent was obtained from all teacher respondents. For student participants, assent was secured along with parental or guardian consent**.** Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Data were used solely for research purposes and stored securely to prevent unauthorized access, in compliance with institutional and professional ethical guidelines.

RESULTS

The findings of this study provide meaningful insights into how teacher motivation influences student engagement in the context of 21st-century classrooms in the Taft District. By examining the patterns observed in both teacher and student responses, this section interprets the results in light of existing theories and literature, highlighting their implications for educational practice and policy, particularly in rural and resource-limited settings.

On Teacher Motivation

Table 1 shows that all four components of teacher motivation yielded high mean scores, with Rewards and Recognition registering the highest mean at 4.17. This finding suggests that teachers in the Taft District feel valued and acknowledged for their efforts, which significantly contributes to their sense of professional fulfillment. As supported by Movsessian (2018), consistent recognition—whether through formal awards or informal praise—enhances teacher morale and inspires higher levels of commitment and instructional quality. This aligns with Hodges (2021), who emphasized that creating a "recognition-rich environment" fosters enthusiasm and productivity among teachers, particularly in challenging work conditions.

Table 1. Teacher Motivation Levels

Component	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Salary and Benefits	4.08	0.59	High
Rewards and Recognition	4.17	0.51	High
Work Environment & Resources	4.12	0.45	High
Administrative Support	4.15	0.53	High
Overall Motivation	4.13	0.47	High

Although Salary and Benefits received the lowest mean score (M = 4.08) among the four domains, it still falls within the "high" category, indicating general satisfaction but also pointing to a potential area for improvement. This observation echoes the findings of SEAMEO INNOTECH (2020), which noted that while Filipino teachers are often intrinsically motivated, inadequate compensation remains a persistent concern that may hinder long-term retention and job satisfaction. While salary alone may not determine teacher effectiveness, fair and competitive compensation is crucial for sustaining motivation, especially in rural districts like Taft, where financial and logistical challenges are more pronounced.

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Meanwhile, the domains of Work Environment and Resources (M = 4.12) and Administrative Support (M = 4.15) also scored highly, suggesting that teachers generally feel supported both materially and institutionally. These findings align with Dela Cruz and Gonzales (2023), who identified a strong link between conducive work environments and teacher motivation in Philippine schools. Moreover, as Portey (2021) pointed out, when school administrators involve teachers in decision-making and provide access to professional development, it fosters a sense of empowerment and increases instructional engagement.

Overall, the composite mean score of 4.13 indicates a highly motivated teaching workforce in the Taft District, which is encouraging given the district's ongoing transition into technology-enhanced education. This level of motivation is vital in promoting the adoption of 21st-century instructional strategies and sustaining student-centered learning practices. As highlighted in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), when teachers experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness—needs addressed through recognition, support, and professional satisfaction—they are more likely to exhibit high levels of motivation that translate into improved classroom performance and learner outcomes.

On Student Engagement

As shown in Table 2, all components of student engagement were rated high, with the highest in 'Social Engagement' (M = 4.06), followed closely by 'Cognitive Engagement' (M = 4.05). This suggests that students are actively involved in both peer interactions and academic content. 'Behavioral Engagement' received the lowest score (M = 3.92), indicating that while students are mentally and emotionally engaged, their participation in physical activities such as attendance and task completion may be slightly lower.

Table 2. **Student Engagement Levels**

Component	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Cognitive Engagement	4.05	0.55	High
Behavioral Engagement	3.92	0.49	High
Emotional Engagement	4.03	0.51	High
Social Engagement	4.06	0.53	High
Overall Engagement	4.01	0.52	High

These findings suggest that students in the Taft District are not only intellectually invested in their academic activities but are also actively participating in peer interactions and collaborative learning environments. This aligns with Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), who emphasized that student engagement is multidimensional, with social and cognitive domains playing a crucial role in sustaining attention, deepening understanding, and fostering a sense of belonging in the classroom. The high levels of social engagement may reflect teachers' success in fostering inclusive, student-centered learning environments, a core characteristic of effective 21st-century classrooms (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

The relatively strong performance in cognitive engagement indicates that students are exerting mental effort, applying higher-order thinking, and showing interest in learning tasks—outcomes often influenced by the instructional methods and motivational behaviors of their teachers. As highlighted by Bond et al. (2020), the use of interactive and technology-supported strategies can enhance students' cognitive involvement by making learning more personalized and relevant. This finding supports the idea that motivated teachers who use such strategies are likely contributing to this elevated level of academic investment.

On the other hand, Behavioral Engagement received the lowest score **(**M = 3.92**),** though still within the high range. This suggests that while students are mentally and emotionally engaged, their observable participation—such as class attendance, punctuality, task completion, and active classroom behavior—may be somewhat less consistent**.** This trend may be influenced by external barriers common in rural settings, such as lack of access to reliable transportation, intermittent internet connectivity, or home-related responsibilities, which can affect students' ability to fully participate in school activities. Kirschner and De Bruyckere (2017) also noted that increased digital distractions and socio-economic disparities can hinder behavioral engagement, particularly when technology is introduced without adequate support systems.

In total, the findings reflect a generally positive engagement profile among students in the Taft District, with particular strengths in interpersonal and intellectual aspects of learning. However, the slightly lower behavioral engagement highlights the need for more targeted interventions that address attendance issues, task completion habits, and learning routines—areas that are critical for achieving consistent academic performance. These results underscore the importance of teacher motivation and effective classroom management in creating environments where all dimensions of engagement are equally nurtured.

Relationship Between Teacher Motivation and Student Engagement

Table 3 illustrates the result of the Pearson correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between teacher motivation and student engagement in 21st-century classrooms within the Taft District. The correlation coefficient of r = 0.61 with a p-value of < .001 indicates a moderate to strong positive correlation that is statistically significant. This suggests that as levels of teacher motivation increase, so do levels of student engagement—highlighting a meaningful and consistent association between the two variables.

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Table 3. Correlation Between Teacher Motivation and Student Engagement

Variable Pair	Correlation (r)	p-value
Teacher Motivation × Student Engagement	0.61	<.001

This result supports the theoretical foundations of the study, particularly Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that individuals who feel autonomous, competent, and supported are more likely to influence others positively. In the context of education, motivated teachers who experience professional satisfaction are more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment—all of which are known to foster a more engaging classroom environment. Similarly, Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) supports this relationship by emphasizing the importance of modeling: when teachers exhibit high motivation and perseverance, students are likely to emulate these behaviors, resulting in improved engagement across cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social dimensions.

Empirical studies reinforce this finding. Delfino (2019), for instance, demonstrated that motivated teachers in Philippine classrooms are better able to sustain student interest, implement dynamic instructional practices, and manage classrooms effectively—factors that directly enhance student engagement. Likewise, Klassen et al. (2011) emphasized that teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction significantly impact students' motivation and academic behavior. In the context of the Taft District—where technological challenges, resource limitations, and rural constraints persist—this relationship becomes even more critical, as motivated teachers often serve as the primary drivers of innovation and learner support in the absence of structural advantages.

The statistically significant correlation found in this study validates the central hypothesis and confirms that teacher motivation is a strong predictor of student engagement in rural, technology-transitioning classrooms. These findings carry important implications for educational leadership and policy, suggesting that efforts to improve student outcomes must begin with investments in teacher support**,** including recognition programs, equitable compensation, professional development, and a collaborative work culture.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that teachers in the Taft District exhibit a high level of motivation across various domains, particularly in areas of rewards and recognition, administrative support, and work environment. While salary and benefits received the lowest mean among the motivational factors, it still fell within the high range, suggesting that financial incentives remain important but are not the sole drivers of teacher motivation. Likewise, students in the district demonstrated high levels of engagement, with social and cognitive engagement emerging as the most prominent, and behavioral engagement showing the most room for improvement. The significant positive correlation between teacher motivation and student engagement affirms the study's hypothesis that motivated teachers are more likely to foster engaged learners, even in resource-constrained and digitally transitioning classrooms. These findings emphasize the critical role of teacher well-being and institutional support in promoting active, student-centered learning environments. In rural settings such as Taft, where technological and infrastructural limitations persist, sustained investment in teacher development and recognition is essential for improving both instructional quality and student outcomes in 21st-century education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the study's findings, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance both teacher motivation and student engagement in 21st-century classrooms, particularly within rural districts like Taft. First, the Department of Education and local school administrators should strengthen recognition and reward systems that publicly acknowledge teachers' efforts, as this was identified as a strong contributor to motivation. Second, while salary and benefits were rated high, they still represent an area for improvement; thus, reviewing and enhancing compensation packages and providing performance-based incentives may further sustain teacher satisfaction and retention. Third, continuous professional development programs focused on digital literacy, innovative pedagogy, and classroom management should be implemented to equip teachers with the tools needed to foster engagement, especially in technology-mediated settings. Fourth, to address the slightly lower behavioral engagement among students, schools should implement targeted strategies such as learning routines, attendance incentives, and task monitoring systems that support consistent student participation. Lastly, policy efforts should prioritize infrastructure development and equitable access to learning technologies to ensure that both teachers and students can thrive in digital and blended learning environments. By addressing these areas, educational stakeholders can create a more supportive, motivating, and engaging learning ecosystem that benefits both teachers and learners.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the conduct of this study. This research was carried out independently and received no financial support or sponsorship from any external organization that could influence the outcomes. All data were collected and analyzed objectively, and the interpretations and conclusions presented are solely based on the findings of the study.

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