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Parents' trust in upper secondary school teachers: development and psychometric properties of the Parental Trust in Teacher Questionnaire (PTTQ)

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Abstract

Introduction. Parental trust in teachers is a relational variable that supports the educational alliance between family and school and bears on adolescents' psychological adjustment. Despite its relevance, no Italian psychometric instrument exists to assess this construct in the upper secondary school context. Method. This study describes the development and psychometric evaluation of the Parental Trust in Teacher Questionnaire (PTTQ), a 13-item self-report scale, in a sample of 237 parents (70.5% female; M age = 52.59, SD = 4.84) of upper secondary school students. Analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, hierarchical cluster analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis using the MLR estimator. Results. Confirmatory factor analysis supported a unidimensional structure with adequate fit (RMSEA = .076; CFI = .942; SRMR = .047). Internal consistency was excellent (α = .95; ω = .96). Standardized factor loadings ranged from .557 to .876, and corrected item-total correlations from .579 to .824. Conclusions. The PTTQ shows adequate preliminary psychometric properties for assessing parental trust in teachers in Italian upper secondary schools. Further studies on larger and more diverse samples will allow consolidation of external validity and examination of its predictive value for student outcomes.

Keywords: trust; parents; teachers; secondary school; psychometric properties.

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Introduction

The educational alliance between family and school is a recognized determinant of adolescents' psychological development and academic adjustment (Cook et al., 2018; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Jeynes, 2011). Empirical research has consistently shown that cooperation between parents and teachers contributes to students' cognitive and social skills, school motivation, and psychological wellbeing, with relational forms of involvement producing more substantial effects than structured forms of academic support (Jeynes, 2011). However, the construction of this alliance has become increasingly challenging given the growing diversity of family models and the heterogeneity of educational expectations characterizing contemporary society (Armocida & Mattalia, 2015).

Within this alliance, parental trust in teachers emerges as a key relational construct. Trust implies exposure to risk and vulnerability, as it entails relying on someone for what matters most—in this case, one's children (Baier, 1997b, 1997a; Frowe, 2005; Mayer et al., 1995). As a relational mechanism, trust is well documented across diverse interpersonal and care-oriented contexts, where it develops and is sustained through clear and transparent communication (Flückiger et al., 2018; Hancock et al., 2023; Rossi et al., 2021), perspective-taking and empathic attunement to the other's viewpoint (Sun et al., 2021), and consistent demonstrations of professional care and benevolence (Lerch et al., 2024). In educational settings, trust is positively associated with student motivation (Santiago et al., 2016), academic achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Forsyth et al., 2006), prosocial behavior, and school attendance (Adams & Christenson, 2000). These general relational mechanisms are complemented, in the school context, by active parental involvement in school life, which represents a foundational ingredient of the trust relationship between families and teachers (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Beycioglu et al., 2013; Chang, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Beyond academic outcomes, parental trust contributes indirectly to adolescents' psychological adjustment by shaping family climate and children's attitudes toward school (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016; Topor et al., 2010).

Despite its theoretical and applied relevance, research on family-school trust has concentrated predominantly on preschool and primary school, with substantially fewer studies addressing the upper secondary level (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Niedlich et al., 2021; Santiago et al., 2016). This empirical gap is mirrored by a corresponding paucity of psychometric instruments specifically developed for assessing parental trust in teachers in this context. The most widely used instruments present important limitations for the present aims. The Family-School Relationship Survey (FSRS; Adams & Christenson, 2000) was developed and validated primarily in preschool and primary samples (Kikas et al., 2016), and recent replications have questioned its unidimensionality, suggesting a two-factor structure in parents' perceptions (Kaplan Toren, 2025). The Parent Trust in Schools Scale (Forsyth et al., 2006) measures trust in the school as an institution rather than in teachers specifically—a distinct measurement target. Moreover, none of these instruments has a validated Italian version for the upper secondary school context.

To address this gap, the present study aimed to develop the Parental Trust in Teacher Questionnaire (PTTQ)—a brief self-report instrument designed to measure parental trust in teachers in Italian upper secondary schools—and to examine its psychometric properties. The instrument was developed within the “Educational Alliance” Project promoted by the “A. Cairolì” Institute (Pavia, Italy), which combines empirical investigation of the variables involved in the construction of the family-school alliance with the design of interventions aimed at strengthening it.

Methods

Questionnaire development procedure

The PTTQ was developed to address the lack of available instruments for measuring parental trust in teachers in the upper secondary school context. The development process followed the phases recommended in the recent psychometric literature for the construction of psychological instruments (Milavic et al., 2019; Pietrabissa et al., 2020; Rossi, Panzeri, Fernández, et al., 2024; Rossi, Panzeri, Taccini, et al., 2024).

In a first phase, a review of the international literature on trust in educational settings allowed the identification of the key constructs underlying the family-school relationship: communicative openness, reliability, benevolence, honesty, and competence (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Consistent with a behavioral approach to the measurement of trust—according to which trust in teachers is manifested in, and can be assessed through, the perceived frequency of specific educational behaviors—items were formulated using a trust stem (“*I trust that my child's teachers...*”) combined with a 5-point frequency-based response scale (1 = “never, almost never”; 5 = “almost always, always”). This format reflects the conceptualization of trust as an inference parents draw from systematic observation of teachers' conduct toward their child (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

In a second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with upper secondary school teachers, aimed at collecting their perceptions about the dimensions considered fundamental for establishing trustful relationships with families and the behaviors and attitudes deemed indicative of trust in everyday educational interactions. Themes emerging from these interviews were integrated with the constructs identified in the previous phase, producing an initial pool of 20 candidate items.

In a third phase, the items were reviewed by five authors of the present work (MF, PB, SD, SM, CS) – all upper secondary school teachers with diverse professional backgrounds (e.g., psychologists, pedagogists, school principals) – and by a panel of teachers with multi-year experience in upper secondary school. This expert-review phase served the function of assessing the content and face validity of the item pool (Haynes et al., 1995). Reviewers evaluated each item for clarity, relevance, and representativeness with respect to the construct being measured, as well as for the appropriateness of the response format and the linguistic accessibility of the

item wording for the target population. Following this review, 7 items were eliminated, yielding the final 13-item version of the questionnaire.

In a fourth phase, the final 13-item version of the questionnaire was administered to a small pilot sample of five respondents in order to assess item comprehensibility, response format acceptability, and the overall feasibility of administration prior to the main data collection. This pilot administration provided a further check on the face validity of the instrument (Milavic et al., 2019; Rossi, Panzeri, Taccini, et al., 2024). No critical issues emerged regarding wording, response format, or completion feasibility, and no further modifications were therefore introduced before the main data collection.

Sample size determination

Sample size was evaluated against the recommendations available in the literature for psychometric studies based on CFA. Although no universally accepted threshold exists, the main methodological references indicate $N = 200$ as a generally acceptable minimum for moderately complex factor models (Brown, 2015; Comrey & Lee, 1992; Kline, 2023). Monte Carlo simulation studies further showed that, for unidimensional models with high loadings—conditions met by the PTTQ, as confirmed by the results—samples between 200 and 300 ensure stable estimates, contained parametric bias, and proper solutions (Wolf et al., 2013). The present sample ($N = 237$) falls within this range and is therefore adequate for a preliminary psychometric study. Future research on larger and more diverse samples will further consolidate the stability of the factor structure.

Recruitment procedure

Participants were parents or legal guardians of students attending the Human Sciences program of the “A. Cairoli” Institute in Pavia, Italy. Data were collected through an online self-administered questionnaire hosted on Google Forms (Google LLC, Mountain View, CA, USA) in March and April 2024. The survey link was distributed to families through the school’s electronic register, and the average completion time was approximately 5–10 minutes. Inclusion criteria were: (a) being a parent or legal guardian of at least one student enrolled at the Institute; (b) good knowledge of the Italian language; and (c) signed informed consent.

All participants were informed about the aims, procedures, and implications of the study and provided informed consent. The study was approved by the school administration of the “A. Cairoli” Institute (communication no. 572, March 6, 2024) and conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (1964, revised 2013).

Measures

General demographic information was collected (age, sex, nationality, educational level, professional role). Participants

additionally indicated their role with respect to the student (parent, internal legal guardian, external legal guardian) and the class attended by their child(ren) at the Institute.

The Parental Trust in Teacher Questionnaire (PTTQ)

The PTTQ is a 13-item self-administered questionnaire. Each item describes a behavior or task typically performed by teachers within the everyday educational relationship. Items cover central aspects of teaching practice, including clarity in subject explanation, the capacity to teach and enforce rules, the promotion of student responsibility, the provision of emotional support and encouragement, and the quality of communication with students’ families. Sample items include “*I trust that teachers do a good job in explaining school subjects*”; “*I trust that teachers are available for a meeting if I have a problem or question concerning my child*”; “*I trust that teachers encourage my child to express their needs and emotions*”; “*I trust that teachers do a good job in teaching my child to follow rules and instructions*”. Responses are provided on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“never, almost never”) to 5 (“almost always, always”). The total score is computed as the sum of all 13 items; no items are reverse-scored, and higher scores indicate higher parental trust in teachers. The items are reported in Appendix A (Italian version) and Appendix B (English version). The PTTQ was developed and administered in Italian, and the psychometric properties reported in this manuscript refer to the Italian version.

Statistical analyses

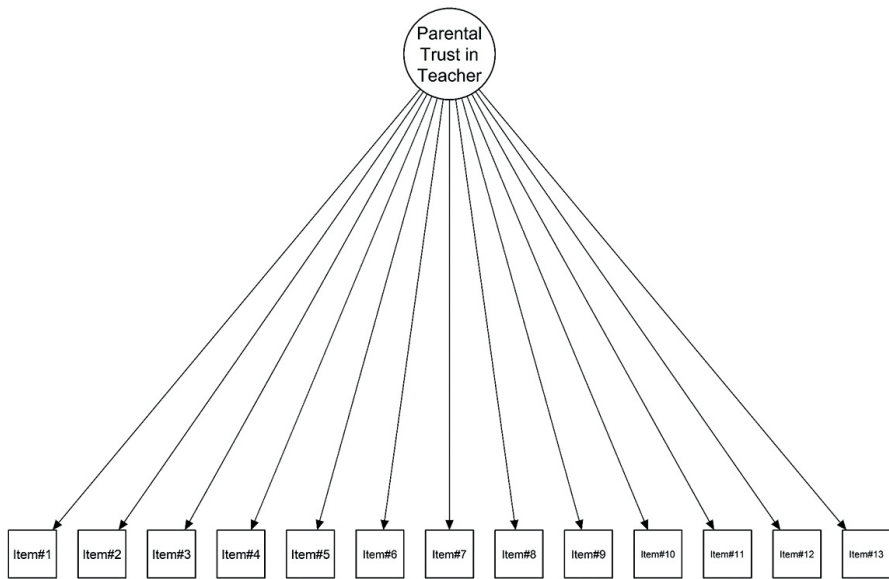
Statistical analyses were performed using R (R Core Team, 2017), with the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012) for CFA, *psych* (Revelle, 2018) for McDonald’s omega, and *corrplot* (Wei & Simko, 2017) for the correlation matrix.

Preliminary analyses examined item distributions through descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis), and inspected the data for potential floor or ceiling effects. Pearson correlations among items were then computed to assess the degree of inter-item covariation, verifying the absence of associations exceeding the .85 threshold (applied to positive values of r) recommended in the literature for detecting potential multicollinearity (Howell, 2013; Panzeri et al., 2024; Rönkkö & Cho, 2022; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The correlation matrix was complemented by hierarchical cluster analysis based on centroids (Wei & Simko, 2017), which iteratively groups items by similarity of their reciprocal correlations, allowing visual exploration of the dimensional structure of the data prior to model specification.

Based on the *a priori* hypothesized model and on this preliminary exploration, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted specifying a first-order unidimensional model in which all items load on a single latent variable (Figure 1). Given univariate non-normality of the items—indicated by skewness and kurtosis values—the analysis used the Robust Maximum Likelihood (MLR) estimator, which provides corrected estimates under violations of normality (Brown, 2015).

Model fit was evaluated through the Yuan-Bentler scaled chi-square test ($YB\chi^2$), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

Fig. 1. Hypothesized factor structure of the Parental Trust in Teacher Questionnaire (PTTQ)



(*RMSEA*), the Comparative Fit Index (*CFI*), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (*SRMR*) (Brown, 2015; Hoyle, 2023; Kline, 2023; van de Schoot et al., 2012). Adequate fit criteria were: (a) non-significant $YB\chi^2$, (b) $RMSEA < .08$, (c) $CFI > .90$, and (d) $SRMR < .08$ (Brown, 2015; Hoyle, 2023; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2023; van de Schoot et al., 2012).

Internal consistency was assessed via McDonald’s omega (ω ; (McDonald, 1999))—preferred over Cronbach’s alpha for its more robust properties when factor loadings are heterogeneous (Barbaranelli et al., 2014; Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011)—and Cronbach’s alpha (α), reported for comparison with prior literature.

Results

Participants

A total of 237 participants consented to take part in the study and completed the questionnaire in full. The sample included 70 male participants (29.5%) and 167 female participants (70.5%), with ages ranging from 34 to 67 years ($M = 52.59$, $SD = 4.84$). Most participants were of Italian nationality ($n = 223$; 94.1%), with 14 participants (5.9%) of foreign nationality. Regarding educational level, the most represented category was a high school diploma ($n = 114$; 48.1%), followed by a bachelor’s or master’s degree ($n = 62$; 26.2%), middle school certificate ($n = 50$; 21.1%), post-graduate specialization ($n = 9$; 3.8%), and primary school certificate ($n = 2$; 0.8%). Concerning occupational status, the most represented category was self-employed workers, middle managers, or teachers ($n = 68$; 28.7%), followed by technicians and semi-professional roles ($n = 39$; 16.5%). All participants except two (0.8%) responded as parents; the remainder were legal guardians. Each participant was the parent or legal guardian of at least one student enrolled at the Institute: 48 had a child attending the first year (20.3%), 54 the second (22.8%), 66 the third (27.8%), 25 the fourth (10.5%), and 44 the fifth (18.6%).

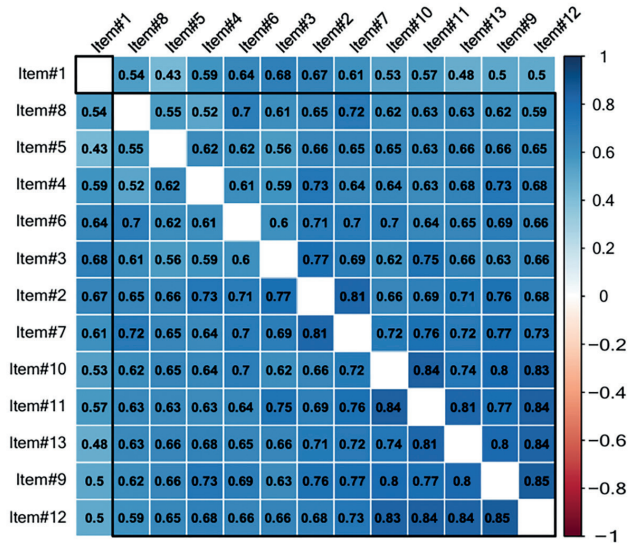
Preliminary analyses

Item distributions are reported in Table 1. Skewness and kurtosis values indicated departures from univariate normality, but no floor or ceiling effects were observed for any of the 13 items.

Pearson correlations among items were all statistically significant and positive, with values ranging from moderate to high (Figure 2), and none exceeded the critical threshold of .85 (Panzeri et al., 2024; Rönkkö & Cho, 2022; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The highest correlation was observed between Item 9 and Item 12 ($r = .85$), reaching exactly the critical threshold without exceeding it. This association was carefully considered in the CFA model specification and will be further examined in future studies on larger samples.

The hierarchical cluster analysis based on centroids confirmed the presence of a single grouping, suggesting a unidimensional structure.

Fig. 2. Item correlations with hierarchical cluster analysis based on centroids.



Factor structure

The initially specified model (Figure 1) showed acceptable but not optimal fit indices: $YB\chi^2(65) = 179.092$, $p < .001$; $RMSEA = .086$, $90\% CI [.074; .098]$, $p < .001$; $CFI = .924$; $SRMR = .049$. Given this fit, and consistent with recent recommendations (Hoyle, 2023; Kline, 2023; Muthén & Muthén, 2017; Rossi et al., 2022, 2025), univariate modification indices were inspected (Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

Modification indices (Brown, 2015; Byrne, 2008) suggested that model fit could be improved by correlating the residuals of Item 1 (“...are available for a meeting if I have a problem or question concerning my child”) with Item 3 (“...do a good job in teaching my child to follow rules and instructions”; $\Delta\chi^2 = 25.034$). Subsequently, a second inspection of the modification indices suggested that model fit could be further improved by correlating the residuals of Item 2 (“...do a good job in explaining school subjects”) with Item 7 (“...provide a fair evaluation of my child’s performance in oral and written tests”; $\Delta\chi^2 = 18.668$). The two pairs share content related to the relational-managerial and didactic-evaluative facets of teaching, respectively, suggesting that the residual covariances reflect localized content similarity rather than distinct latent sub-dimensions. Closer inspection of these item pairs supported the plausibility of non-independence between indicators on theoretical grounds (see Discussion).

After correlating the residuals of these item pairs (Brown, 2015; Byrne, 2008, 2016; Hoyle, 2023; Kline, 2023), the model showed improved fit ($\text{ritem1-3} = .341$; $\text{ritem2-7} = .299$). Although the Yuan-Bentler chi-square remained significant, $YB\chi^2(63) = 150.06$, $p < .001$, the remaining fit indices exceeded the recommended thresholds for adequate model fit: $RMSEA = .076$, $90\% CI [.064; .089]$; $CFI = .942$; $SRMR = .047$. Together, these results support the factorial validity of the PTTQ. Descriptive statistics, corrected item-total correlations, standardized factor loadings (λ), and item-level explained variance (R^2) are reported in Table 1.

Standardized factor loadings ranged from .557 to .876. In detail, Item 12 (“...encourage my child’s emotional development”; $\lambda = .876$), Item 11 (“...help my child to understand their ethical

and moral responsibilities”; $\lambda = .855$), Item 9 (“...encourage my child to express their needs and emotions”; $\lambda = .853$), and Item 13 (“...help my child to develop interest in knowledge and/or motivation to learn”, $\lambda = .847$) showed the highest standardized factor loadings. Conversely, Item 1 (“...are available for a meeting if I have a problem or question concerning my child”) yielded the lowest values across all indicators ($\lambda = .557$, $R^2 = .311$, $\text{rit-tot} = .579$), although still within technically acceptable thresholds. Item-level explained variance was overall adequate, ranging from .311 to .767.

Internal consistency and item-total correlations

Internal consistency of the scale was assessed via Cronbach’s alpha and McDonald’s omega. Both indicated excellent internal consistency: $\alpha = .95$; $\omega = .96$. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .579 to .824, all above the .30 threshold recommended in the literature (Nunnally, 1978; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Raykov, 2012; Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011), confirming the adequate contribution of each item. Consistently with the loadings pattern, Item 12 (“...encourage my child’s emotional development”; $r = .824$), Item 11 (“...help my child to understand their ethical and moral responsibilities”; $r = .817$), and Item 9 (“...encourage my child to express their needs and emotions”; $r = .814$) showed the highest item-total correlations, while Item 1 (“...are available for a meeting if I have a problem or question concerning my child”; $r = .579$) showed the lowest.

Discussion

The present study aimed to develop and examine the psychometric properties of the PTTQ, a self-report instrument for assessing parental trust in teachers in Italian upper secondary schools, addressing a gap in the available literature. Results support the preliminary psychometric adequacy of the instrument and confirm its suitability for assessing a relational variable that has been linked to adolescents’ psychological adjustment (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016; Santiago et al., 2016; Topor et al., 2010).

Confirmatory analyses supported the unidimensional structure of the PTTQ, hypothesized *a priori* on the basis of the theoretical literature on trust in educational settings (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The final model, obtained by correlating the residuals of two item pairs based on modification indices, displayed adequate fit— $RMSEA = .076$; $CFI = .942$; $SRMR = .047$ —in line with the recommended criteria (Brown, 2015; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Consistent with previous studies (Brown, 2015; Byrne, 2016; Hoyle, 2023; Kline, 2023; Muthén & Muthén, 2017; Pietrabissa et al., 2020; Rossi et al., 2022, 2025), residual correlation is a methodologically defensible practice when a plausible theoretical explanation supports non-independence between item pairs (Brown, 2015; Byrne, 2008, 2016), a condition that appears satisfied in both identified cases. The first pair—Item 1 (“...are available for a meeting if I have a problem or question concerning my child”) and

	Descriptive statistics				rit-tot	CEA	
	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis		λ	R2
Item 1	4.28	.86	-1.45	2.54	.579	.557	.311
Item 2	3.84	.91	-.74	.32	.803	.784	.615
Item 3	4.11	.84	-.85	.67	.710	.706	.499
Item 4	3.69	1.01	-.54	-.26	.719	.728	.531
Item 5	3.59	1.23	-.59	-.60	.686	.703	.494
Item 6	3.95	1.11	-1.03	.42	.719	.715	.511
Item 7	3.90	.94	-.95	.87	.803	.802	.643
Item 8	4.05	.92	-.93	.76	.671	.674	.454
Item 9	3.79	1.15	-.70	-.39	.814	.853	.728
Item 10	3.65	1.12	-.57	-.37	.801	.839	.704
Item 11	3.88	1.00	-.84	.40	.817	.855	.730
Item 12	3.65	1.08	-.64	-.11	.824	.876	.767
Item 13	3.77	1.07	-.65	-.23	.805	.847	.717

Nota: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; rit-tot = Item-Total correlation; λ = Standardized factor loading; R2 = Item Explained variance

Item 3 (“...do a good job in teaching my child to follow rules and instructions”) – shares content related to the management of the educational relationship between teacher, parent, and student, understood as the teacher’s accessibility and capacity to promote regulated behavior ($\Delta\chi^2 = 25.034$). More specifically, both items frame the teacher’s behavior from a markedly parental-evaluative perspective: Item 1 evaluates the teacher’s responsiveness to the parent’s own needs, while Item 3 evaluates the teacher’s effectiveness in managing the child according to standards the parent endorses. The shared variance in this pair was therefore interpreted as a wording-level similarity in evaluative framing, rather than as a distinct latent sub-dimension. The second pair – Item 2 (“...do a good job in explaining school subjects”) and Item 7 (“...provide a fair evaluation of my child’s performance in oral and written tests”) – shares content related to the teacher’s didactic and evaluative competence ($\Delta\chi^2 = 18.668$). The two items refer to the two core activities of classroom teaching – explaining content and assessing learning outcomes – and their wording follows a similar “doing the teaching job well” formulation. The shared variance in this pair was likewise interpreted as content and wording similarity within the broader trust construct, rather than as a separate latent facet. The residual correlation was therefore retained as the most parsimonious solution. Although in principle correlated residuals can flag candidate sub-dimensions and motivate bifactor or hierarchical model specifications, this interpretation does not appear plausible in the present case: the two pairs are qualitatively heterogeneous, and each comprises only two indicators, which is insufficient to support the identification of stable latent sub-factors (Brown, 2015; Kline, 2023). The two correlated residuals were therefore retained as a parsimonious solution that acknowledges localized content and wording similarities without overspecifying the factor structure. In both cases, residual correlations do not compromise the unidimensional interpretation of the instrument or its theoretical coherence; rather, they highlight content nuances within the trust construct that may be further investigated in future studies.

Standardized factor loadings ranged from .557 to .876, with 12 of 13 items showing loadings above .67, indicating an adequate contribution of each item to the latent variable. Examining loadings in relation to item content, an interpretable pattern emerges: the highest loadings cluster on items concerning emotional support and the student’s personal development – Item 9 (“...encourage my child to express their needs and emotions”), Item 11 (“...help my child to understand their ethical and moral responsibilities”), Item 12 (“...encourage my child’s emotional development”), and Item 13 (“...help my child to develop interest in knowledge and/or motivation to learn”). These results suggest that parental trust in teachers, as operationalized by the PTTQ, is particularly anchored in the perception of comprehensive educational care of the student rather than in purely didactic or communicative aspects. The item with the lowest loading was Item 1 (“...are available for a meeting if I have a problem or question concerning my child”), addressing meeting availability – a more procedural and logistical dimension of the family-school relationship, less closely tied to the core of the trust construct. While still within technically acceptable thresholds, this item may be revised in future studies, possibly reframing its content toward the relational dimension of availability rather than its procedural aspect.

Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .579 to .824, all above the .30 threshold recommended in the literature (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), confirming the adequate contribution of each item. Consistently with the loadings pattern, items relating to the student’s emotional and developmental dimension (Item 12, Item 11, and Item 9) showed the highest item-total correlations, while Item 1 showed the lowest, confirming its peripheral position with respect to the construct’s core.

Theoretically, the convergence between CFA results and item-total correlations strengthens the interpretation that parental trust in teachers—as operationalized in the PTTQ—is primarily rooted in the perception of comprehensive educational care, understood as the teachers’ capacity to support the student’s emotional, moral, and motivational development. This dimension is consistent with theoretical conceptualizations of trust in educational settings that emphasize benevolence and professional dedication as core components of the construct (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Notably, the PTTQ adopts a behavioral approach to the measurement of trust, operationalizing it through the perceived frequency with which teachers enact specific educational behaviors—rather than through general agreement items. This format reflects the conceptualization of trust as an inference parents construct on the basis of systematic and repeated observation of teachers’ conduct toward their child (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002), and represents a distinctive feature of the PTTQ relative to more general measurement approaches such as the FSRS (Adams & Christenson, 2000) or the Parent Trust in Schools Scale (Forsyth et al., 2006). From this perspective, high PTTQ scores do not simply indicate a generic favorable attitude toward teachers but reflect the perception of educational conduct concretely and frequently oriented to the student’s wellbeing—a distinction relevant for both research and the design of interventions aimed at strengthening the family-school alliance.

Internal consistency of the PTTQ was excellent, with McDonald’s omega of .96 and Cronbach’s alpha of .95. These values are in line with those reported for similar instruments—including the FSRS (Adams & Christenson, 2000), with α values of .92 to .93 across samples—and well above conventional thresholds (Nunnally, 1978; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Reporting McDonald’s omega alongside Cronbach’s alpha follows recent methodological recommendations highlighting that alpha tends to underestimate internal consistency when factor loadings are heterogeneous (Barbaranelli et al., 2014; Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011). For the PTTQ, the small discrepancy between the two indices ($\omega = .96$ vs. $\alpha = .95$) confirms scale robustness regardless of the estimator used.

A further element warranting attention concerns the correlation between Item 9 (“...encourage my child to express their needs and emotions”) and Item 12 (“...encourage my child’s emotional development”), which reached exactly the critical threshold of .85 (Panzeri et al., 2024; Rönkkö & Cho, 2022; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Although this value does not exceed the threshold and therefore does not compromise discriminant validity, its proximity to the limit suggests possible content overlap—both items focus on the teacher’s emotional support

of the student. Comparable patterns of strong yet sub-threshold associations between conceptually related but distinct elements of a measure have been documented in previous psychometric validation studies, where the original structure was retained on the grounds that the elements captured semantically close but not perfectly overlapping facets of the construct (e.g., (Consoli et al., 2020; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Indeed, from a content perspective, Item 9 describes a directly observable teacher behavior – encouraging the child’s expression of needs and emotions – whereas Item 12 refers to a broader developmental outcome (the child’s emotional development) that is less anchored to specific teacher behaviors. Within the behavioral approach to the measurement of trust adopted in the present study (see Method), Item 9 is therefore the more conceptually consistent of the two. Future studies on larger and independent samples should therefore evaluate a 12-item version of the PTTQ in which Item 12 is removed, or alternatively whether Item 12 could be reformulated to capture a sufficiently distinct nuance of the construct and reduce its semantic redundancy with Item 9, in either case improving scale parsimony.

Limitations and future directions

The present study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the sample comprises parents of students from a single school in a circumscribed geographic area, attending a specific track—the Human Sciences upper secondary program—that may not be representative of the general population of Italian upper secondary parents. The resulting limited variability—both geographic and by institutional type—reduces the generalizability of the findings and calls for replication on larger and more diverse samples.

Second, the sample shows a marked female prevalence (70.5%), reflecting the documented tendency for mothers to be more frequently involved in school evaluation and monitoring activities than fathers (Kikas et al., 2016). Future studies should verify whether the psychometric properties of the PTTQ remain stable in samples more balanced for parental sex, and whether systematic differences emerge in trust perceptions between mothers and fathers.

Third, online self-report administration exposes data to social desirability bias, especially relevant in the school context, where parents may tend to overestimate trust in teachers to avoid appearing critical of the institution. Although anonymity partially mitigates this risk, it cannot be fully ruled out.

Fourth, psychometrically, Item 1 showed the lowest values across all indicators—factor loading ($\lambda = .557$), explained variance ($R^2 = .311$), and corrected item-total correlation ($r = .579$)—although still within technically acceptable thresholds. Its more procedural and logistical content suggests possible reformulation in future studies, oriented to capturing the relational dimension of teacher availability rather than the merely organizational aspect. Likewise, the borderline correlation between Item 9 and Item 12 ($r = .85$) suggests that future versions of the instrument may benefit from removing Item 12 – the more conceptually distant from the behavioral framing of the scale – or from reformulating it to reduce semantic redundancy with Item 9.

Fifth, it should be noted that the PTTQ was developed and administered only in Italian; consequently, the psychometric properties reported in this manuscript refer to the Italian version. The English wording in Appendix B is provided for the international readership and was reviewed by a bilingual researcher to ensure semantic correspondence with the Italian items; however, a formal forward-backward translation procedure (Beaton et al., 2000) was not performed. Such a procedure, together with the assessment of cross-cultural and psychometric equivalence of an English version, is needed and represents a relevant direction for future research.

Finally, although this is a preliminary psychometric study, no measures of external convergent or discriminant validity were included—that is, correlations with other instruments measuring constructs theoretically related to or distinct from parental trust in teachers. The inclusion of such measures in future studies—including scales of family involvement, perceived school climate, or student psychological wellbeing—will allow consolidation of PTTQ external validity and examination of its predictive value for relevant outcomes.

Implications for research and practice

Results suggest that the PTTQ represents, preliminarily, a psychometrically adequate instrument for assessing parental trust in teachers in Italian upper secondary schools. Having a methodologically sound measure of this construct is relevant beyond the strictly scholastic level: as documented in the literature, parental trust in teachers is a relational variable bearing on adolescents’ psychological adjustment, as it influences family climate, children’s attitudes toward school, and the support parents are able to provide in addressing the challenges of adolescence (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016; Santiago et al., 2016; Topor et al., 2010). The PTTQ may thus serve as a useful tool not only for empirical research but also for educational monitoring of a relational variable with implications for adolescent adjustment.

In research, the PTTQ may be employed in studies investigating the role of parental trust as a mediator or moderator in the relationship between school environment characteristics and student outcomes—including anxiety and depressive symptoms, subjective wellbeing, and resilience (Salter et al., 2025). It may further be integrated into broader assessment batteries within school-based programs, alongside measures of student wellbeing, family involvement, and perceived school climate. From an applied perspective, the brief, self-administered format—completable in a few minutes—makes the PTTQ readily usable in real school contexts, both for periodic monitoring within educational alliance projects and as an empirical basis for designing interventions aimed at strengthening family-school cooperation.

Conclusions

The present study presented the development and psychometric evaluation of the PTTQ, a self-report instrument for assessing parental trust in teachers in Italian upper secondary schools.

Results indicated adequate preliminary psychometric properties: a theoretically coherent unidimensional structure, adequate fit indices, excellent internal consistency, and appropriate item-total correlations. As these are preliminary findings, future studies on larger and more diverse samples—including measures of external validity—will allow further consolidation of the PTTQ's psychometric properties. In perspective, the PTTQ is offered as a useful tool for researchers and practitioners interested in monitoring the quality of the family-school educational alliance.

Ethical Approval

Ethics approval was provided by the Committee of the school administration of the “A. Cairolì” Institute (communication no. 572, March 6, 2024) and conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (1964, revised 2013). Informed consent was obtained from all participants. All procedures adhered to the relevant guidelines and regulations. The study described has been carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available due to privacy restrictions, data were available from the corresponding author on a reasonable request.

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Conflict of Interests

None

Author Contributions

MF; PB; SD; SM; CS: Conceptualization and data collection. AAR: Methodology, Formal analysis, and Writing—original draft; IT: Writing—original draft.

Supplementary material

Not applicable

Declaration about the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

No AI was employed in any stage of the study, including the writing process.

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Appendix A

Parental Trust in Teacher Questionnaire (PTTQ)

ISTRUZIONI:

Questo questionario contiene una serie di affermazioni **relative ad atteggiamenti, sentimenti o comportamenti legati al rapporto di fiducia verso gli insegnanti**, di cui i genitori posso fare esperienza. Per ciascuna di queste affermazioni la preghiamo di selezionare un valore numerico compreso tra 1 (= MAI/QUASI MAI) e 5 (= QUASI SEMPRE/SEMPRE).

NON ESISTONO RISPOSTE GIUSTE O SBAGLIATE

1	2	3	4	5
MAI / QUASI MAI	A VOLTE	LA METÀ DELLE VOLTE	MOLTE VOLTE	QUASI SEMPRE/ SEMPRE

Ho fiducia che gli insegnanti...

1	...Siano disponibili a un colloquio se ho un problema o una domanda che riguarda mio figlio/a	1	2	3	4	5
2	...Facciano un buon lavoro nella spiegazione delle materie scolastiche	1	2	3	4	5
3	...Facciano un buon lavoro nell'insegnare a mio figlio/a a seguire regole e indicazioni	1	2	3	4	5
4	...Mi aiutino ad acquisire un punto di vista diverso sulla situazione	1	2	3	4	5
5	...Non facciano preferenze all'interno della classe	1	2	3	4	5
6	...Mi tengano aggiornato su progressi o difficoltà scolastiche di mio figlio/a.	1	2	3	4	5
7	...Diano una valutazione corretta della prestazione di mio figlio/a nelle interrogazioni e nelle verifiche	1	2	3	4	5
8	...Rispettino la mia opinione di genitore	1	2	3	4	5
9	...Incoraggino mio figlio/a a esprimere i suoi bisogni e le sue emozioni.	1	2	3	4	5
10	...Prestino attenzione a eventuali difficoltà di mio figlio nella relazione con i compagni.	1	2	3	4	5
11	...Aiutino mio figlio/a a comprendere le sue responsabilità etiche e morali.	1	2	3	4	5
12	...Incoraggino lo sviluppo emotivo di mio figlio/a	1	2	3	4	5
13	...Aiutino mio figlio/a a sviluppare interesse per la conoscenza e/o motivazione all'apprendimento	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

Parental Trust in Teacher Questionnaire (PTTQ)

INSTRUCTIONS:

This questionnaire contains a series of statements *concerning attitudes, feelings, or behaviors related to the relationship of trust toward teachers*, which parents may experience. For each of these statements, please select a numerical value between 1 (= NEVER/ALMOST NEVER) and 5 (= ALMOST ALWAYS/ALWAYS).

THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWER

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER / ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	HALF OF THE TIME	MOST OF THE TIME	ALMOST ALWAYS / ALWAYS

I trust that my child's teachers...

1	...Are available for a meeting if I have a problem or question concerning my child	1	2	3	4	5
2	...Do a good job in explaining school subjects	1	2	3	4	5
3	...Do a good job in teaching my child to follow rules and instructions	1	2	3	4	5
4	...Help me to gain a different perspective on a situation	1	2	3	4	5
5	...Do not show preferences within the class	1	2	3	4	5
6	...Keep me informed about my child's academic progress or difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
7	...Provide a fair evaluation of my child's performance in oral and written tests	1	2	3	4	5
8	...Respect my opinion as a parent	1	2	3	4	5
9	...Encourage my child to express their needs and emotions	1	2	3	4	5
10	...Pay attention to any difficulties my child may have in relationships with peers	1	2	3	4	5
11	...Help my child to understand their ethical and moral responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5
12	...Encourage my child's emotional development	1	2	3	4	5
13	...Help my child to develop interest in knowledge and/or motivation to learn	1	2	3	4	5

