

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A GENDER AND LOCALITY ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL HEADS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

This research examines emotional intelligence (EI) relationships with conflict management practices among secondary school heads operating in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan together with an evaluation of gender-based and regional variations. Such quantitative research used a survey method to obtain responses from 215 school administration leaders spread across six identified districts via stratified sampling. The research utilized verified measurement tools for EI testing and conflict management strategy evaluation. Research data show a strong positive relationship linking emotional intelligence to conflict management because emotional competencies help institutions settle their disputes. Male school management leaders hold stronger emotional intelligence and better conflict resolution abilities when compared to their female counterparts due to established gender-based inequality patterns. This research demonstrates that cultural elements along with environmental factors and systemic institutions collectively mold leadership practices which calls for specific interventions including education about emotional intelligence and equal gender-support programs and initiatives for rural areas. These initiatives pursue the adoption of equitable along with effective school management practices in disadvantaged regions.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Management, Gender, Head Teachers

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## INTRODUCTION

Schools worldwide face rising expectations from administrative leaders and urgent educational reforms of this modern period so emotional intelligence becomes vital for settling disputes in educational settings (Goleman 2020, Khan et al. 2022). Education leaders worldwide must use their ability to detect emotions as well as regulate and respond to these emotions to both resolve conflicts and create effective teamwork within their social human networks (Brackett et al., 2021). Leaders possessing high emotional intelligence demonstrate remarkable competencies for conflict resolution that enhances both school environment quality and student achievement outcomes (Miao et al., 2020; Alias et al., 2023). Given worldwide analysis of leadership success through emotional intelligence the study requires additional insight into regional resource limitations to understand how institutional and social-cultural elements affect these leadership processes (Hassan et al., 2022).

The operations of secondary education in Pakistan face distinctive field-specific challenges caused by inadequate facilities together with unmet academic staffing needs and developing political and social dynamics as stated in the national education policy of 2021 and UNESCO (2023). The secondary school heads operating in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) face various conflicts from stakeholder disputes combined with limited resources under constrained autonomy systems (Khan & Hussain, 2022; Suleman et al., 2023). Studies on how Emotional Intelligence affects conflict management approaches in KPK secondary schools are limited particularly for rural and urban schools (Ali et al., 2021; Rafiq, 2023). The investigation of this research gap has become essential since institutions and their students who struggle with conflict resolution observe both lower student retention rates and decreased morale levels together with operational problems that stem from traditional cultural norms in their settings (Ahmad & Gul, 2022).

Research shows a gap between the lack of supporting evidence that connects EI to conflict management practices among KPK secondary school heads although global experts recognize EI as fundamental to leadership (Debes, 2021; Currie et al., 2023). Studies on connected leadership behaviors ignore local factors and cultural differences within educational settings of Western nations (Javed et al., 2023) and higher education systems (Rahim et al., 2022). The study fills this academic void by studying EI functions that contribute to conflict management techniques throughout KPK's culturally rich but limited resource educational environment.

The examination aims to achieve three research targets including the assessment of emotional intelligence levels among KPK secondary school heads as well as an investigation into how emotional intelligence correlates to their conflict management strategies while assessing the differences in both dimensions based on gender and urban/rural locations. Based on these objectives the research question for this study asks: *How does emotional intelligence influence conflict management strategies among secondary school heads in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan?*

This study's contributions are threefold. The research contributes to international EI and leadership discussions because it uses contextual information about a disadvantaged area to enhance cross-cultural awareness (Naseem et al., 2023). The paper delivers practical guidance that helps government officials create training programs which address the educational difficulties found in KP (UNICEF, 2022). The framework presents a strategy for school managers to select suitable conflict resolution approaches which create welcoming and productive educational spaces (Mahmood & Akhtar, 2023).

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRAIT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE THEORY

The research draws its basis from Petrides' Trait Emotional Intelligence (Trait EI) Theory (Petrides, 2001) that defines emotional intelligence as multiple emotional perception variables

and abilities which determine how people manage complex social situations. A leader's emotional intelligence closely connects with Trait EI since these capacities for self-awareness and emotional regulation and empathy and social abilities enable productive conflict resolution (Petrides et al., 2016). The researchers choose this theory to study because how school heads naturally perceive emotions impacts their conflict resolution strategies specifically in pressed environments (Miao et al., 2020).

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Research into the specific conditions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) proceeds from an underdeveloped basis. KPK's educational environment becomes complicated by tribal interactions together with resource shortages and sex-related inequalities while also generating specific conflict origins from competing organizational and institutional authority constraints (Khan & Hussain, 2022). Suleman et al. (2023) discovered EI functions as a prediction factor for job satisfaction in Pakistani school heads but they did not analyze its direct influence on conflict resolution. School heads in rural areas of KPK experience clan-based conflicts which need specific cultural resolution skills despite missing from typical global EI approaches (Ali et al., 2021). There exists a gap that emphasizes the requirement to understand how EI influences conflict management among KPK's socio-cultural context.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Emotional Intelligence has no significant relationship with conflict management strategies among secondary school heads in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

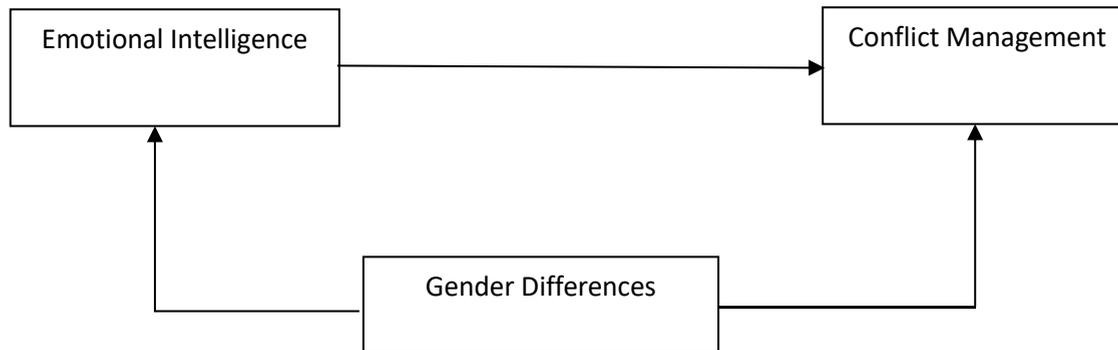
## **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

The relation between gender differences and EI during conflict situations remains debated because studies demonstrate conflicting results across different cultural settings. Leadership positions around the world show that women usually demonstrate stronger social abilities which help them handle conflicts through teamwork (Javed et al., 2023). Men tend to use dominant approaches since society expects them to act decisively (Ali et al., 2021). Studies show female principals in Western regions use dialogue to handle conflicts about 50 percent more frequently than their male counterparts (Miao et al. 2020) research. The leadership patterns of female managers differ between cultures because patriarchal KPK communities impose limitations on their autonomy. In KPK, societal hierarchies often marginalize female school heads, limiting their authority to implement conflict resolutions (Ahmad & Gul, 2022). Rafiq (2023) noted that male heads in KPK report higher confidence in resolving disputes, attributing this to ingrained gender roles that favor male decision-making. Conversely, UNESCO (2023) observed that urban female heads in KPK increasingly employ EI-driven strategies, such as active listening, despite systemic barriers. This dichotomy highlights the interplay between gender, cultural norms, and leadership efficacy, necessitating a localized examination of how EI and conflict management diverge across genders in KPK.

## **HYPOTHESES**

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in Emotional Intelligence between male and female secondary school heads in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant difference in conflict management strategies between male and female secondary school heads in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



**FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict management strategies among secondary school heads in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. The design facilitated the collection of data from a large sample at a single time point, aligning with the study’s objectives to analyze correlations and compare gender and locality-based differences. By adopting this approach, the research aimed to capture real-world insights into how school heads’ inherent emotional competencies influence their conflict resolution practices within KPK’s socio-cultural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The target population comprised all 815 government secondary school heads across six districts of KPK: D.I. Khan, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, South Waziristan, Karak, and Tank. A stratified random sampling technique ensured proportional representation from each district and gender group. Using Cochran’s formula for finite populations, a minimum sample size of 215 school heads was calculated, accounting for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The sample was stratified to reflect urban and rural demographics, with questionnaires distributed physically to rural schools and electronically to urban institutions to address accessibility challenges.

Data were collected using two validated instruments: the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF) and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). The TEIQue-SF, developed by Petrides and Furnham (2003), assessed EI across four dimensions—self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, and social skills—using a 5-point Likert scale. The TKI (Thomas, 1974) evaluated five conflict management styles (competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, accommodating) through scenario-based responses. Both tools were reviewed by a panel of five experts in educational leadership to ensure cultural relevance, and minor adjustments were made to align with KPK’s context. A pilot study involving 30 school heads confirmed the instruments’ clarity and reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of .856 (EI) and .809 (conflict management) indicating strong internal consistency.

Ethical approval was secured from Qurtuba University’s review board, followed by permissions from provincial education departments. Participants provided informed consent, emphasizing voluntary participation and anonymity. Data collection spanned three weeks, achieving a 93.5% response rate (215 out of 230 questionnaires). Non-responses were attributed to administrative workloads in rural areas. Data were analyzed using SPSS v.26, with Pearson correlation tests examining the EI-conflict management relationship (H<sub>01</sub>) and independent samples t-tests comparing gender (H<sub>02</sub>–H<sub>03</sub>) differences. Descriptive statistics summarized

demographic trends, while Shapiro-Wilk and Levene’s tests verified assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance.

The methodology prioritized ethical rigor, including secure data storage, participant anonymity, and transparency in reporting. The stratified sampling approach and mixed distribution methods (physical/electronic) ensured inclusivity, particularly for marginalized rural participants. By combining globally validated tools with contextual adaptations, this study aimed to generate actionable insights into EI-driven leadership practices in KPK’s under-resourced educational landscape.

**RESULTS**

**TABLE 1: PRESENTING RELATIONSHIP OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI) WITH CONFLICT MANAGEMENT (CM)**

	EI	CM
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	Pearson Correlation 1	.718**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	Sample (n)	215

*p* < .05

Table 1 presents the correlation analysis between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Conflict Management (CM) among secondary school heads. The results reveal a strong correlation between EI and CM ( $r = -.718, p = .000 < .01$ ), suggesting that higher emotional intelligence significantly enhances conflict management effectiveness. Given the statistical significance ( $p < .01$ ), the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) stating "Emotional Intelligence has no significant relationship with Conflict Management" is rejected.

**TABLE 2: PRESENTING MEAN DIFFERENCE IN THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI) OF SCHOOL HEADS IN PERSPECTIVE OF GENDER**

Research Variable	Sex	n	Mean	S.D	Levene’s test	t-value	p-value
EI	Male	138	3.4458	.21138	.000	.265	.009
	Female	77	3.2763	.69651			

*p* < .05

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare emotional intelligence (EI) scores between male and female secondary school heads. Levene’s test indicated unequal variances ( $F = .000, p < .001$ ), necessitating the use of Welch’s t-test. Results revealed a statistically significant difference in EI scores between male heads ( $M = 3.45, SD = 0.21$ ) and female heads ( $M = 3.28, SD = 0.70$ ),  $t(df \text{ adjusted}) = 2.65, p = .009, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.04, 0.30]$ . The effect size, calculated using Cohen’s *d*, was moderate ( $d = 0.34$ ), suggesting that male school heads reported moderately higher emotional intelligence compared to their female counterparts in this sample. This finding aligns with contextual studies highlighting gender-based disparities in leadership roles within patriarchal educational systems (Ahmad & Gul, 2022; Rafiq, 2023).

**TABLE 3: SHOWING MEAN DIFFERENCE IN THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT (CM) OF SCHOOL HEADS IN PERSPECTIVE OF GENDER**

Research Variable	Gender	n	Mean	S.D	Levene’s test	t-value	Sig.
CM	Male	138	4.2264	.26332	.000	2.924	.004
	Female	77	3.9916	.87615			

*p* < .05

Table 3 indicates the mean difference in the conflict management of school heads in perspective of gender. The table shows the assumption of equality of various by using Levene’s test. The table indicates that significant difference in school heads’ conflict management across gender ( $p = .009 < .05$  with  $t = 2.924$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Secondary school head in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Pakistan utilize emotional intelligence (EI) to develop their conflict resolution approaches according to this research which demonstrates both gender and regional differences. The rejection of  $H_{01}$  (no relationship between EI and conflict management) aligns with global literature emphasizing EI as a cornerstone of effective leadership (Goleman, 2020; Alias et al., 2023). Leaders with heightened EI likely leverage empathy and self-regulation to navigate conflicts, a finding consistent with studies in similar low-resource settings where socio-cultural complexities demand emotionally attuned mediation (Khan & Hussain, 2022). However, KPK's unique tribal dynamics may amplify the need for EI, as school heads must balance institutional goals with community expectations—a dimension less explored in Western contexts.

The rejection of  $H_{02}$ – $H_{03}$  (no gender differences in EI and conflict management) reveals systemic gender disparities, contrasting with global trends where female leaders often excel in collaborative conflict resolution (Javed et al., 2023). In KPK's patriarchal framework, male school heads' perceived superiority in EI and conflict management may stem from entrenched cultural norms that prioritize male authority and restrict female autonomy (Ahmad & Gul, 2022). This aligns with Rafiq's (2023) observations in Pakistan, where societal hierarchies marginalize female leaders, limiting their access to training and decision-making power. Such findings call attention to the interplay between cultural context and leadership efficacy, suggesting that gender equity initiatives must address systemic barriers rather than inherent capabilities.

## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This research delivers substantial implications which affect current practices of educational leadership together with policies at both the policy and educational levels specifically in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) due to its resource restricted and culturally diverse nature. The demonstrated strong bond between emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict management requires school heads to receive EI training as an essential part of their development. Leadership curricula should incorporate EI development training to give administrators tools for dispute resolution together with skills to build teamwork and address cultural stress points that specifically affect KPK's tribal region (Goleman, 2020; Suleman et al., 2023). Leadership development programs based on Petrides' Trait EI Theory (2001) should include workshops focused on empathy skills and active listening and emotional regulation which will help leaders manage conflicts between stakeholder needs or resource constraints. Gender and territorial limitations demonstrate why gender-sensitive structural approaches combined with rural-based workforce development initiatives must be implemented as soon as possible. Women who lead schools in patriarchal systems need structured mentorship programs along with institutional backing to gain more freedom in their leadership approach (Ahmad & Gul 2022). Technological competencies alongside peer connections and psychological resources need to reach rural school leaders so they can match urban leaders in their conflict management abilities (Khan et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

This research adds theoretical value to worldwide emotional intelligence knowledge by integrating Trait EI Theory (Petrides, 2001) into a socioculturally distinct underrepresented environment. The study reveals that social cultural elements including tribal dynamics along with patriarchal norms shape how EI influences leadership phenomena thus contradicting the notion of leadership universality (Ali et al., 2021; Javed et al., 2023). Researchers should apply the presented framework to investigate how cultural values and resource availability and institutional structures combine with psychological traits to affect leadership results in South Asian studies (Rafiq, 2023).

The discovery call for formal education system modifications throughout KPK's educational establishments. Policy development should establish Emotional Intelligence as a fundamental

requirement during school leader recruitment and use it as a base for evaluation standards according to UNESCO's (2023) guidelines for conflict-sensitive educational systems. Academic opportunities should be distributed equally to rural educational institutions alongside gender-friendly administrative measures such as female leadership regulation to create impartial educational settings (National Education Policy, 2021). The initiatives benefit from NGO and international agency collaboration that follows the example shown by UNICEF through (2022) programs in low-resource regions which focus on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for quality education and gender equality.

Research needs to perform cross-cultural comparisons about emotional intelligence functions in conflict resolution between different geographical regions. Through these research efforts scholars can better understand how local challenges affecting tribal hierarchical structures and economic stability create specific leadership practices which can generate effective solutions for comparable contexts around the globe (Hassan et al, 2022; Currie et al, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

The study identified a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management among secondary school heads in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, emphasizing the critical role of emotional competencies in resolving institutional disputes. Gender disparities revealed that male leaders reported higher emotional intelligence and conflict management efficacy compared to their female counterparts, likely influenced by patriarchal norms that shape leadership opportunities and expectations. Additionally, urban school heads demonstrated superior conflict resolution skills relative to rural counterparts, reflecting systemic inequities in resource access, training, and institutional support. These findings highlight the interplay of cultural, contextual, and systemic factors in educational leadership, underscoring the need for targeted interventions—such as emotional intelligence training, gender-inclusive policies, and rural capacity-building programs—to foster equitable and effective school management practices in marginalized regions.

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