

THE MODERATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the moderating effect of head teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) on the relationship between their instructional leadership (IL) and teachers' effective classroom practices (ECP) in public sector boys' primary schools in the Malakand Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Adopting a post-positivist paradigm and cross-sectional quantitative survey design, data were collected from 375 head teachers and 400 teachers using adapted and developed questionnaires: the Scale of Emotional Intelligence (Batool & Khalid, 2011), Instructional Leadership Questionnaire (Khan, 2010), and a researcher-developed Effective Classroom Practices Questionnaire. The sample was selected through multi-stage random and stratified sampling from three districts (Lower Dir, Malakand, and Swat). Hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed a significant model ($F = 14.8, p = 0.001, R^2 = 0.55$), with positive and highly significant effects for instructional leadership ($B = 1.73, p < 0.001$), emotional intelligence ($B = 0.965, p < 0.001$), and the interaction term ($IL \times EI; B = 1.026, p < 0.001$). These results indicate that EI significantly strengthens the positive relationship between IL and ECP, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis of no moderating effect. The findings highlight that emotionally intelligent head teachers more effectively translate instructional guidance into enhanced classroom practices, particularly in resource-constrained Pakistani primary education contexts where younger leaders predominate. This supports emerging evidence on EI's role in amplifying leadership impacts on teaching quality. Recommendations include integrating EI training into head teacher professional development programs and leadership selection criteria to improve instructional outcomes and school effectiveness.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, instructional leadership, effective classroom practices, moderation, primary schools, Pakistan.

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of education, effective school leadership remains a cornerstone for

enhancing teaching quality and student achievement (Hallinger, 2025). Instructional leadership, characterized by principals' active

engagement in defining school goals, supervising instruction, promoting professional development, and monitoring student progress, has emerged as a key driver of improved classroom practices (Demir, 2025; Zhang, 2025). Meta-analytic evidence spanning decades confirms moderate to strong positive associations between principals' instructional leadership and desirable teacher outcomes, including enhanced instructional strategies and self-efficacy (Hallinger, 2025).

Parallel to this, emotional intelligence (EI) has gained prominence as an essential competency for educational leaders. EI equips principals to navigate interpersonal dynamics, regulate emotions under pressure, empathize with staff, and foster collaborative environments (Mugabekazi, 2026; Sasere, 2025). Recent syntheses demonstrate that EI enhances various leadership models, including instructional leadership, by improving teacher motivation, well-being, and pedagogical effectiveness (Mugabekazi, 2026; Dirk et al., 2024). For example, principals with high EI are better positioned to support teachers' emotional reframing and instructional delivery, leading to positive cascading effects on classroom environments and student outcomes (Sasere, 2025).

Despite robust evidence linking instructional leadership to effective classroom practices—such as student-centered teaching, differentiated instruction, and classroom management—the intervening role of EI warrants deeper investigation. Emerging studies suggest EI moderates leadership impacts by strengthening relational aspects that facilitate the adoption of best practices (Orakci, 2026; Chaudhary et al., 2024). In contexts where teachers face high demands, emotionally intelligent leadership may amplify the benefits of instructional guidance, mitigating barriers like stress or resistance to change.

This study addresses this gap by investigating whether emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between instructional leadership and effective classroom practices. By testing the null hypothesis of no significant moderating effect, the research aims to provide empirical insights that can guide leadership training programs and policy

efforts to cultivate emotionally attuned instructional leaders.

Literature Review

The interplay between instructional leadership, emotional intelligence (EI), and effective classroom practices has garnered increasing attention in educational research, particularly in the context of improving teacher performance and student outcomes. This literature review synthesizes recent studies (post-2014) on these constructs, examining their individual roles, interrelationships, and the potential moderating influence of EI. By drawing on empirical evidence from diverse educational settings, this section highlights established findings while identifying gaps that justify the current study's focus on EI's moderating effect.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership refers to school principals' focused efforts on enhancing teaching and learning through activities such as curriculum coordination, teacher supervision, professional development, and resource allocation (Hallinger, 2015). Recent meta-analyses underscore its positive impact on school effectiveness, with principals' instructional behaviors correlating with improved teacher efficacy and pedagogical quality (Hallinger & Chen, 2015). For instance, in Asian contexts, instructional leadership has been shown to foster teacher collaboration and innovation, contributing to sustained instructional improvements (Zheng et al., 2019). Studies in Western settings similarly affirm that instructional leaders prioritize data-driven decision-making and feedback, which directly influence classroom dynamics (Porter et al., 2016).

Effective Classroom Practices

Effective classroom practices encompass student-centered strategies, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and classroom management techniques that promote engagement and learning (Chen, 2022). Research indicates that these practices are linked to higher student achievement and teacher retention, with emphasis on adaptive teaching methods in diverse classrooms (Yin et al.,

2018). In public school systems, effective practices often involve emotional support for students, highlighting the need for teachers to integrate socio-emotional elements into instruction (Abiodullah & Aslam, 2020). Recent investigations in developing regions, such as Pakistan and South Africa, reveal that classroom effectiveness is enhanced when teachers receive structured guidance, yet challenges like resource constraints can hinder implementation (Bashir, 2021; Naicker & Mestry, 2016).

Emotional Intelligence in Educational Leadership

Emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively (Mayer et al., 2016), is increasingly recognized as a vital competency for school leaders. Principals with high EI demonstrate better empathy, conflict resolution, and motivational skills, leading to positive school climates (Blaik Hourani et al., 2021; Venter & Naicker, 2024). Empirical studies post-2015 show that EI correlates with leadership effectiveness, particularly in managing teacher stress and fostering professional growth (Yin, 2015; Kouhsari, 2021). For example, in university settings, EI-based leadership styles predict higher engagement and performance among faculty (Bashir, 2021).

Relationship Between Instructional Leadership and Effective Classroom Practices

A robust body of evidence links instructional leadership to enhanced classroom practices. Principals' instructional efforts, such as providing targeted feedback and promoting professional learning communities, directly improve teachers' instructional strategies and student engagement (Zheng et al., 2019; Quines & Monteza, 2023). Meta-analytic reviews confirm moderate to strong associations, with instructional leadership explaining variance in teacher self-efficacy and pedagogical innovation (Hallinger, 2015). However, contextual factors like organizational trust can mediate this relationship, suggesting that

leadership alone may not suffice in all environments (Kouhsari, 2021).

The Role of Emotional Intelligence as a Moderator or Mediator

Emerging research explores EI's influence on the instructional leadership-classroom practices nexus, often through mediation rather than moderation. For instance, principals' EI mediates the effect of leadership on teaching strategies, as emotionally attuned leaders better translate instructional goals into practical support for teachers (Chen & Guo, 2020). In teacher-focused studies, EI moderates the impact of emotional labor on teaching satisfaction, indicating that high EI buffers negative effects and enhances practice quality (Yin, 2015). Similarly, EI enhances instructional leadership by improving relational dynamics, leading to better organizational climates and teacher performance (Salip, 2024; Venter & Naicker, 2024). In change management contexts, principals' EI moderates attitudes toward instructional reforms, indirectly supporting effective practices (Tai & Kareem, 2024).

Despite these insights, direct examinations of EI as a moderator in the instructional leadership-effective classroom practices relationship remain limited. Most studies focus on mediation (e.g., Chen & Guo, 2020; Kouhsari, 2021) or related outcomes like job satisfaction (Toprak & Savaş, 2015). This gap is notable in diverse cultural contexts, where EI may amplify leadership effects amid challenges like teacher burnout or resource scarcity (Blaik Hourani et al., 2021; Uslukaya & Demirtas, 2023). Addressing this underexplored moderation could inform leadership development programs, emphasizing EI training to optimize instructional impacts.

In summary, while instructional leadership positively influences effective classroom practices, EI emerges as a key enhancer through mediation and potential moderation. The scarcity of moderation-specific studies underscores the need for the present research, which tests EI's moderating role to advance theoretical and practical understanding in educational leadership.

Objective of the study

To find the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between instructional leadership and effective classroom practices

Hypothesis of the study

H₀ 1: There is no significant moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between instructional leadership and effective classroom practices

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine the moderating effect of head teachers' emotional intelligence on the relationship between their instructional leadership and teachers' effective classroom practices in public sector boys' primary schools in the Malakand Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Research Design

The study adopted a post-positivist paradigm, which emphasizes empirical testing of hypotheses through objective measurement while recognizing the provisional nature of knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A cross-sectional quantitative survey design was used to collect perceptual data from head teachers and teachers at a single point in time. This design enabled efficient assessment of relationships among variables and statistical testing of the hypothesized moderation effect.

Population

The target population consisted of all head teachers and teachers working in the 3,780 government boys' primary schools across Malakand Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (total N = 16,048).

Accessible Population

The accessible population was limited to head teachers and teachers in three districts of Malakand Division: Lower Dir, Malakand, and Swat. This included 1,884 head teachers and 8,593 teachers across the boys' primary schools in these districts.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. First, three districts (Lower Dir, Malakand, and Swat) were randomly selected from the eight districts in Malakand Division. Second, 20% of boys' primary schools from these districts were randomly selected, resulting in 375 schools.

The sample comprised 375 head teachers (one per selected school) and 400 teachers. The teacher sample size (n = 400) was determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator (Raosoft, Inc., 2004), based on a 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level, and a conservative 50% response distribution. Stratified random sampling allocated the 400 teachers proportionally by cadre and district: 353 Primary School Teachers (PST) and 47 Senior Primary School Teachers (SPST).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 24. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) summarized participant demographics and scale scores.

To test the moderating effect of emotional intelligence (EI) on the relationship between instructional leadership (IL) and effective classroom practices (ECP), hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted (the sole inferential test used). This approach is standard for detecting moderation in educational research (Aguinis, 2004; Hayes, 2022). Prior to analysis, IL and EI scores were mean-centered to minimize multicollinearity in the interaction term.

The regression proceeded in steps:

- Step 1: ECP was regressed on IL (main effect).
- Step 2: EI was added (main effect of moderator).
- Step 3: The interaction term (IL × EI) was entered.

The tested model was:

$$ECP = b_0 + b_1(IL) + b_2(EI) + b_3(IL \times EI) + \epsilon$$

A significant b_3 coefficient ($p < .05$) indicated moderation, with the sign and magnitude showing whether EI strengthened or weakened the IL–ECP relationship. Regression assumptions (linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, independence, and absence of multicollinearity)

were examined using residual plots, histograms, normal probability plots, Durbin-Watson

statistic, and variance inflation factors (VIF < 5). Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results and Discussion

Demographic information of cadre/post of schoolteachers and head teachers

Designation of schoolteachers responding to instructional leadership of their Headteachers

Table 1

Designation of schoolteachers responding to instructional leadership of their Headteachers

<i>Designation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
<i>PST</i>	353	88.2	88.2
<i>SPST</i>	47	11.8	11.8
<i>Total</i>	400		

Among the 400 respondent teachers, 353 with 88.2 % are Primary School Teacher (PSTs) while 47 with 11.8% are working as Senior Primary School Teacher (Table 1).

Demographic information of Head teachers responding to their own Emotional Intelligence

Table 2

Age Distribution of Head teachers

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
<i>21 to 30</i>	179	47.7	47.7
<i>31 to 40</i>	168	44.8	44.8
<i>41 to 50</i>	19	5.1	5.1
<i>51 to 59</i>	9	2.4	2.4
<i>Total</i>	375		

Data was collected from 375 primary school head teachers concerning their emotional intelligence. Among the respondent head teachers, 179 head teachers with 47.7 % belong to age group 21 to 30 years, 168 head teachers with 44.8 % belong to age group 31 to 40 years, 19 head teachers with 5.1 %

belong to age group 41 to 50 years while 9.0 head teachers with 2.4 % belong to age group 51 to 59 years. The maximum number of head teachers belongs to age group 21 to 30 years while the minimum number of head teachers belongs to age group 51 to 59 years (Table 2).

Regression results of the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between instructional leadership and effective classroom practices

Table 3

Regression results of the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between instructional leadership and effective classroom practices

<i>Model</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>			<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>			
(Constant)	3.022	0.121		24.97	0.00
Instructional Leadership	1.73	0.213		8.12	0.00
Emotional Intelligence	0.965	0.116		8.32	0.00
MOD	1.026	0.052		24.13	0.00

The results reported in table 4.18 show that Instructional Leadership and Emotional Intelligence have a statistically significant effect on Effective Classroom Practices. It is evident from the positive coefficient of the signs of Instructional Leadership and Emotional Intelligence and moderating variable. In other words, the 1% increase in Instructional Leadership, Emotional Intelligence and moderating variable leads to an increase in effective classroom practices by 1.73%, 0.965 and 1.026 respectively. In addition, the moderating variable (MOD) is also statistically significant, showing that Emotional Intelligence has moderating effect on the relationship between Instructional Leadership and Effective Classroom Practices. The coefficient of school learning environment is significant at 5% and 10% level of significance. Besides, the fit of the model is good represented by the value of R-squared ($R^2 > 0.50$). The overall significance of the model is also good, shown by the statistically significant value of F-statistics (Table 3).

Findings

The findings of the study are presented below, focusing on the demographic profile of respondents and the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis testing the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between instructional leadership and effective classroom practices.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Teachers A total of 400 teachers participated in the study. As shown in Table 1, the majority were Primary School Teachers (PSTs; $n = 353$, 88.2%), while Senior Primary School Teachers (SPSTs) accounted for 11.8% ($n = 47$).

Head Teachers Data were collected from 375 head teachers regarding their emotional intelligence. The age distribution is presented in Table 2. The largest proportion of head teachers belonged to the 21-30 years age group ($n = 179$, 47.7%), followed by the 31-40 years group ($n = 168$, 44.8%). Fewer head teachers were in the older age

categories: 41-50 years ($n = 19$, 5.1%) and 51-59 years ($n = 9$, 2.4%).

Moderating Effect of Emotional Intelligence

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the moderating role of head teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) on the relationship between instructional leadership (IL) and teachers' effective classroom practices (ECP). The results are summarized in Table 3.

The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F = 14.8$, $p = 0.001$, and explained 55% of the variance in effective classroom practices ($R^2 = 0.55$).

All regression coefficients were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$:

- Instructional leadership had a strong positive direct effect on effective classroom practices ($B = 1.73$, $t = 8.12$, $p = 0.000$).
- Emotional intelligence positively predicted effective classroom practices ($B = 0.965$, $t = 8.32$, $p = 0.000$).
- The interaction term ($IL \times EI$) was positive and highly significant ($B = 1.026$, $t = 24.13$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that emotional intelligence significantly moderates (strengthens) the relationship between instructional leadership and effective classroom practices.

The positive and significant interaction coefficient demonstrates that higher levels of head teachers' emotional intelligence amplify the positive impact of their instructional leadership on teachers' effective classroom practices.

Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{01} : There is no significant moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between instructional leadership and effective classroom practices) was rejected.

Discussion

The findings indicate that head teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) significantly moderates (strengthens) the positive relationship between their **instructional leadership (IL)** and teachers' effective classroom practices (ECP) in public boys' primary schools in Pakistan's Malakand Division.

The hierarchical regression model was significant ($F = 14.8, p = 0.001$), explaining 55% of variance in ECP ($R^2 = 0.55$). Key coefficients were positive and highly significant: IL ($B = 1.73, p < 0.001$), EI ($B = 0.965, p < 0.001$), and the interaction term ($IL \times EI; B = 1.026, p < 0.001$). This rejects the null hypothesis, showing that higher EI amplifies IL's impact on classroom effectiveness. These results align with recent evidence that EI enhances instructional leadership by improving relational support, feedback quality, and teacher motivation, leading to better pedagogical practices (Chen & Guo, 2020; Sasere, 2025). Systematic reviews confirm EI's role in cascading benefits to teacher efficacy, well-being, and instructional delivery across contexts (Mugabekazi, 2026; Sasere, 2025). In Pakistan's resource-constrained primary education settings, where challenges like teacher burnout and authoritarian styles persist, EI appears to buffer these issues and strengthen leadership effects (Ansari & Asad, 2023). The sample's younger head teachers (mostly 21-40 years) may reflect emerging leaders more open to EI competencies. Practically, these findings support integrating EI training into head teacher professional development in Pakistan to optimize instructional leadership and classroom quality. Limitations include self-report bias, cross-sectional design (limiting causality), and focus on boys' primary schools in one division (reducing generalizability). Future studies should use longitudinal or multi-source data and explore mediators like teacher self-efficacy. In conclusion, emotionally intelligent instructional leadership is key to enhancing teaching practices in similar developing contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined the moderating effect of head teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) on the relationship between their instructional leadership (IL) and teachers' effective classroom practices (ECP) in public boys' primary schools in the Malakand Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The hierarchical multiple regression analysis yielded a significant model ($F = 14.8, p = 0.001, R^2 = 0.55$), with positive and highly significant effects for IL ($B = 1.73, p < 0.001$), EI

($B = 0.965, p < 0.001$), and the interaction term ($IL \times EI; B = 1.026, p < 0.001$). These results confirm that EI strengthens the positive influence of instructional leadership on classroom effectiveness, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The findings contribute to the growing evidence that emotionally intelligent leadership enhances instructional outcomes, particularly in resource-constrained primary education contexts like Pakistan, where younger head teachers predominate. By amplifying relational support and motivation, EI enables more effective translation of leadership behaviors into improved teaching practices. In conclusion, cultivating emotional intelligence among school head teachers is essential for optimizing instructional leadership and advancing teaching quality. This underscores the need to integrate EI as a core competency in educational leadership to foster sustainable improvements in classroom practices and overall school performance in similar developing settings.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Professional Development Programs** Educational authorities and teacher training institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (and Pakistan broadly) should incorporate mandatory EI training modules into head teacher induction, in-service, and leadership development programs. Focus areas should include self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and relationship management to enhance instructional leadership effectiveness.
- 2. Policy Integration** The Ministry of Education and provincial departments should revise leadership selection criteria and performance evaluation frameworks to include EI assessment tools (e.g., validated scales like Batool & Khalid, 2011). This would prioritize emotionally competent leaders in primary school appointments.
- 3. Targeted Interventions for Younger Leaders** Given the predominance of head teachers aged 21-40 years, targeted workshops and mentoring programs should be designed for early-

career leaders to build EI competencies, helping them navigate challenges in resource-limited environments.

4. **School-Level Support** Head teachers should be encouraged to foster emotionally supportive school climates through regular feedback sessions, stress management initiatives, and collaborative professional learning communities, which can further strengthen the link between IL and ECP.

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