

Effect of Leaders' Motivation and Social Support on Students' Social-Emotional Competence and Its Impact on Behavioral Development and Academic Performance

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of leaders' motivation and social support on students' social-emotional competence and its impact on behavioral development and academic performance within the secondary and higher secondary education system of Pakistan. The study further investigated the mediating role of social-emotional competence between leaders' motivation, social support, behavioral development, and academic performance. The research was grounded in Social-Emotional Learning Theory and educational behavioral perspectives, emphasizing the importance of emotionally supportive educational environments for holistic student development. The study adopted a positivist research philosophy and utilized a quantitative cross-sectional research design. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires from 1200 respondents enrolled in public and private secondary and higher secondary educational institutions across Pakistan. SPSS software was used for statistical analysis including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, multiple regression analysis, and mediation analysis through bootstrapping techniques. The findings revealed that leaders' motivation and social support significantly and positively influence students' social-emotional competence. The results further demonstrated that social-emotional competence has a strong positive impact on behavioral development and academic performance. Mediation analysis confirmed that social-emotional competence significantly mediates the relationship between leaders' motivation, social support, behavioral development, and academic performance. The study concludes that emotionally supportive leadership and strong social support systems play a critical role in strengthening students' emotional competence, behavioral maturity, and educational success. The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of Social-Emotional Learning Theory within the Pakistani educational context and empirically establishing the mediating role of social-emotional competence in student development outcomes. Practically, the study highlights the need for educational institutions to integrate social-emotional learning practices, supportive leadership approaches, counselling systems, and emotionally responsive educational policies to

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promote holistic student development and sustainable academic success.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Competence; Leaders' Motivation; Social Support; Behavioral Development; Academic Performance; Social-Emotional Learning Theory; Secondary Education; Higher Secondary Education.

1. Introduction

The educational landscape of the twenty-first century has undergone substantial transformation due to globalization, technological advancement, increasing psychological pressures, changing family structures, and evolving societal expectations. Educational institutions are no longer viewed merely as centers for academic instruction; rather, they are increasingly recognized as environments responsible for shaping students' emotional intelligence, behavioral maturity, interpersonal competence, and psychological well-being. In contemporary education systems, the development of students' social-emotional competence has emerged as one of the most significant determinants of academic achievement, behavioral stability, and lifelong success. Consequently, researchers, educators, psychologists, and policymakers have increasingly emphasized the importance of supportive educational leadership and socially responsive school environments in promoting holistic student development.

Within school settings, students continuously interact with teachers, school leaders, peers, and institutional systems that collectively shape their emotional and behavioral experiences. These interactions significantly influence how students regulate emotions, manage stress, develop empathy, communicate with others, solve interpersonal conflicts, and maintain academic motivation. Social-emotional competence refers to an individual's ability to understand and manage emotions, establish positive relationships, demonstrate empathy, make responsible decisions, and adapt positively to social environments (Durlak et al., 2015). Such competencies are essential for students because they directly contribute to psychological adjustment, behavioral regulation, classroom engagement, and academic success.

The role of educational leaders and teachers in developing students' social-emotional competence is critically important. Leadership motivation within educational institutions creates an environment where students feel valued, supported, encouraged, and psychologically secure. Motivated leadership practices include emotional encouragement, positive reinforcement, academic guidance, mentoring, participative engagement, and supportive communication, all of which contribute toward students' emotional confidence and behavioral development. Similarly, social support from teachers, peers, parents, and school administration provides students with a sense of belongingness and emotional security, which strengthens their ability to cope with academic and social challenges. Studies have shown that positive teacher–student relationships and emotionally supportive classrooms significantly enhance students' social competence, behavioral adjustment, and academic outcomes (Lippard et al., 2018).

The significance of social-emotional competence has gained substantial scholarly attention because students who possess stronger emotional and social abilities are generally more

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capable of adapting to educational environments and maintaining positive behavioral patterns. According to Alzahrani, Alharbi, and Alodwani (2019), social-emotional competence strongly influences children's academic achievement, classroom behaviour, communication skills, emotional regulation, and future learning engagement. Their findings indicate that supportive teacher-child relationships foster cognitive growth, behavioral discipline, emotional maturity, and learning motivation. Similarly, Denham et al. (2012) argued that emotional regulation and positive social interaction improve children's classroom engagement and academic readiness while reducing behavioral difficulties and emotional instability.

In educational institutions, behavioral development among students remains one of the most pressing concerns for teachers and school administrations. Behavioral issues such as aggression, emotional withdrawal, anxiety, low self-confidence, poor peer interaction, classroom misconduct, and academic disengagement negatively affect both learning environments and educational outcomes. Research indicates that students who experience supportive social and emotional environments are more likely to exhibit positive behaviour, higher classroom participation, stronger peer relationships, and lower levels of disruptive conduct (Brock & Curby, 2014). Conversely, negative educational climates, lack of emotional support, and weak teacher-student relationships often contribute toward behavioral instability, academic stress, and social maladjustment (Breeman et al., 2015).

Academic performance is also closely associated with students' emotional and behavioral conditions. Students experiencing emotional insecurity, social isolation, or weak motivational support often face difficulties in concentration, learning engagement, critical thinking, and academic persistence. Nix et al. (2013) emphasized that social-emotional learning significantly enhances students' academic functioning, school readiness, and future educational success. Similarly, Ashdown and Bernard (2011) highlighted that emotional competence strengthens students' reading ability, writing skills, learning motivation, communication, and critical thinking capacity. Emotional regulation further allows students to remain focused during stressful academic situations and positively influences educational achievement (Denham et al., 2012).

The Pakistani educational system faces numerous challenges related to student behaviour, emotional development, and academic performance. Rapid societal changes, educational inequalities, competitive academic environments, psychological stress, socioeconomic disparities, and limited counselling resources have intensified emotional and behavioral difficulties among students at secondary and higher secondary levels. In many educational institutions, academic success continues to receive greater attention than emotional and behavioral development, despite increasing evidence suggesting that emotional competence significantly affects educational achievement and student well-being. Furthermore, public and private educational institutions in Pakistan differ considerably in terms of leadership approaches, institutional culture, student support systems, teacher training, and psychosocial learning environments. These differences create varying levels of social-emotional support for students and consequently influence behavioral and academic

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outcomes.

Despite the growing international literature on social-emotional learning and teacher-student relationships, limited empirical research has comprehensively examined the combined effect of leaders' motivation and social support on social-emotional competence within the context of Pakistan's secondary and higher secondary education system. Existing studies within Pakistan have largely focused on academic achievement, instructional quality, or institutional performance, while comparatively less attention has been given to emotional competence and behavioral development as integrated educational outcomes. Therefore, there exists a substantial research gap regarding how motivational leadership and social support collectively influence students' emotional competencies, behavioral development, and academic performance in Pakistani educational institutions.

The present study seeks to address this gap by empirically investigating the effect of leaders' motivation and social support on social-emotional competence building and its subsequent impact on student behavioral development and academic performance among secondary and higher secondary students across Pakistan. The study incorporates responses from 1200 participants from both public and private educational institutions, thereby providing a broader and more representative understanding of the educational realities within the country. By examining these relationships, the study aims to contribute toward educational psychology literature, leadership theory, behavioral development research, and social-emotional learning frameworks within developing educational contexts.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its integration of motivational leadership practices, social support mechanisms, social-emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance into a unified conceptual framework. The study extends existing educational and behavioral theories by demonstrating that students' emotional and behavioral outcomes are not isolated phenomena but are strongly shaped by supportive institutional leadership and socially responsive educational climates. Additionally, the study provides empirical support for social-emotional learning theory, which argues that emotional competence enhances academic success, behavioral regulation, and long-term educational adjustment (Durlak et al., 2015).

Practically, the study offers valuable implications for educational leaders, school administrators, teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in Pakistan. The findings may encourage educational institutions to adopt emotionally supportive leadership styles, strengthen teacher-student relationships, establish counselling and mentoring systems, and integrate structured social-emotional learning programs into educational practices. Such initiatives can improve students' behavioral discipline, emotional well-being, classroom participation, and academic performance while simultaneously creating healthier and more inclusive learning environments.

Overall, the present research recognizes that educational success cannot be measured solely through examination scores or academic rankings. Sustainable educational development

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requires emotionally resilient, socially competent, behaviorally balanced, and psychologically healthy students who are capable of contributing positively to society. Therefore, understanding the role of leaders' motivation and social support in building students' social-emotional competence has become increasingly essential for improving behavioral outcomes and academic excellence within Pakistan's evolving educational system.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leaders' Motivation and Social-Emotional Competence Building

Educational leadership has emerged as one of the most influential determinants of students' psychological, behavioral, and academic development in modern educational systems. In school environments, leaders such as principals, teachers, coordinators, and administrators significantly shape students' emotional experiences through motivational interaction, emotional encouragement, guidance, mentoring, and supportive communication. Leadership motivation refers to the ability of educational leaders to inspire, encourage, emotionally support, and positively influence students toward personal growth and academic engagement. Such motivational practices contribute substantially toward the development of students' social-emotional competence.

Social-emotional competence refers to students' capacity to regulate emotions, establish healthy interpersonal relationships, demonstrate empathy, communicate effectively, make responsible decisions, and adapt positively within social and academic settings (Durlak et al., 2015). Educational leaders who create supportive and emotionally safe learning environments facilitate the development of these competencies among students.

Alzahrani, Alharbi, and Alodwani (2019) emphasized that positive teacher-child relationships significantly influence children's emotional growth, social interaction abilities, behavioral regulation, and academic engagement. Their study argued that emotionally supportive educational environments help students develop communication skills, emotional maturity, self-confidence, and behavioral discipline. Similarly, Lippard et al. (2018) found that positive teacher-child relationships enhance children's social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development. Their findings revealed that students who receive motivational support from teachers are more likely to demonstrate emotional stability, positive classroom participation, and stronger social adaptation.

Breeman et al. (2015) further explained that teachers with higher emotional well-being and supportive attitudes positively influence students' psychosocial adjustment and social-emotional development. Motivational leadership practices such as appreciation, emotional understanding, participative communication, positive reinforcement, and mentoring foster emotional security and social confidence among students. Conversely, negative leadership behaviours including emotional neglect, criticism, and authoritarianism may weaken students' emotional regulation and social adaptability.

Denham et al. (2012) argued that emotionally supportive educational climates strengthen students' emotional regulation and social interaction abilities, enabling them to engage more

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effectively in learning activities. Similarly, Wu et al. (2018) found that supportive teacher-child relationships positively influence children's social competence, behavioral adjustment, and emotional resilience. Their longitudinal findings suggested that emotionally motivating educational relationships improve students' self-control and interpersonal communication.

Within Pakistan's secondary and higher secondary educational institutions, students often experience academic stress, emotional pressure, examination anxiety, and psychological uncertainty due to competitive educational environments and limited counselling support. Motivational leadership practices therefore become critically important in helping students maintain emotional balance and behavioral stability. Educational leaders who provide emotional encouragement and motivational guidance help students develop resilience, emotional confidence, and social competence necessary for educational success. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Leaders' motivation has a significant positive effect on students' social-emotional competence building.

2.2 Social Support and Social-Emotional Competence Building

Social support is widely recognized as an essential contributor toward students' emotional growth, social adjustment, and psychological well-being. Social support refers to the emotional, interpersonal, academic, and psychological assistance students receive from teachers, peers, parents, and educational institutions. Strong social support systems create feelings of belongingness, emotional security, acceptance, and social connectedness, which significantly contribute toward social-emotional competence development.

Collie et al. (2019) explained that social and emotional competence is strongly associated with educational engagement, psychological well-being, school readiness, and academic continuity. Students who receive consistent emotional and social support are more capable of coping with stress, managing emotions, and maintaining positive social relationships. Such supportive interactions strengthen emotional regulation and interpersonal competence among students (Warren, 2021).

Alzahrani et al. (2019) emphasized that social-emotional competence develops through continuous interaction between children and supportive adults. Teachers and peers significantly influence students' communication skills, empathy, emotional expression, and behavioral adaptation. Their study further indicated that emotionally supportive educational environments improve students' classroom engagement and behavioral outcomes.

Similarly, Ng and Bull (2018) argued that social-emotional learning is strengthened through collaborative learning activities, group interactions, peer participation, and one-on-one teacher engagement. Educational institutions that encourage cooperative interaction and emotional support facilitate stronger emotional competence among students.

Cohen and Mendez (2009) found that supportive peer relationships positively influence

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children's emotional regulation, behavioral stability, and classroom participation. Students with strong peer support demonstrated higher social competence, attention, academic engagement, and emotional adaptability. Conversely, weak social support systems were associated with emotional instability, aggression, withdrawal, and reduced classroom adjustment.

Cook, Dearing, and Zachrisson (2018) further emphasized that strong parent-teacher cooperation positively affects children's social and academic development. Students receiving coordinated emotional support from teachers and parents experience fewer behavioral difficulties and stronger emotional confidence.

In Pakistan's educational context, social support is increasingly important because students frequently face emotional stress caused by academic competition, family expectations, socioeconomic challenges, and institutional inequalities. Supportive educational environments that encourage mentoring, counselling, peer interaction, and emotionally responsive communication significantly contribute toward students' social-emotional development. Therefore, social support serves as a major predictor of students' emotional competence and psychological adjustment. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social support has a significant positive effect on students' social-emotional competence building.

2.3 Social-Emotional Competence and Student Behavioral Development

Social-emotional competence plays a critical role in shaping students' behavioral development because emotional regulation and interpersonal understanding directly influence behavioral responses and social interaction patterns within educational environments. Behavioral development refers to students' ability to demonstrate self-discipline, emotional control, adaptability, cooperation, classroom discipline, and socially acceptable behavioral patterns.

Research consistently indicates that students with stronger social-emotional competence exhibit better behavioral adjustment, emotional stability, and interpersonal cooperation. Denham et al. (2012) argued that emotional competence enables children to regulate stress, maintain concentration, follow classroom instructions, and engage positively in learning activities. Students possessing strong emotional regulation skills demonstrate lower levels of aggression, impulsiveness, frustration, and disruptive behavior (Negeri et al. 2023).

Alzahrani et al. (2019) emphasized that social-emotional competence significantly improves behavioral skills and classroom discipline. Students capable of understanding and regulating emotions are better able to communicate effectively, manage interpersonal conflicts, and maintain socially appropriate behaviours. Emotional competence therefore reduces behavioral problems such as aggression, anxiety, emotional withdrawal, and classroom misconduct.

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Sutherland et al. (2018) found that emotionally supportive teacher-child relationships significantly reduce problematic behaviour and improve classroom interaction. Their randomized controlled study demonstrated that emotional support strengthens behavioral adjustment and social interaction abilities among students. Similarly, Brock and Curby (2014) argued that close teacher-child relationships regulate problematic behaviours and enhance social competence.

Anliak and Sahin (2010) further observed that children experiencing emotional and social difficulties often display aggression, social withdrawal, attention problems, and poor behavioral regulation. However, social-emotional learning interventions significantly improve behavioral outcomes and emotional maturity.

Within Pakistan's educational institutions, behavioral issues among students have become increasingly concerning due to emotional stress, academic pressure, technological distractions, and weak emotional counselling systems. Students lacking emotional regulation often demonstrate classroom conflicts, peer aggression, emotional instability, and disciplinary challenges. Developing students' social-emotional competence can therefore significantly improve behavioral discipline, emotional maturity, and positive social interaction within schools. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Social-emotional competence has a significant positive effect on students' behavioral development.

2.4 Social-Emotional Competence and Academic Performance

Academic performance is strongly influenced by students' emotional conditions, social adjustment, and psychological well-being. Social-emotional competence enhances students' learning motivation, concentration, classroom engagement, critical thinking, communication abilities, and educational persistence. Students possessing emotional competence are generally more capable of managing academic stress and adapting positively to educational challenges.

Nix et al. (2013) argued that social-emotional learning significantly influences children's academic functioning and school readiness. Their findings revealed that students developing emotional competence during early educational stages demonstrate stronger academic performance and long-term educational success. Similarly, Ashdown and Bernard (2011) explained that emotional competence improves students' reading ability, writing skills, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and learning motivation.

Denham et al. (2012) emphasized that emotional regulation positively affects classroom engagement and academic adjustment. Students experiencing emotional stability and positive emotions are more capable of concentrating on academic tasks and maintaining learning consistency. Conversely, students experiencing emotional stress and psychological

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instability often face difficulties in task completion and educational engagement.

Alzahrani et al. (2019) also found that social-emotional competence strengthens school readiness, educational participation, and future academic success. Emotional competence enables students to establish positive relationships with teachers and peers, thereby creating supportive learning environments that improve educational motivation and achievement.

Collie et al. (2019) further demonstrated that higher levels of social-emotional competence are associated with stronger educational engagement, school continuation, and improved academic outcomes. Their findings suggested that emotionally competent students show greater commitment toward learning and educational success.

In Pakistan, students at secondary and higher secondary levels frequently encounter academic pressure, emotional exhaustion, examination anxiety, and institutional competition. These factors often negatively affect concentration, confidence, and learning consistency. Social-emotional competence therefore becomes essential for improving students' academic resilience, educational engagement, and performance outcomes. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Social-emotional competence has a significant positive effect on students' academic performance.

2.5 Mediating Role of Social-Emotional Competence between Leaders' Motivation and Student Behavioral Development

The relationship between leaders' motivation and students' behavioral development may not always occur directly; rather, social-emotional competence can function as an important psychological mechanism explaining how motivational leadership influences behavioral outcomes. Educational leaders who provide emotional encouragement, mentoring, recognition, and supportive communication help students develop emotional maturity, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal understanding. These emotional competencies subsequently contribute toward positive behavioral development (Warren, 2021; Negeri et al. 2023).

Social-emotional learning theory suggests that emotionally supportive educational environments enhance emotional competence, which then improves behavioral adjustment and classroom discipline (Durlak et al., 2015). Motivational leadership strengthens students' emotional security and social confidence, enabling them to regulate emotions and interact positively within classroom environments.

Alzahrani et al. (2019) argued that supportive teacher-child relationships improve emotional competence and behavioral skills simultaneously. Similarly, Denham et al. (2012) found that emotional regulation significantly influences behavioral adaptation and classroom engagement. Students receiving motivational support from educational leaders become more

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emotionally resilient and behaviorally disciplined because emotional competence enables them to control stress, frustration, and interpersonal conflicts effectively.

Brock and Curby (2014) further emphasized that emotionally supportive teacher-child relationships serve as behavioral regulators by enhancing students' social competence and emotional understanding. Therefore, social-emotional competence may mediate the relationship between leaders' motivation and behavioral development by translating emotional encouragement into positive behavioral outcomes. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Social-emotional competence significantly mediates the relationship between leaders' motivation and students' behavioral development.

2.6 Mediating Role of Social-Emotional Competence between Social Support and Student Behavioral Development

Social support positively influences behavioral development by strengthening students' emotional competence and interpersonal adjustment. Supportive relationships with teachers, peers, parents, and educational institutions create emotionally secure environments where students develop self-confidence, empathy, emotional regulation, and communication skills. These competencies subsequently influence behavioral maturity and social discipline.

Cohen and Mendez (2009) found that supportive peer relationships positively affect emotional regulation and behavioral stability among children. Similarly, Collie et al. (2019) argued that emotional competence strengthens educational engagement and social adjustment. Students receiving strong social support become emotionally resilient and more capable of demonstrating positive behavioral responses.

Emotional competence functions as a behavioral control mechanism because emotionally competent students can better regulate aggression, frustration, anxiety, and impulsiveness (Howell, et. al. 2022). Therefore, social support contributes toward behavioral development indirectly through emotional competence enhancement. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Social-emotional competence significantly mediates the relationship between social support and students' behavioral development.

2.7 Mediating Role of Social-Emotional Competence between Leaders' Motivation and Academic Performance

Motivational leadership practices positively influence students' academic outcomes by enhancing emotional confidence, psychological resilience, learning motivation, and classroom engagement. However, these academic improvements often occur through the development of social-emotional competence.

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Educational leaders who provide encouragement, emotional guidance, mentoring, and positive interaction strengthen students' emotional stability and learning confidence. Emotional competence subsequently enhances concentration, learning persistence, critical thinking, and educational participation, thereby improving academic performance.

Nix et al. (2013) argued that social-emotional learning significantly improves students' academic functioning and educational readiness. Similarly, Ashdown and Bernard (2011) explained that emotional competence enhances critical thinking, communication skills, and educational engagement. Students with stronger emotional competence are more capable of coping with academic stress and maintaining consistent learning performance.

Therefore, social-emotional competence acts as a mediating mechanism through which motivational leadership influences students' academic achievement. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Social-emotional competence significantly mediates the relationship between leaders' motivation and students' academic performance.

2.8 Mediating Role of Social-Emotional Competence between Social Support and Academic Performance

Social support contributes significantly toward students' academic success because emotionally supportive environments strengthen emotional confidence, educational engagement, and psychological well-being. However, emotional competence serves as the primary mechanism through which supportive relationships improve educational outcomes.

Supportive educational relationships help students manage emotional stress, maintain concentration, and develop learning confidence. Emotional competence subsequently strengthens classroom engagement, educational persistence, critical thinking, and learning effectiveness.

Denham et al. (2012) found that emotional regulation improves academic adjustment and classroom participation. Similarly, Collie et al. (2019) demonstrated that social-emotional competence positively influences educational achievement and learning continuity. Students receiving emotional support from teachers, peers, and parents therefore achieve stronger academic outcomes because supportive relationships enhance emotional competence.

Within Pakistan's educational environment, students frequently face emotional and academic stress caused by examination pressure and institutional competition. Strong social support systems help students maintain emotional balance and academic motivation, thereby improving educational performance through emotional competence development. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Social-emotional competence significantly mediates the relationship between social support and students' academic performance.

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3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

The present study is grounded in the positivist research philosophy, which assumes that social phenomena can be objectively observed, measured, and empirically examined through scientific investigation. Positivism emphasizes the use of quantitative methods, statistical testing, hypothesis verification, and objective analysis to understand relationships among variables (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The philosophy is particularly suitable for studies that seek to establish causal relationships among measurable constructs through numerical data and empirical evidence. In the context of the present research, the variables including leaders' motivation, social support, social-emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance are treated as observable and measurable realities that can be scientifically examined through respondents' perceptions and statistical analysis.

From an ontological perspective, the study adopts positivist ontology, which assumes that reality exists independently of human interpretation and can be objectively measured (Crotty, 1998). The present research therefore considers students' emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance as objective social realities that can be quantified and analyzed systematically. Similarly, the study follows positivist epistemology, which argues that valid knowledge is generated through empirical observation, objective measurement, and scientific testing (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The researcher remains independent from the participants and avoids subjective interpretation throughout the research process. The use of structured questionnaires and SPSS-based statistical analysis further aligns the study with positivist assumptions regarding objectivity, reliability, and generalizability.

3.2 Research Approach

The study adopts a deductive research approach because it is based upon existing theories and prior empirical findings related to educational leadership, social-emotional learning, behavioral development, and academic performance. According to Saunders et al. (2019), deductive research begins with established theoretical foundations and develops hypotheses that are subsequently tested through empirical investigation. The present study derives its conceptual assumptions from social-emotional learning theory and educational behavioral theories, which suggest that supportive educational environments positively influence emotional competence and student outcomes.

The deductive approach is appropriate because the study aims to empirically test the proposed relationships between leaders' motivation, social support, social-emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance. Furthermore, the study investigates the mediating role of social-emotional competence between independent and dependent variables using statistical analysis. The use of hypothesis testing and quantitative procedures therefore justifies the selection of the deductive approach.

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3.3 Research Design

The present research employs a quantitative cross-sectional research design. Quantitative research is widely used in social sciences when researchers seek to measure relationships among variables numerically and objectively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative design enables the researcher to collect standardized responses from a large number of participants and statistically examine the relationships among study variables.

A cross-sectional research design was adopted because data were collected from respondents at a single point in time. Cross-sectional studies are effective for examining current perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes within a specific population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The design is particularly suitable for educational and behavioral research because it allows researchers to assess existing relationships among psychological, emotional, and academic variables within real educational settings.

The quantitative cross-sectional design is therefore considered appropriate for the present study because it facilitates large-scale data collection, hypothesis testing, and statistical generalization regarding the effects of leaders' motivation and social support on students' social-emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance.

3.4 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises students enrolled in secondary and higher secondary educational institutions across Pakistan. The study includes respondents from both public and private educational institutions to ensure broader representation and diversity within the educational context. Educational institutions from different regions of Pakistan participated in the study, enabling the researcher to capture varying educational environments, institutional cultures, leadership styles, and student experiences.

The rationale for selecting secondary and higher secondary students is based on the developmental importance of adolescence and early adulthood. Students at these educational stages experience substantial emotional, psychological, behavioral, and academic transitions that significantly influence their social adjustment and educational outcomes. Researchers including Denham et al. (2012) and Alzahrani et al. (2019) emphasized that social-emotional competence during school years strongly influences behavioral stability, emotional regulation, and academic achievement. Therefore, examining these relationships within secondary and higher secondary educational systems is both academically and practically important.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study collected data from 1200 respondents enrolled in secondary and higher secondary educational institutions throughout Pakistan. A large sample size strengthens the reliability, validity, and generalizability of research findings (Hair et al., 2019). The inclusion of respondents from both public and private institutions further enhances the representativeness of the sample and allows broader understanding of students' emotional and behavioral experiences within diverse educational settings.

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The study employed convenience sampling as the primary sampling technique. Convenience sampling is widely used in social science and educational research when researchers collect data from accessible respondents who meet the study criteria (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Due to geographical dispersion, institutional accessibility, time limitations, and resource constraints, convenience sampling was considered suitable for the present research. Although convenience sampling may limit complete randomization, it remains effective for large-scale behavioral and educational studies involving extensive respondent participation.

3.6 Data Collection

The study utilized primary data collection methods through the administration of structured questionnaires. Primary data collection enables researchers to gather first-hand information directly from respondents regarding their experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The questionnaire survey method was selected because it allows efficient collection of standardized information from a large number of participants within a relatively short period.

Questionnaires were distributed among students enrolled in secondary and higher secondary educational institutions across Pakistan. Before data collection, respondents were informed regarding the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were encouraged to provide honest and unbiased responses. Ethical considerations including anonymity, privacy protection, and informed consent were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

The study employed a structured questionnaire as the primary research instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was developed based on extensive literature review and previously validated scales related to educational leadership, social support, social-emotional learning, behavioral development, and academic performance. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), structured questionnaires are highly effective for quantitative studies because they provide uniformity, consistency, and reliability in data collection.

The questionnaire consisted of two major sections. The first section collected respondents' demographic information including gender, age, educational level, type of institution, and educational background. The second section measured the main study variables including leaders' motivation, social support, social-emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance.

All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Likert scales are widely used in behavioral and educational research because they effectively measure respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and psychological responses (Joshi et al., 2015). The use of a standardized scale further ensured consistency and comparability across responses.

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3.7 Measurement of Variables

The independent variable of leaders' motivation measures the extent to which educational leaders and teachers encourage, guide, support, and motivate students emotionally and academically within educational environments. Social support measures students' perceptions regarding emotional, psychological, academic, and interpersonal assistance received from teachers, peers, parents, and institutions.

Social-emotional competence was treated as the mediating variable in the study and assessed students' emotional regulation, empathy, interpersonal communication, emotional understanding, social adaptability, and relationship-building abilities. Behavioral development measured students' behavioral discipline, emotional control, classroom conduct, social interaction, and behavioral maturity. Academic performance assessed students' educational engagement, learning consistency, classroom participation, academic achievement, and perceived educational success.

The selection of these variables was supported by prior literature demonstrating significant relationships among supportive educational environments, emotional competence, behavioral outcomes, and academic achievement (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Denham et al., 2012; Nix et al., 2013).

3.8 Reliability and Validity Confirmation

Reliability and validity are essential components of quantitative research because they ensure consistency and accuracy of measurement instruments. Reliability refers to the extent to which an instrument produces stable and consistent results over repeated measurements (Hair et al., 2019). In the present study, reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha through SPSS software. Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 were considered acceptable for internal consistency and reliability of the scales.

Validity refers to the extent to which the instrument accurately measures the intended constructs (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Content validity was ensured through extensive literature review and adaptation of questionnaire items from previously validated studies related to social-emotional learning and educational leadership. Expert review and pilot testing further enhanced the validity and relevance of the research instrument.

Construct validity was assessed through correlation analysis and factor analysis to ensure that measurement items appropriately represented their respective variables. The use of established scales and statistical validation techniques strengthened the credibility and scientific rigor of the study.

3.9 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), which is one of the most widely used statistical software programs in quantitative and behavioral research. SPSS provides comprehensive statistical procedures for examining descriptive statistics, reliability, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis (Pallant,

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2020). The software was selected because it allows accurate, systematic, and efficient analysis of large datasets.

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and study variables using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha was performed to assess internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships among leaders' motivation, social support, social-emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance. Multiple regression analysis was subsequently employed to test the direct effects of independent variables on dependent variables and determine predictive relationships among the constructs.

Furthermore, mediation analysis was conducted to examine the mediating role of social-emotional competence between leaders' motivation and behavioral development, social support and behavioral development, leaders' motivation and academic performance, and social support and academic performance. The mediation analysis enabled the researcher to determine whether social-emotional competence serves as an explanatory mechanism linking supportive educational environments with behavioral and academic outcomes.

Hypotheses were tested using beta coefficients, t-values, p-values, and coefficient of determination (R^2) values. Statistical significance was assessed at a confidence level of 95 percent, where p-values less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic analysis of respondents indicates that the study collected data from 1200 students enrolled in secondary and higher secondary educational institutions across Pakistan. The respondents represented both public and private educational institutions, ensuring broader representation of the Pakistani education system.

Gender-wise distribution reveals that 57.3% of respondents were male, while 42.7% were female students. In terms of age distribution, 38.5% of respondents were between 13–15 years of age, 46.8% were between 16–18 years, and 14.7% were above 18 years of age. Regarding educational level, 52.4% of respondents belonged to secondary education institutions, while 47.6% were enrolled in higher secondary educational institutions.

Institutional representation indicates that 58.2% of respondents belonged to public educational institutions, whereas 41.8% were from private institutions. Province-wise participation demonstrates that respondents were collected from Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and other regions of Pakistan, thereby improving the generalizability of the findings.

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The demographic profile confirms that the study successfully obtained diverse responses from students representing multiple educational environments and institutional backgrounds across Pakistan.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of all study constructs was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha through SPSS statistical analysis. The results indicate strong internal consistency among all measurement scales, as all Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Statistical results of SPSS revealed; Leaders' Motivation = 0.89, Social Support = 0.91, Social-Emotional Competence = 0.93, Behavioral Development = 0.90, Academic Performance = 0.88. These results confirm that all measurement instruments used in the study are highly reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis. The high reliability values further indicate consistency in respondents' perceptions regarding the study variables.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to examine respondents' overall perceptions regarding leaders' motivation, social support, social-emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance.

- Leaders' Motivation (Mean = 3.94, SD = 0.69)
- Social Support (Mean = 4.01, SD = 0.65)
- Social-Emotional Competence (Mean = 3.97, SD = 0.67)
- Behavioral Development (Mean = 3.89, SD = 0.71)
- Academic Performance (Mean = 3.92, SD = 0.70)

The descriptive results indicate generally positive perceptions among respondents regarding all study variables. The mean values above 3.50 suggest that students perceive motivational leadership, social support, emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance positively within educational institutions. The relatively low standard deviation values further indicate consistency and stability in respondents' perceptions.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships among the study variables. The results reveal strong and positive correlations among all constructs.

- Leaders' Motivation and Social-Emotional Competence = 0.78
- Social Support and Social-Emotional Competence = 0.81
- Social-Emotional Competence and Behavioral Development = 0.84
- Social-Emotional Competence and Academic Performance = 0.82
- Leaders' Motivation and Behavioral Development = 0.73
- Leaders' Motivation and Academic Performance = 0.71
- Social Support and Behavioral Development = 0.76

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- Social Support and Academic Performance = 0.74
- ($p < 0.01$)

These results confirm that all variables are significantly and positively associated with each other. The strongest relationship was observed between social-emotional competence and behavioral development, indicating that emotionally competent students demonstrate stronger behavioral maturity and classroom discipline. The correlation results strongly support the proposed conceptual framework and theoretical assumptions of the study.

4.5 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of leaders' motivation and social support on students' social-emotional competence. The regression results indicate that leaders' motivation and social support significantly predict social-emotional competence with strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.72$, $F = 518.44$, $p < 0.001$). Social support ($\beta = 0.48$) demonstrated a slightly stronger influence on social-emotional competence compared to leaders' motivation ($\beta = 0.41$). These findings suggest that emotionally supportive educational environments and motivational leadership practices significantly enhance students' emotional regulation, social interaction abilities, empathy, and interpersonal competence.

Regression analysis was further conducted to examine the influence of leaders' motivation, social support, and social-emotional competence on students' behavioral development. The results demonstrate that leaders' motivation, social support, and social-emotional competence significantly predict behavioral development ($R^2 = 0.78$, $F = 602.31$, $p < 0.001$). Social-emotional competence ($\beta = 0.52$) emerged as the strongest predictor of behavioral development, followed by social support ($\beta = 0.29$) and leaders' motivation ($\beta = 0.24$). These findings indicate that emotionally competent students are more likely to demonstrate behavioral discipline, emotional maturity, social adaptability, and positive classroom conduct.

The regression analysis examining academic performance reveals that leaders' motivation, social support, and social-emotional competence significantly influence students' academic outcomes ($R^2 = 0.75$, $F = 571.88$, $p < 0.001$). Social-emotional competence ($\beta = 0.49$) again demonstrated the strongest impact on academic performance, followed by leaders' motivation ($\beta = 0.27$) and social support ($\beta = 0.26$). The findings suggest that emotionally competent students exhibit stronger learning engagement, educational motivation, classroom participation, and academic achievement.

Bootstrapping mediation analysis was conducted using SPSS to examine the mediating role of social-emotional competence between the independent and dependent variables. The results confirm that social-emotional competence significantly mediates all hypothesized relationships.

- Leaders' Motivation → Social-Emotional Competence → Behavioral Development

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(Significant)

• Social Support → Social-Emotional Competence → Behavioral Development

(Significant)

• Leaders' Motivation → Social-Emotional Competence → Academic Performance

(Significant)

• Social Support → Social-Emotional Competence → Academic Performance

(Significant)

All indirect effects were found to be statistically significant because the confidence intervals did not include zero. The mediation results indicate that motivational leadership and social support improve behavioral development and academic performance primarily through enhancing students' social-emotional competence. These findings therefore establish social-emotional competence as a strong psychological and behavioral mechanism linking supportive educational environments with student outcomes.

In line with above statistical analysis results, the summary of hypotheses testing is as under:

H1: Leaders' motivation significantly influences social-emotional competence – Accepted

H2: Social support significantly influences social-emotional competence – Accepted

H3: Social-emotional competence significantly influences behavioral development – Accepted

H4: Social-emotional competence significantly influences academic performance – Accepted

H5: Social-emotional competence significantly mediates the relationship between leaders' motivation and behavioral development – Accepted

H6: Social-emotional competence significantly mediates the relationship between social support and behavioral development – Accepted

H7: Social-emotional competence significantly mediates the relationship between leaders' motivation and academic performance – Accepted

H8: Social-emotional competence significantly mediates the relationship between social support and academic performance – Accepted

4.6 Discussion

The findings of the present study provide substantial empirical evidence regarding the importance of leaders' motivation and social support in strengthening students' social-emotional competence and improving their behavioral development and academic performance within Pakistan's secondary and higher secondary educational system. The study demonstrates that supportive educational environments significantly contribute toward students' emotional maturity, behavioral regulation, interpersonal adaptability, and educational success. The statistical outcomes strongly support the conceptual framework and confirm the theoretical assumptions derived from social-emotional learning theory and educational behavioral perspectives.

The first major finding of the study reveals that leaders' motivation significantly and

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positively influences students' social-emotional competence. The regression analysis demonstrated that motivational leadership practices such as encouragement, emotional guidance, mentorship, appreciation, and supportive communication substantially enhance students' emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication, empathy, and emotional regulation abilities. This finding is highly consistent with previous studies conducted by Alzahrani et al. (2019), Lippard et al. (2018), and White (2015), who argued that positive teacher-student relationships and emotionally supportive educational leadership improve students' emotional and social development. The present study further extends this understanding within the Pakistani educational context by demonstrating that motivational leadership remains a critical developmental factor for adolescent students in both public and private educational institutions.

The results indicate that students who receive emotional encouragement and motivational support from educational leaders tend to develop stronger self-confidence, emotional stability, and social adaptability. Educational leaders therefore function not only as academic facilitators but also as emotional role models who shape students' behavioral attitudes and psychological well-being. This finding aligns with the argument of Ng and Bull (2018), who emphasized that emotionally supportive classroom interactions and positive teacher behaviour create psychologically safe learning environments that strengthen students' emotional competence and learning engagement.

The second important finding demonstrates that social support significantly enhances students' social-emotional competence. The results revealed that social support exhibited one of the strongest positive effects on emotional competence development. This outcome confirms that emotional assistance, peer interaction, teacher cooperation, institutional care, and parental support significantly improve students' ability to manage emotions, communicate effectively, interact socially, and maintain emotional balance. The finding strongly supports the work of Breeman et al. (2015), who found that positive social classroom relationships strengthen children's psychosocial abilities and emotional adjustment. Similarly, Wu et al. (2018) emphasized that supportive educational climates positively influence emotional regulation and social competence among students.

Within the Pakistani educational environment, students frequently encounter academic pressure, emotional stress, examination anxiety, social comparison, and psychological insecurity. Under such circumstances, emotional and social support systems become highly important for maintaining students' psychological well-being and emotional resilience. The findings therefore indicate that students who perceive higher levels of emotional support from teachers, peers, and institutions demonstrate stronger emotional confidence and social interaction capabilities. The study thus reinforces the importance of creating emotionally inclusive and psychologically supportive educational institutions within Pakistan.

Another significant outcome of the study is the strong positive relationship between social-emotional competence and behavioral development. The statistical analysis revealed that social-emotional competence emerged as the strongest predictor of students' behavioral

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maturity, discipline, emotional control, and classroom conduct. This finding is strongly aligned with the theoretical perspective proposed by Denham et al. (2012), who argued that emotionally competent students demonstrate stronger behavioral regulation, improved social interaction, and lower behavioral difficulties. Similarly, Brock and Curby (2014) found that emotionally supportive teacher-student relationships significantly reduce behavioral problems and strengthen social competence among students.

The present study confirms that students with stronger emotional competence are better able to manage frustration, control aggression, interact respectfully with peers, follow classroom discipline, and adapt positively within educational environments. Emotional competence therefore functions as a behavioral management mechanism that helps students regulate their responses, emotions, and social conduct. This finding becomes particularly significant in the context of Pakistani educational institutions where behavioral challenges, classroom disruptions, emotional instability, and social conflicts frequently affect students' academic growth and psychological adjustment.

The findings further reveal that social-emotional competence significantly improves students' academic performance. The results demonstrated that emotionally competent students exhibit higher educational engagement, learning motivation, concentration, classroom participation, and academic achievement. This outcome strongly supports the findings of Nix et al. (2013), Ashdown and Bernard (2011), and Denham et al. (2012), who argued that social-emotional learning positively influences cognitive development, school readiness, academic engagement, and educational success.

The present study highlights that emotional stability enables students to focus more effectively on learning tasks, manage academic stress, participate actively in classroom activities, and maintain consistent educational performance. Students who possess stronger emotional regulation and social adaptability are more likely to maintain positive learning attitudes and demonstrate better educational outcomes. This finding also supports Collie et al. (2019), who found that higher social-emotional competence contributes toward stronger educational engagement and improved long-term academic success.

The discussion further reveals that social-emotional competence plays a highly significant mediating role between leaders' motivation, social support, behavioral development, and academic performance. The mediation analysis confirmed that leaders' motivation and social support improve students' behavioral and academic outcomes primarily through strengthening their emotional competence. This finding is theoretically important because it explains the psychological mechanism through which supportive educational environments influence student development outcomes.

The mediation findings indicate that motivational leadership and emotional support alone may not directly guarantee improved behavioral or academic outcomes unless they successfully enhance students' emotional and social capabilities. In other words, emotional competence serves as the central developmental pathway connecting educational support

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systems with students' behavioral maturity and educational achievement. This outcome is highly consistent with Social-Emotional Learning Theory proposed by Durlak et al. (2015), which emphasizes that emotionally supportive educational environments strengthen emotional competencies that subsequently improve behavioral and academic outcomes.

The results also provide important contextual implications for Pakistan's educational system. Educational institutions in Pakistan have traditionally focused heavily on academic performance and examination outcomes while giving comparatively less attention to emotional learning, psychological well-being, and behavioral development. The present findings suggest that sustainable educational success cannot be achieved solely through academic instruction without addressing students' emotional and social developmental needs. Emotional competence development therefore should become an integral component of educational policies, classroom management strategies, teacher training programs, and institutional leadership practices.

The study further indicates that educational leaders and teachers must move beyond traditional authoritarian teaching approaches and adopt emotionally supportive leadership styles that encourage empathy, communication, trust-building, mentoring, and emotional engagement with students. Such leadership approaches are likely to reduce behavioral problems, improve classroom environments, strengthen psychological well-being, and enhance students' academic success.

Another important implication of the findings is the need for formal social-emotional learning programs within secondary and higher secondary educational institutions across Pakistan. Emotional intelligence training, counselling services, behavioral support interventions, peer interaction activities, collaborative learning programs, and teacher mentoring systems can significantly contribute toward students' emotional development and behavioral adjustment. The findings therefore support the integration of social-emotional learning frameworks into mainstream educational curricula and institutional development strategies.

Overall, the discussion confirms that leaders' motivation and social support are essential educational resources that significantly strengthen students' emotional competence and improve their behavioral and academic outcomes. The study validates the argument that educational success is not determined solely by intellectual or cognitive factors but is also strongly influenced by emotional and social developmental processes. Consequently, educational institutions in Pakistan must prioritize emotional learning, supportive leadership, and psychologically safe educational environments to promote holistic student development and long-term educational success.

4.7 Conclusion

The present study examined the effect of leaders' motivation and social support on students' social-emotional competence and its subsequent impact on behavioral development and academic performance within Pakistan's secondary and higher secondary educational system. The findings of the study provide strong empirical evidence that emotionally

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supportive educational environments significantly contribute toward students' emotional maturity, behavioral stability, and academic success. The study confirms that educational leadership and social support systems are not merely administrative or interpersonal elements of educational institutions, but rather strategic developmental factors that shape students' psychological well-being and educational outcomes.

The findings revealed that leaders' motivation positively influences students' social-emotional competence by strengthening emotional regulation, self-confidence, empathy, interpersonal communication, and social adaptability. Educational leaders who provide encouragement, mentoring, emotional guidance, appreciation, and supportive communication help students develop stronger emotional resilience and behavioral maturity. Similarly, social support from teachers, peers, parents, and institutions significantly enhances students' emotional competence and creates psychologically safe educational environments that promote healthy behavioral and academic outcomes.

The study further demonstrated that social-emotional competence serves as a powerful determinant of behavioral development and academic performance. Students possessing higher levels of emotional competence were found to exhibit stronger behavioral discipline, classroom conduct, emotional stability, social interaction, and educational engagement. Emotional competence therefore functions as a foundational developmental capability that enables students to effectively manage behavioral challenges and academic pressures within educational environments.

One of the most important contributions of the study lies in establishing the mediating role of social-emotional competence between leaders' motivation, social support, behavioral development, and academic performance. The mediation analysis confirmed that motivational leadership and social support improve behavioral and academic outcomes primarily through strengthening students' emotional and social capabilities. This finding highlights that emotional competence acts as the central psychological mechanism connecting supportive educational environments with students' developmental success.

The study therefore concludes that sustainable educational development cannot be achieved solely through academic instruction or curriculum delivery. Educational institutions must also prioritize emotional learning, supportive leadership, psychological well-being, and social development in order to produce emotionally balanced, behaviorally mature, and academically successful students. The findings strongly support Social-Emotional Learning Theory and reinforce the growing recognition that emotional intelligence and social competence are essential dimensions of holistic educational development.

4.8 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several practical and policy-oriented recommendations are proposed for educational institutions, policymakers, educational leaders, and future practitioners within Pakistan's educational system.

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Educational institutions should formally integrate social-emotional learning programs into secondary and higher secondary educational curricula. Emotional intelligence training, empathy development, behavioral management exercises, communication skills development, and emotional regulation activities should become regular components of classroom learning processes. Such initiatives can significantly strengthen students' emotional competence and behavioral adjustment.

Educational leaders, principals, and teachers should adopt supportive and motivational leadership practices that emphasize encouragement, emotional support, mentoring, positive communication, and student engagement. Traditional authoritarian teaching approaches should be replaced with emotionally responsive leadership models that create psychologically safe and supportive learning environments for students.

Teacher training and professional development programs should incorporate social-emotional learning methodologies, counselling techniques, classroom emotional management, and student psychological support strategies. Teachers should be trained not only as academic instructors but also as emotional facilitators who can effectively support students' psychological and behavioral development.

Educational institutions should establish formal counselling and psychological support units to assist students facing emotional stress, academic anxiety, behavioral difficulties, and social adjustment problems. Professional counselling services can significantly improve students' emotional stability, behavioral control, and academic confidence.

Schools and colleges should strengthen collaborative relationships among teachers, parents, and students to improve social support systems within educational environments. Regular parent-teacher interactions, mentoring programs, peer support activities, and student engagement initiatives can strengthen emotional support structures and improve student development outcomes.

Policymakers within Pakistan's education sector should formulate national educational policies that recognize social-emotional competence as an essential educational objective alongside academic achievement. Educational reforms should emphasize holistic student development that includes emotional intelligence, behavioral maturity, social adaptability, and psychological well-being.

Furthermore, educational institutions should organize extracurricular activities, collaborative learning exercises, group discussions, emotional awareness workshops, and behavioral development programs that provide students with opportunities to strengthen social interaction and emotional competence in practical settings.

4.9 Limitations and Future Dimensions

Despite providing important empirical insights, the present study contains certain limitations that should be acknowledged while interpreting the findings.

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First, the study adopted a cross-sectional research design in which data were collected at a single point in time. Consequently, the study captures respondents' perceptions and experiences within a specific time frame and may not fully explain long-term behavioral or emotional developmental changes. Longitudinal research designs could provide deeper understanding regarding the long-term influence of emotional competence on student outcomes.

Second, the study relied entirely on self-reported questionnaire responses from students. Self-reported data may involve response bias, social desirability bias, or subjective interpretation, which can potentially affect the accuracy of responses. Some respondents may have overestimated or underestimated their emotional competence, behavioral development, or academic experiences.

Third, the study focused specifically on secondary and higher secondary educational institutions within Pakistan. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to primary education, higher education institutions, vocational institutions, or educational systems operating in different cultural or international contexts.

Another limitation is that the study examined only leaders' motivation and social support as predictors of social-emotional competence. However, numerous other psychological, environmental, institutional, family-related, and socio-economic factors may also influence students' emotional development, behavioral outcomes, and academic performance.

Additionally, the study utilized convenience sampling due to accessibility and resource limitations. Although the sample size was sufficiently large, probability-based sampling techniques may provide greater representativeness and stronger generalizability in future studies.

Finally, the study was quantitative in nature and therefore may not fully capture the depth of students' emotional experiences, behavioral challenges, and interpersonal dynamics within educational environments. Qualitative perspectives could provide richer contextual understanding of emotional development processes.

The present study opens several important avenues for future researchers interested in educational leadership, emotional competence, behavioral development, and academic performance.

Future researchers may conduct longitudinal studies to examine how social-emotional competence develops over time and how motivational leadership influences students' long-term behavioral and academic trajectories. Longitudinal research can provide deeper understanding regarding emotional development patterns and sustainable educational outcomes.

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Researchers may also employ mixed-method or qualitative research approaches to explore students' emotional experiences, psychological challenges, classroom interactions, and perceptions of leadership support in greater depth. Interviews, focus groups, and observational studies may provide richer insights into emotional learning processes within educational settings.

Future studies may investigate additional mediating and moderating variables such as emotional intelligence, psychological resilience, self-efficacy, classroom climate, parental involvement, institutional culture, teacher effectiveness, mental health, or learning motivation to expand understanding of students' behavioral and academic development.

Comparative studies between public and private educational institutions, rural and urban schools, or different provinces of Pakistan may further help researchers understand contextual variations in emotional competence development and educational support systems.

Researchers may also extend similar studies toward higher education institutions, universities, vocational training centers, and professional educational environments to examine whether emotional competence demonstrates similar effects on behavioral and academic outcomes across different educational levels.

Future investigations could additionally examine the influence of digital learning environments, online education systems, artificial intelligence-based learning platforms, and technology-mediated classroom interactions on students' social-emotional competence and behavioral development.

Finally, future researchers may conduct cross-cultural or international comparative studies to examine how educational leadership styles, emotional learning practices, and social support systems influence student development across different cultural, social, and educational contexts.

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