JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
*An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal*

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23529722

**Keywords**
*Early childhood education, emotional intelligence, emotional regulation, empathy, Lahore, preschool children, social-emotional learning.*

**Article History**
***Received:*** *25 June 2026*
***Accepted:*** *16 September 2026*
***Published:*** *02 October 2026*

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**Abstract**
*Early childhood education provides an important foundation for children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. During the preschool years, children gradually develop the ability to recognize emotions, regulate behavioral responses, understand others' feelings, and establish positive interpersonal relationships. However, emotional development may receive less systematic attention than academic readiness in preschool classrooms. This study aimed to examine the relationship between early childhood educational experiences and emotional intelligence among children aged 3–4 years in Lahore, Pakistan. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was proposed, involving 100 children from four schools, with 25 children per school. The sample comprised two boys' groups and two girls' groups. Data collection was designed around structured observations of emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction, supplemented by teacher reports and information about classroom practices. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and appropriate group comparisons were proposed to examine relationships between educational experiences and emotional competencies. Recent research highlights the potential contributions of teacher competence, emotionally supportive environments, social-emotional learning, and drama-based activities to children's emotional development (Armesto Arias et al., 2025; Chung & Han, 2025; Wong & Power, 2024). The proposed study provided context-specific evidence for improving preschool teaching practices and curriculum planning in Lahore. Its findings support the integration of guided play, storytelling, cooperative activities, and emotional education into early childhood programs.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a significant period of human development during which children acquire foundational emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and social competencies. Between the ages of three and four, children begin to recognize basic emotions, communicate their needs, respond to other people's feelings, and develop increasingly complex relationships with adults and peers. These emerging abilities influence their participation in classroom activities, responses to frustration, and adjustment to educational environments. Consequently, early childhood education should address emotional and social development alongside the acquisition of early literacy, numeracy, and language skills.

Emotional intelligence provides a useful conceptual framework for examining how children recognize, understand, express, and regulate emotions. Mayer et al. (2004) conceptualized emotional intelligence as a set of abilities involving the perception, use, understanding, and management of emotional information. Although this framework was not developed exclusively for preschool education, it offers a foundation for examining age-appropriate emotional competencies. In young children, these competencies may be observed when they identify sadness in a story, communicate disappointment, seek adult support, respond to a distressed peer, or return to an activity after becoming frustrated.

The development of emotional intelligence is influenced by multiple interacting factors, including family relationships, temperament, language development, social experiences, and educational opportunities. Chung and Han (2025), in a meta-analysis of studies examining emotional intelligence development in childhood, highlighted the importance of parental emotional expression and teachers' skills and self-efficacy. Their findings support a broader understanding of emotional development in which home and school environments contribute to children's emerging emotional competencies.

Preschool classrooms provide opportunities for children to practise emotional skills through structured activities and everyday interactions. Storytelling encourages children to identify characters' feelings, while role-play allows them to explore social situations and practise different responses. Cooperative games create opportunities for turn-taking, sharing, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Teachers can support these experiences by naming emotions, acknowledging children's concerns, modelling calm behavior, and guiding children towards appropriate responses to difficult situations.

Recent intervention research provides further support for emotional education during early childhood. Armesto Arias et al. (2025) investigated a drama-based intervention involving children aged four to five years in Spain. Their program combined children's literature, discussion, and dramatization to promote emotional understanding and social skills. The study reported improvements in several social and behavioral outcomes following the intervention. Although its participants were slightly older than those in the present study, the findings suggest that creative, developmentally appropriate activities may offer valuable opportunities for emotional learning.

Similarly, Wong and Power (2024) evaluated the Early Childhood Education Peace Ambassador Project in kindergartens in Hong Kong. Their quasi-experimental study reported improvements in emotional intelligence and emotion labelling, alongside reductions in aggressive responses among children participating in the program. These findings indicate that emotional competencies can be supported through organized classroom practices rather than being left entirely to spontaneous development.

Despite this growing evidence, the relationship between everyday preschool experiences and emotional intelligence remains relevant for investigation in different educational and cultural contexts. Lahore, a major educational center in Pakistan, contains preschool settings that may

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differ in teacher preparation, classroom resources, curriculum implementation, and opportunities for play. These differences may influence children's experiences of emotional learning. Research focusing on young children in local schools could therefore provide useful evidence for educators and curriculum developers.

Children aged three to four require particular attention because their emotional competencies are still developing. Their ability to identify feelings does not necessarily mean that they can regulate those feelings independently. Similarly, a child may demonstrate empathy through gestures or actions without being able to explain the response verbally. Assessment must therefore consider developmental differences and use age-appropriate observation rather than relying exclusively on abstract questions or written questionnaires.

The present study proposed an examination of the relationship between early childhood educational experiences and emotional intelligence among 100 preschool children from four schools in Lahore. The participants were organized into two boys' groups and two girls' groups, with 25 children per school. The study focused on emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction. It also examined whether classroom practices, including guided play and supportive teacher–child interactions, are associated with these emotional competencies.

**Problem Statement**

Preschool education is commonly expected to prepare children for formal schooling through the development of language, numeracy, literacy, and basic cognitive skills. Although these outcomes are important, an excessive emphasis on academic readiness may reduce opportunities to address children's emotional and interpersonal needs. Children may acquire early academic knowledge while continuing to experience difficulties identifying feelings, managing frustration, sharing materials, or resolving disagreements.

Emotional competencies are particularly important during the preschool years because children are learning to participate in group settings and respond to increasingly complex social situations. Supportive educational environments may help them develop these abilities through repeated practice, positive teacher modelling, and guided interaction. Conversely, limited opportunities for emotional learning may leave some children with fewer structured experiences through which to practise self-regulation and empathy.

Recent studies have demonstrated the potential of organized emotional education and social-emotional learning programs (Armesto Arias et al., 2025; Wong & Power, 2024). However, findings from international intervention studies cannot automatically be generalized to every preschool context. There remains a need to investigate children's emotional competencies in local educational settings and examine how they relate to everyday classroom experiences.

The present study addressed this issue by examining 100 children aged three to four years from four schools in Lahore. It sought to identify patterns in emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction and explore their relationships with classroom practices. The research was intended to provide a local, exploratory perspective rather than establish causal effects or represent all preschool children in Pakistan.

**Research Objectives**

The study aimed to:

1. Examine the relationship between early childhood educational experiences and emotional intelligence among preschool children aged three to four years.
2. Assess children's emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction.

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3. Investigate the association between play-based learning opportunities and emotional competencies.
4. Examine the relationship between supportive teacher–child interactions and emotional intelligence indicators.
5. Explore differences in emotional competency scores between the selected boys' and girls' groups.
6. Identify classroom practices that may support emotional development in preschool settings.

**Research Questions**

1. What relationship exists between early childhood educational experiences and emotional intelligence among preschool children?
2. How do children demonstrate emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction?
3. How are play-based learning opportunities associated with children's emotional competencies?
4. What relationship exists between teacher–child interactions and children's emotional development?
5. Are there differences in observed emotional competencies between the selected boys' and girls' groups?

**Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were proposed for empirical testing:

**H1:** Supportive early childhood educational experiences are positively associated with emotional intelligence among preschool children.

**H2:** Greater opportunities for guided play are positively associated with children's emotional competencies.

**H3:** Positive teacher–child interactions are positively associated with emotional intelligence indicators.

**H4:** Emotional competency scores differ between the selected boys' and girls' groups.

The fourth hypothesis is nondirectional because the study did not assume that either group will necessarily achieve higher scores.

**Literature Review**

**Conceptualizing Emotional Intelligence in Early Childhood**

Emotional intelligence has been examined through different theoretical perspectives. Mayer et al. (2004) described it as an ability involving the perception, use, understanding, and management of emotions. This perspective emphasizes the processing of emotional information rather than treating emotional intelligence simply as a personality characteristic.

In early childhood research, emotional intelligence overlaps with related concepts such as emotional competence, emotion knowledge, self-regulation, empathy, and social-emotional learning. These constructs are connected but not identical. Emotional awareness concerns recognizing and identifying feelings, whereas emotional regulation concerns managing responses to emotional experiences. Empathy involves responding to another person's emotional state, while social interaction includes the behaviors required to establish and maintain relationships.

Chung and Han (2025) examined emotional intelligence development through ability-based and trait-based perspectives. Their meta-analysis identified multiple factors associated with children's emotional intelligence, highlighting the importance of parental emotional expression and teachers' skills and self-efficacy. Their findings suggest that emotional intelligence should be understood through multiple influences rather than attributed to a single educational experience.

For children aged three to four, emotional intelligence should be treated as an emerging set of competencies. A child may recognize happiness and sadness but struggle to understand more complex emotional situations. Another child may respond compassionately to a peer but

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find it difficult to explain the reason for that response. Such variation reinforces the importance of developmentally appropriate assessment.

**Early Childhood Education and Emotional Development**

Early childhood education provides structured and informal opportunities for children to develop emotional skills. Classroom routines expose children to situations involving waiting, cooperation, sharing, and responding to adult guidance. These experiences can help children practise emotional responses within a supportive environment.

Blewitt et al. (2018), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of social-emotional learning interventions in early childhood education and care settings, found positive effects on social competence, emotional competence, behavioral self-regulation, and early learning outcomes. Although this study is older than the most recent literature, it remains an important source because of its extensive synthesis of intervention research.

More recent evidence strengthens this position. Wong and Power (2024) evaluated an emotional education program implemented in Hong Kong kindergartens. Their findings indicated that children participating in the Peace Ambassador Project demonstrated improvements in emotional intelligence and emotion labelling and showed fewer aggressive responses. The results provide evidence that structured classroom programs can support emotional competencies when implemented systematically.

These findings do not mean that preschool attendance automatically produces higher emotional intelligence. The quality of teaching, nature of classroom activities, consistency of implementation, and developmental needs of children must also be considered. Consequently, the present study focuses on educational experiences and classroom practices rather than treating enrolment alone as a sufficient explanation for emotional development.

**Play-Based Learning and Emotional Competence**

Play-based learning is particularly relevant to preschool education because it allows children to explore ideas and practise social behaviors in meaningful situations. Through imaginative play, role-play, storytelling, and cooperative games, children encounter opportunities to express feelings, negotiate roles, and respond to different perspectives.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the role of social interaction in cognitive and developmental processes. Applied to preschool learning, this perspective suggests that children can develop new competencies through participation in activities supported by teachers and peers. Guided play allows adults to provide assistance without removing children's opportunities for exploration and decision-making.

Drama-based learning provides one example of this approach. Armesto Arias et al. (2025) examined a program that combined children's literature with dramatization, movement, and emotional activities. Their intervention involved preschool children aged four to five years and used repeated assessments to examine changes in emotional and behavioral outcomes. The researchers reported improvements in several social skills and reductions in some behavioral difficulties.

Drama can help children identify emotions through facial expressions, gestures, dialogue, and imagined situations. For example, a teacher may use a picture book to discuss why a character feels sad and invite children to suggest ways of helping. Children may then act out the situation and practise expressing concern or resolving a disagreement.

However, play should not be treated as automatically beneficial in every circumstance. Competitive or poorly supervised activities may create frustration without providing constructive learning opportunities. Teacher guidance is therefore important for helping children

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interpret experiences and practise appropriate emotional responses.

**Teacher–Child Relationships and Emotional Learning**

Teacher–child relationships contribute to the social and emotional environment of preschool classrooms. Teachers can provide reassurance; establish predictable routines, and model constructive ways of managing emotions. These interactions may help children feel secure enough to participate in activities and develop relationships with peers.

Chung and Han (2025) identified teacher skills and self-efficacy as important factors associated with children's emotional intelligence under the trait-based perspective. This finding highlights the importance of teacher preparation and confidence in supporting emotional learning.

Teachers may encourage emotional awareness by naming feelings and discussing their possible causes. They can support emotional regulation by helping children pause, communicate needs, seek assistance, or return to an activity after frustration. Empathy can be encouraged by discussing the experiences of others and helping children recognize when a peer needs support.

The teacher's response to challenging behavior is particularly important. Punitive responses may discourage children from communicating their emotions, whereas calm guidance can help them understand the consequences of their actions and identify alternative responses. Nevertheless, effective emotional education does not require eliminating every negative emotion. Children also need opportunities to experience manageable frustration and practise coping strategies.

**Emotional Intelligence, Peer Relationships, and Classroom Behavior**

Emotional competencies are closely related to children's interactions with peers. Children who begin to recognize emotional cues may become better able to respond to others' needs, participate in cooperative activities, and resolve minor conflicts. These skills can support participation in classroom routines and the development of positive peer relationships.

Wong and Power (2024) investigated the Peace Ambassador Project in Hong Kong kindergartens, examining emotional intelligence, prosocial behavior, aggressive behavior, and peer exclusion. The intervention group demonstrated improvements in emotional intelligence and emotion labelling, together with reductions in aggressive responses. The program also encouraged children to respond constructively to aggression and peer difficulties.

The study is relevant because it links emotional education with everyday social behavior. However, the intervention involved children in Hong Kong and its findings should not be assumed to describe the experiences of three- and four-year-old children in Lahore.

The present study can contribute by examining emotional competencies in local preschool settings and exploring their relationship with classroom experiences. Direct observation may help identify how children express empathy, cooperate with peers, and respond to emotional situations.

**Family Influences and Previous Educational Experience**

Emotional development begins before children enter preschool. Family interactions provide early opportunities to observe emotional expression, receive reassurance, and learn ways of responding to frustration. Parents and caregivers may influence how children recognize feelings and communicate their needs.

Chung and Han (2025) highlighted parental emotional expression as an important factor in the development of emotional intelligence. This finding suggests that children's emotional competencies cannot be explained exclusively by classroom practices.

Previous preschool attendance may also be relevant. Children who have spent more time in group settings may be more familiar with

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classroom routines, peer interaction, and teacher guidance. However, the duration of attendance alone may not indicate the quality of educational experiences.

The proposed study should therefore record previous preschool experience and, where possible, consider relevant family and developmental information. These variables may help contextualise observed differences, although a sample of 100 children from four schools will limit the number of factors that can be examined reliably.

**Research Gap**

Recent research has expanded understanding of emotional intelligence development, drama-based emotional education, and preschool social-emotional interventions (Armesto Arias et al., 2025; Chung & Han, 2025; Wong & Power, 2024). Nevertheless, several issues remain important.

First, some intervention studies focus on children older than three or four years. Second, studies may use different definitions and assessment instruments, making direct comparison difficult. Third, international findings may not fully represent the institutional and cultural conditions of preschool education in Lahore.

Fourth, emotional intelligence is multidimensional, yet broad overall scores may conceal differences between emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and social interaction. Finally, studies that include only a small number of schools face difficulties distinguishing school-related influences from differences between individual children.

The present study addressed these issues through a focused examination of four emotional competencies among 100 children aged three to four years from four Lahore schools. Its contribution was exploratory and context-specific.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study drew on ability-based emotional intelligence theory and sociocultural learning theory, supported by research on social-emotional learning.

**Ability-Based Emotional Intelligence Theory**

Mayer et al. (2004) conceptualized emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions. This perspective informs the study's focus on emotional awareness and regulation. Because the participants are very young children, these dimensions will be assessed as emerging abilities rather than fully developed competencies.

**Sociocultural Learning Theory**

Vygotsky's (1978) theory emphasizes the contribution of social interaction and adult guidance to children's learning. In preschool settings, teachers and peers may provide opportunities to practise emotional expression, cooperation, and social problem-solving.

For example, a teacher may guide children through a disagreement by helping them identify their feelings, listen to another child's perspective, and choose a constructive response. Such interactions illustrate how emotional competencies may develop through supported participation.

**Social-Emotional Learning**

Social-emotional learning provides a practical educational framework for developing emotional awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. Research on preschool interventions indicates that structured program can support these competencies (Blewitt et al., 2018; Wong & Power, 2024).

Together, these perspectives suggest that children's emotional development reflects both emerging individual abilities and experiences within family and educational environments. The proposed framework therefore examines classroom practices as potential correlates of emotional intelligence while acknowledging other developmental influences.

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## Research Methodology

### Research Design

The study was designed as a quantitative, cross-sectional investigation involving structured behavioral observations and teacher reports. This design describes children's emotional competencies at a particular point in time and examine relationships between assessment scores and classroom experiences.

### Population and Sample

The target population consisted of preschool children aged three to four years enrolled in schools in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. The proposed sample included 100 children from four schools, with 25 participants per school.

**Table 1 Distribution of Participants by School and Gender Group**

| School | Gender group | Age range | Participants | Percentage of total sample |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School A | Boys | 3–4 years | 25 | 25% |
| School B | Boys | 3–4 years | 25 | 25% |
| School C | Girls | 3–4 years | 25 | 25% |
| School D | Girls | 3–4 years | 25 | 25% |
| **Total** | **Two boys' and two girls' groups** | **3–4 years** | **100** | **100%** |

Purposive sampling was used to select participating children from schools in Lahore.

### Inclusion Criteria

Participants should:

1. Be aged three or four years at the time of assessment.
2. Be enrolled in one of the participating preschools.
3. Have written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
4. Be able to participate in developmentally appropriate activities with reasonable support.

Children were not excluded merely because they communicated nonverbally or required additional time to respond. Assessment procedures accommodated different communication styles and developmental needs.

### Research Instruments

Data was collected through a structured observation checklist and a teacher-report form. These methods are appropriate for young children because they may have limited capacity to understand abstract questionnaire items.

The proposed observation checklist examined four dimensions:

- **Emotional awareness:** Recognizing basic emotions, identifying feelings in stories, and communicating emotional needs.
- **Emotional regulation:** Responding to frustration, accepting guidance, recovering after disappointment, and returning to an activity.
- **Empathy:** Noticing distress, expressing concern, offering help, and responding to another child's emotional cues.
- **Social interaction:** Sharing materials, taking turns, cooperating during play, and responding constructively to disagreements.

Each behavior may be rated using a four-point scale.

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| Score | Behavioral description |
|---|---|
| 1 | Rarely observed |
| 2 | Observed occasionally, with substantial support |
| 3 | Observed frequently, with some support |
| 4 | Observed consistently in the assessed situations |

**Data Collection Procedure**

After obtaining school permission, parental consent, and relevant ethical approval, trained observers assessed children during ordinary classroom activities. These included storytelling, free play, cooperative games, transitions between activities, and teacher-guided emotional discussions.

Where feasible, each child was observed on more than one occasion. Repeated observations reduced the risk of interpreting an isolated behaviour as a stable characteristic.

Teachers provided information about classroom routines, play-based activities, and previous preschool attendance. Participant records used anonymous codes rather than children's names. Missing observations, refusals, and deviations from the planned procedure were documented.

**Validity and Reliability**

Content validity was examined through expert review by specialists in early childhood education, educational psychology, and child development. Pilot testing identified unclear items and impractical assessment procedures.

Inter-rater reliability was assessed by having two trained observers independently rate a subset of observations. An inter-class correlation coefficient or another appropriate agreement statistic was calculated according to the scale's measurement properties.

The instrument was also checked for age appropriateness and cultural relevance. Quiet behavior, limited eye contact, or reluctance to speak was not automatically interpreted as low emotional intelligence.

**Data Analysis, Ethical Considerations, and Results**

**Data Analysis**

The study examined emotional intelligence among 100 preschool children aged three to four years attending four schools in Lahore, Pakistan. The analysis focused on four dimensions of emotional intelligence: emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction. Educational experiences, gender, age, and previous preschool attendance were also considered in interpreting children's emotional competencies.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics and emotional competency scores. Pearson's correlation was used to examine relationships between educational experiences and emotional competencies, with Spearman's rank correlation appropriate for ordinal data or when the assumptions of Pearson's correlation were not satisfied. Gender-group comparisons were examined using suitable independent-group statistical tests. Effect sizes and confidence intervals were considered alongside significance levels to provide a more complete interpretation of the findings.

Children were drawn from four schools, meaning that observations within the same school might share contextual characteristics. Given the limited number of schools, school-level effects could not be estimated reliably through a complex multilevel model. The findings were therefore interpreted in relation to the participating children and schools rather than generalised to all preschool children in Lahore.

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**Ethical Considerations**

The study involved preschool children and therefore required particular attention to informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and protection from distress. Parental or legal guardian consent was required before data collection, and children's willingness to participate was respected throughout the assessment process. Children were free to discontinue an activity without penalty. Observations were conducted in a supportive environment, avoiding labels that portrayed children as emotionally deficient or encouraged public comparisons between participants. Personal information was protected through anonymised records and secure data storage. Institutional ethical approval was obtained before data collection, as documented by the relevant approving institution.

**Results and Statistical Analysis**

**Demographic Characteristics**

**Table 2 Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 100)**

| Characteristic | Category | Frequency (*n*) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Boys | 50 | 50.0 |
| Gender | Girls | 50 | 50.0 |
| Age | 3 years | 48 | 48.0 |
| Age | 4 years | 52 | 52.0 |
| Previous preschool experience | Yes | 62 | 62.0 |
| Previous preschool experience | No | 38 | 38.0 |
| **Total participants** | | **100** | **100.0** |

The sample comprised 50 boys (50%) and 50 girls (50%). Of the participants, 48 children (48%) were three years old and 52 (52%) were four years old. Previous preschool experience was reported for 62 children (62%), while 38 children (38%) had no previous preschool experience.

These characteristics provide a descriptive overview of the participating children. Previous preschool experience is particularly relevant because familiarity with classroom routines, group activities, and peer interactions may be associated with children's observed emotional competencies. However, the demographic distribution alone does not establish that previous attendance influences emotional development.

**Emotional Intelligence Dimensions**

**Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Intelligence Dimensions**

| Emotional intelligence dimension | Mean (*M*) | Standard deviation (*SD*) |
|---|---|---|
| Emotional awareness | 3.10 | 0.58 |
| Emotional regulation | 2.75 | 0.65 |
| Empathy | 3.05 | 0.61 |
| Social interaction | 3.20 | 0.55 |

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**Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence Dimensions**

The descriptive analysis examined four dimensions of emotional intelligence among preschool children aged three to four years in Lahore: emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction. The dimensions were assessed using a four-point observation scale, with higher scores indicating more frequently observed competencies.

Social interaction recorded the highest mean score ($M$ = 3.20, $SD$ = 0.55), followed by emotional awareness ($M$ = 3.10, $SD$ = 0.58) and empathy ($M$ = 3.05, $SD$ = 0.61). Emotional regulation recorded the lowest mean score ($M$ = 2.75, $SD$ = 0.65). The descriptive results indicate that social interaction was the most highly rated dimension, whereas emotional regulation received comparatively lower ratings.

The comparatively high mean for social interaction reflects stronger ratings of children's observable engagement with peers, including sharing, turn-taking, cooperation, and interpersonal communication. In contrast, the lower mean for emotional regulation indicates comparatively lower ratings of children's ability to manage frustration, respond to disappointment, and regulate emotional reactions in challenging situations.

The standard deviations further illustrate variation in children's observed competencies. Emotional regulation demonstrated the greatest variability ($SD$ = 0.65), followed by empathy ($SD$ = 0.61), emotional awareness ($SD$ = 0.58), and social interaction ($SD$ = 0.55). These findings indicate that emotional regulation scores were more dispersed around their mean than scores for the other dimensions, while social interaction scores showed comparatively less dispersion.

Overall, the descriptive findings identify social interaction as the highest-rated emotional intelligence dimension and emotional regulation as the lowest-rated dimension within the reported results. This pattern highlights the importance of examining emotional regulation alongside interpersonal competencies in early childhood education. Activities involving emotional identification, guided problem-solving, cooperative play, and discussion of feelings may offer opportunities for children to practise these skills. However, the descriptive statistics alone do not establish the effectiveness of particular educational activities or explain the factors underlying differences in children's scores.

**Relationships between Educational Experiences and Emotional Intelligence**

**Table 4 Correlations between Educational Experiences and Emotional Competencies**

| Variable relationship | Correlation coefficient ($r$) | $p$ value | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Play-based learning and emotional intelligence | .42 | .001 | Positive association |
| Teacher–child interaction and emotional intelligence | .38 | .001 | Positive association |
| Storytelling and emotional awareness | .31 | .002 | Positive association |
| Cooperative play and social interaction | .46 | .001 | Positive association |

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**Correlation Analysis of Educational Experiences and Emotional Competencies**

The correlation analysis examined the relationships between educational experiences and emotional competencies among preschool children aged three to four years in Lahore. The results indicated positive associations between all four pairs of variables examined. Cooperative play demonstrated the strongest reported association with social interaction ($r$ = .46, $p$ = .001), followed by play-based learning and emotional intelligence ($r$ = .42, $p$ = .001). Teacher–child interaction was also positively associated with emotional intelligence ($r$ = .38, $p$ = .001), while storytelling demonstrated a positive association with emotional awareness ($r$ = .31, $p$ = .002).

The association between cooperative play and social interaction suggests that children who participate more frequently in shared activities may also demonstrate higher levels of peer interaction. Cooperative activities provide opportunities to practise turn-taking, negotiation, communication, sharing, and collaborative problem-solving. These experiences may be relevant to the development and expression of interpersonal competencies in early childhood settings.

The positive association between play-based learning and emotional intelligence highlights the relevance of interactive learning environments in which children can express feelings, respond to peers, and participate in shared tasks. Similarly, the relationship between teacher–child interaction and emotional intelligence underscores the potential importance of supportive classroom relationships. Responsive communication, emotional encouragement, and appropriate teacher guidance may provide opportunities for children to recognize and express emotions in socially appropriate ways.

Storytelling was positively associated with emotional awareness. Stories can expose children to different emotional situations and encourage them to identify feelings, interpret characters' experiences, and consider alternative emotional responses. The reported relationship therefore highlights storytelling as a potentially valuable component of social-emotional learning in preschool classrooms.

Among the four reported relationships, cooperative play and social interaction demonstrated the largest correlation coefficient, whereas storytelling and emotional awareness demonstrated the smallest. All four reported associations were positive, suggesting that higher levels of the identified educational experiences were associated with higher scores on the corresponding emotional competency measures. However, these findings do not establish that the educational experiences caused improvements in emotional intelligence. Children's existing competencies, classroom characteristics, teacher practices, and other contextual factors may contribute to the observed relationships.

Overall, the correlation results highlight the relevance of play-based learning, cooperative activities, supportive teacher–child interactions, and storytelling when examining emotional competencies in early childhood education. Further research using verified participant-level data and longitudinal or intervention-based designs would help clarify the direction, stability, and potential educational significance of these relationships.

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**Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence**

**Table 5 Comparison of Emotional Intelligence Scores by Gender**

| Dimension | Boys, *M* (*SD*) | Girls, *M* (*SD*) | Mean difference (boys − girls) | *p* value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional awareness | 3.05 (0.59) | 3.15 (0.57) | −0.10 | .39 |
| Emotional regulation | 2.70 (0.66) | 2.80 (0.64) | −0.10 | .44 |
| Empathy | 3.00 (0.62) | 3.10 (0.60) | −0.10 | .42 |
| Social interaction | 3.15 (0.56) | 3.25 (0.54) | −0.10 | .36 |

**Gender Differences in Emotional Competencies**

The comparison of gender-based mean scores indicated that girls obtained slightly higher scores than boys across all four emotional competency dimensions. The mean difference was 0.10 points in favor of girls for emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction. The reported *p* values ranged from .36 to .44, exceeding the conventional significance threshold of .05. Accordingly, the reported comparisons did not identify statistically significant gender differences in any of the four dimensions.

Although girls demonstrated marginally higher mean scores, the observed differences were small in magnitude. These findings suggest that, within the reported sample, emotional competencies were broadly comparable between boys and girls. Nevertheless, the absence of statistically significant differences should not be interpreted as evidence that the two groups possess identical emotional competencies. Further investigation using verified participant-level data and appropriate effect-size estimates would provide a more comprehensive assessment of the magnitude and practical significance of the observed differences.

School-level and classroom factors are also relevant when interpreting these findings. Teacher–child relationships, classroom practices, peer interactions, and opportunities for cooperative learning may contribute to variations in children's emotional competencies. Since the reported comparisons do not establish the independent effects of these contextual factors, gender-related patterns should be interpreted within the broader educational environment.

**Overall Interpretation of Findings**

The reported results provide a descriptive account of emotional intelligence among preschool children aged three to four years in Lahore. Among the four assessed dimensions, social interaction recorded the highest mean score ($M$ = 3.20, $SD$ = 0.55), followed by emotional awareness ($M$ = 3.10, $SD$ = 0.58) and empathy ($M$ = 3.05, $SD$ = 0.61). Emotional regulation recorded the lowest mean score ($M$ = 2.75, $SD$ = 0.65). This pattern indicates that emotional regulation represented the comparatively weaker dimension within the reported results, whereas social interaction received the highest average rating.

The reported correlation analysis also indicated positive associations between educational experiences and emotional competencies. Play-based learning was positively associated with overall emotional intelligence ($r$ = .42, $p$ = .001), while teacher–child interaction demonstrated a positive relationship with emotional intelligence ($r$ = .38, $p$ = .001). Storytelling was positively associated with emotional awareness ($r$ = .31, $p$ = .002), and cooperative play demonstrated the strongest reported association among these relationships, specifically with social interaction ($r$ = .46, $p$ = .001). These associations are consistent

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
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with the educational relevance of interactive and collaborative preschool activities, although they do not establish causal relationships.

Taken together, the reported findings highlight emotional regulation, cooperative play, storytelling, and supportive teacher–child interaction as relevant areas for consideration in early childhood education. Classroom activities that encourage children to identify and express emotions, share resources, resolve disagreements, cooperate with peers, and discuss characters' feelings may provide opportunities to practise social-emotional skills. These educational implications should be distinguished from claims of effectiveness, which would require evidence from an appropriate intervention or longitudinal design.

The findings must also be interpreted in relation to the study's scope and methodological limitations. The participation of children from a limited number of schools restricts the extent to which school-level variation can be examined and limits generalization to the wider preschool population in Lahore. In addition, the reported associations do not establish temporal order or causality. Future research could incorporate larger and more diverse samples, validated age-appropriate assessment instruments, and multilevel or longitudinal analyses to examine the contributions of classroom practices and school environments to children's emotional development.

**Discussion**

The present study examines emotional intelligence among preschool children aged three to four years in Lahore, focusing on emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction. It also considers the relationships between educational experiences and emotional competencies, alongside potential differences by gender. The reported results provide a basis for discussing the role of preschool environments in children's social and emotional development, although the numerical findings require verification against the original participant records.

The descriptive results indicate that social interaction had the highest reported mean score ($M$ = 3.20, $SD$ = 0.55), followed by emotional awareness ($M$ = 3.10, $SD$ = 0.58) and empathy ($M$ = 3.05, $SD$ = 0.61). Emotional regulation had the lowest reported mean ($M$ = 2.75, $SD$ = 0.65). If confirmed by the original data, this pattern would suggest that the participating children received relatively higher ratings for observable social behaviors than for managing emotional responses. However, the differences must be interpreted in relation to the assessment instrument, the classroom situations observed, and the developmental characteristics of three- and four-year-old children.

Emotional regulation is particularly important during early childhood because children are still learning to manage frustration, express disappointment, and respond appropriately to challenging situations. A child may recognize an emotion without being able to regulate the associated behavior independently. Teachers can support this developmental process by modelling calm responses, helping children name their feelings, and providing opportunities to practise problem-solving. Nevertheless, the reported mean scores alone do not establish that emotional regulation is a developmental weakness among the participating children.

The reported correlation results also suggest positive associations between educational experiences and emotional competencies. Cooperative play had the strongest reported association with social interaction ($r$ = .46, $p$ = .001), followed by play-based learning and emotional intelligence ($r$ = .42, $p$ = .001). Teacher–child interaction was positively associated with emotional intelligence ($r$ = .38, $p$ = .001), while storytelling was associated with emotional awareness ($r$ = .31, $p$ = .002). These relationships, if verified, would support further investigation of classroom experiences as

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potential contexts for practising emotional and social skills.

Cooperative play can provide opportunities for sharing, turn-taking, negotiation, and communication. During these activities, children encounter situations requiring them to consider others' needs and respond to different viewpoints. Storytelling and role-play can similarly encourage children to identify emotions, discuss characters' experiences, and explore alternative responses to conflict. Armesto Arias et al. (2025) examined drama-based activities involving literature and emotional learning, offering relevant context for considering creative classroom approaches to social-emotional development. However, findings from other interventions do not independently verify the relationships reported in the present study.

Teacher–child interaction is another important consideration. Responsive teachers can help children communicate their needs, recognize emotional experiences, and practise appropriate responses to frustration. The reported positive association between teacher–child interaction and emotional intelligence is consistent with investigating supportive teaching practices as part of early childhood emotional development. Chung and Han (2025) also highlighted parental emotional expression and teacher-related factors in their examination of emotional intelligence development. These perspectives suggest that children's emotional competencies are best understood through consideration of both educational and family environments.

The association between storytelling and emotional awareness is also educationally relevant. Stories can introduce children to emotions such as sadness, anger, fear, happiness, and disappointment in situations they can discuss with adults and peers. Teachers can ask children how a character feels, why the character might feel that way, and how the situation could be handled differently. Wong and Power (2024), in their examination of a structured peace-ambassador program, provide further context for investigating explicit emotional learning and constructive responses to conflict. Nevertheless, the present study's correlational design cannot establish that storytelling or other activities directly improve emotional intelligence.

Gender comparisons showed slightly higher reported mean scores for girls across all four dimensions, with a mean difference of 0.10 points in each comparison. The reported *p* values ranged from .36 to .44, indicating no statistically significant differences at the conventional .05 level, assuming the reported tests and values are correct. These findings do not establish that boys and girls possess identical emotional competencies; rather, they indicate that statistically significant differences were not detected in the reported comparisons.

The interpretation of gender differences also requires attention to the distribution of children across schools. Classroom practices, teacher expectations, opportunities for participation, and previous educational experiences may contribute to differences in observed behavior. Future studies involving boys and girls within the same schools and classrooms would provide a stronger basis for examining gender-related patterns independently of institutional context.

Previous preschool experience is another potentially relevant factor because children entering preschool for the first time may have different levels of familiarity with group activities and classroom routines. However, the demographic distribution alone does not establish a relationship between previous attendance and emotional intelligence. Such a conclusion requires a direct comparison of emotional competency scores between children with and without previous preschool experience, together with appropriate statistical analysis.

Overall, the reported findings draw attention to emotional regulation, cooperative play, storytelling, and supportive teacher–child interaction as relevant areas for early childhood research. Their educational implications are promising, but the strength of the conclusions

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depends on the validity of the assessment instrument, the accuracy of the numerical results, and the extent to which the statistical analyses account for the study's observational design and school-based sampling.

## Educational Implications

### Integrating Emotional Learning into Preschool Curricula

Preschool curricula can incorporate activities that help children recognise emotions, express needs, manage frustration, and respond constructively to peers. Emotion cards, picture stories, guided discussions, and daily reflection activities can introduce these skills in developmentally appropriate ways.

### Strengthening Teacher Preparation

Teacher education programmes can include practical training in emotional development, conflict resolution, positive behaviour guidance, and supportive communication. Teachers can model calm responses and help children practise strategies for handling disappointment and disagreements.

### Promoting Guided Play and Storytelling

Cooperative games, puppetry, storytelling, and role-play can provide opportunities to practise turn-taking, empathy, and emotional expression. Teachers can extend these activities through questions that encourage children to identify feelings and consider constructive responses.

### Improving Assessment Practices

Schools can use structured observations across different classroom activities to assess emotional competencies. Assessment procedures should use clearly defined indicators, consistent scoring criteria, and appropriate checks of observer agreement. Children's behaviour should be interpreted in relation to age, temperament, language ability, and the circumstances in which it occurs.

### Encouraging Family–School Partnerships

Parents and teachers can exchange information about children's emotional responses and coping strategies. Consistent, supportive approaches across home and school may provide children with opportunities to practise emotional skills in different settings. Family influences should be considered alongside classroom experiences rather than treated as secondary factors.

### Supporting Inclusive Classrooms

Emotional learning activities should accommodate differences in temperament, language development, and individual learning needs. Quietness, hesitation, or limited verbal expression should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of poor emotional intelligence. Supportive assessment focuses on individual development and opportunities for growth rather than labels or comparisons.

## Limitations of the Study

Several limitations affect the interpretation of the findings.

First, the sample of 100 children from four schools provides a limited basis for generalisation to all preschool children in Lahore or Pakistan. The representativeness of the sample depends on the sampling procedure and the characteristics of the participating institutions.

Second, the cross-sectional observational design identifies associations at a particular point in time but cannot establish causal relationships. Longitudinal or experimental research would provide stronger evidence about changes in emotional competencies and the effects of specific educational interventions.

Third, the validity and reliability of the observation instrument are central to interpreting the competency scores. A four-point rating scale requires clearly defined indicators, appropriate pilot testing, and evidence of inter-rater reliability. Without these checks, differences in scores may partly reflect differences in observers' judgements.

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Fourth, children are clustered within four schools. School environments may influence both educational experiences and emotional competency ratings. With only four schools, reliable estimation of school-level effects through complex multilevel modelling is difficult.

Fifth, gender comparisons may be affected by school composition, classroom practices, and other contextual differences. Equal numbers of boys and girls do not, by themselves, eliminate these potential sources of bias.

Finally, emotional competencies may be associated with family emotional expression, temperament, language development, and previous preschool attendance. Where these factors have not been measured or statistically examined, their contribution to the observed patterns remains uncertain. Comparisons with earlier studies must also account for differences in assessment instruments, participants, and intervention designs.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies can recruit larger samples from diverse public and private preschools to improve geographical and institutional coverage. Recruiting children of different genders from the same schools and classrooms would strengthen comparisons of gender-related patterns.

Longitudinal research can examine changes in emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and social interaction as children progress through preschool. Intervention studies can evaluate whether structured storytelling, drama-based activities, cooperative play, or social-emotional learning programmes produce measurable changes in these competencies.

Researchers can also examine previous preschool experience, parental emotional expression, teacher preparation, and classroom climate using clearly defined measures. Culturally appropriate assessment instruments and systematic observer training would strengthen the quality and comparability of the findings.

Mixed-methods research combining structured observations with teacher interviews and parental perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding of emotional development across home and school settings. Future statistical analyses can also report confidence intervals, effect sizes, and sensitivity checks to support more precise interpretation.

**Conclusion**

This study examines emotional intelligence among 100 preschool children aged three to four years attending four schools in Lahore, with particular attention to emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction. The reported descriptive statistics place social interaction highest and emotional regulation lowest among the four dimensions. The reported correlations indicate positive associations between educational experiences and emotional competencies, while the gender comparisons show small mean differences that were not statistically significant according to the supplied $p$ values.

These patterns highlight the relevance of investigating cooperative play, storytelling, and supportive teacher–child interaction in early childhood education. They also draw attention to emotional regulation as an important area for further assessment and classroom support. However, the findings do not establish causal effects, and conclusions about previous preschool experience or other untested factors cannot be drawn from the demographic information alone.

The study's contribution depends on accurate participant records, appropriate statistical analysis, and transparent reporting of its sampling and measurement procedures. Once the reported numerical values are verified against the original dataset, the research can offer context-specific evidence to inform preschool teaching practices and future investigations of children's social and emotional development. Its broader educational significance lies in recognising emotional development as an important

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
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complement to academic readiness and a meaningful part of children's relationships, participation, and well-being.

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