



Empowering Minds: The Role of Social Intelligence in Reducing Anxiety and Building Resilience among Secondary School Students in District Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Noor Ul Ahad Mian¹, Dr. Farooq Nawaz Khan², Dr. Sajjad Hussain³, Akhtar Hussain⁴, Aftab Khan⁵, Uzma Bashir⁶

1. PhD Scholar, Center for Education and Staff Training, University of Swat
Email: miannoorulahad@gmail.com
2. Assistant Professor, Center for Education and Staff Training, University of Swat
Email: farooqlit76@gmail.com
3. Assistant Professor, Center for Education and Staff Training, University of Swat
Email: sajjadhussain@uswat.edu.pk
4. PhD Scholar, Center for Education and Staff Training, University of Swat
Email: akhtarfkk@gmail.com
5. PhD Scholar, Center for Education and Staff Training, University of Swat
Email: aftabhm1980@gmail.com
6. PhD Scholar, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan.
Email: zonabashir001@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper will look at the impact of social intelligence in improving the psychological integrity of the secondary school pupils in District Swat, both in terms of the contribution of such intelligence in the minimization of social anxiety and in the enactment of resiliency. The socio-emotional skills that are essential to adolescents are social intelligence, which is the ability to interpret and regulate social behaviors. Able to cope and achieve excellence within the complicated social interactions of peer relationships, classroom situations, and general societal demands. The purpose of the study is to unravel the understanding of social intelligence in terms of its role in enabling students to take charge of the emotional obstruction they face and deal with pressure of dealing with their education and social lives through a qualitative research design. The evidence indicates the result that achievement of social intelligence competencies among the students ranked high showed better emotional regulation, good communication and the capability in developing supportive peer group networks. All these were directly associated with a decreased social anxiety level and the increased ability to overcome scholastic and personal pressures. Another implication suggested by the study relates to the relevance of the contextual and cultural socializing factors like gender expectation and community values to the formulation and deployment of social intelligence. These factors have a great influence as to how students relate with others and overcome social anxiety in the conservative and collectivist setup of Swat. In response, specifically, female students demonstrated resiliency and adapted to the gender-sensitive educational practices implemented that ensured emotional safety and such resiliency resources as positive peer relationships. As the study points out, social intelligence is both a cognitive characteristic and a social and emotional asset that has the potential to bring about healthy

behaviors to include empathy, perspective-taking, and relationship-building that increases the effective sources of emotional regulation as well as social assimilation. Design of the research points toward the necessity of schools and policymakers to put particular emphasis on the importance of social intelligence as an encompassing aspect of development in students in underserved areas such as Swat. It proposes that one could include social-emotional learning (SEL) in the curriculum and teach the teachers to be empathetic role models and develop peer support programs. Such type of interventions can be used to create an atmosphere whereby learners do not just succeed in their academics, but they also develop socially and emotionally. As we have concluded, social intelligence is a promotive and protective factor of adolescent development and it can potentially reduce anxiety and can make adolescents become more resilient. Future studies and policy would need to be directed to imparting social intelligence to students so that they would have a platform to survive both academically and socially.

Keywords: Social Intelligence, Social Anxiety, Social Emotional Learning

Introduction

Within the current and more sophisticated social environment especially in the education systems, the topic of social intelligence as a major factor in processes of development in adolescents needs to be mentioned with great respect. Social intelligence can be defined as the capability of an individual to comprehend people and how to deal with them and respond to social contact with others and how to respond readily to situations socially (Husain et.al, 2025). In students of secondary schools especially those belonging to the marginalized areas, including District Swat of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, social intelligence may be significant in the psychological well-being. This age range is vulnerable because adolescents in this age group are at a transition phase of forming their identities and are emotionally sensitive therefore susceptible to many psychological problems including social anxiety and lack of resilience (Chen et.al, 2024). Academic pressure and constraint in culture and lack of accessibility in the mental health care system are the common problems that contribute to their emotional problem. Social anxiety is a widespread mental disorder in teenagers and is described as such an individual is subject to a great fear of being evaluated negatively by peers in a social or a performance situation. Social anxiety can be relevant in the academic and emotional development of students in the socio-cultural context of Pakistan where the self-expression and the need to conformity are common (Adam et.al,2025). Literature indicates that highly socially intelligent students are better able to read social contexts, deal with interpersonal conflict and communicate effectively, furthermore, it is observed that this is likely to lead to a down-side of reduced anxiety and social discomfort (Ayık et.al 2025). This self-control is not only negatively relative towards better relationships with peers but also to better performance in the school set-ups that involve many interactions and group like activities. Meanwhile, resilience, the ability to overcome negative and adjust to the adversary circumstances has been an essential character feature to youth particularly those who lived in resource-strapped or conflict-torn societies. The most pressing need to develop resilience among adolescents in District Swat, where the after-effects of conflicts, poverty, and under-resourced education systems continue to affect the daily activities of students, has never been so prominent (Saba et.al,2021). It is estimated that social intelligence can help students become more resilient, since it helps them to find assistance when they require it, to support positive relationships, and to be calm in situations of stress (Lau, J. (2016). The combination of these skills helps them to better withstand academic demands and socio-emotional issues, which leads to the establishment of psychological resilience. Although there has been an increased interest on these separate constructions over the past couple of years there has been a significant gap in the research about the role of social intelligence and its specific role as social anxiety and resilience among youth in a rural and culturally permissive

society such as Swat. Most of the current literature is numerical and set in the western backdrop, not depicting the complex lived experience of students in this region of the globe. Very few empirical studies exist that describe the use and application of social intelligence as a psychological and social resource among students in Swat in their daily lives (Ali, G., & Hussain, E.2020). In addition to that, these students cannot be heard in national education and mental health discourses and the interventions that are designed often lack cultural specificity or do not match the needs of students (Pirzada et.al,2024) That is why it is necessary to explore the narratives and perceptions of students themselves; to fill this gap and locate interventions closer to the needs of the students.

It is the purpose of the current study to examine how the application of social intelligence could help lessen the presence of social anxiety and also increase a sense of resiliency among secondary school students in District Swat. This study is not merely topical but terribly essential. The implications of the functioning of social intelligence in this narrow cultural and socio-economic context can help educators, school counselors, as well as policymakers doing their best to enhance the well-being of students. Besides, the given study has the potential to inform the creation of school-based interventions, character education programs, and teacher training programmes based on local realities of Swat youth (Rafiq et.al,2024). This investigation, which provides visibility to the life experiences of the students through a qualitative approach, will advance academic and practical literature to bring psychological needs of the disenfranchised youth into the perspective with the awareness of context. It also emphasizes the need to empower teenagers with emotional and inter-personal skills to cope with an ever complex world, first in the classroom and followed by their wider social context (Akbar et.al,2023). Although the concepts of social intelligence, social anxiety, and resilience have been gaining great awareness, there is little research which links the three constructs to each other in the Pakistani setting, especially in the rural or conflict-ridden environments such as Swat (Bhatti, H. A. 2015). The contemporary scholarship lacks the sensitivity and specificity of context in the socio-cultural aspects and lived experience at adolescence stage in underfunded parts of the world that quantitative studies operating under the pretexts of the Western educational universities promote. In addition, very little research has tried to capture the way social intelligence is perceived by students how they employ it in their everyday life and its influence on their ability to overcome anxiety as well as stress). In the absence of such contextual-specific interventions, the current supply of interventions will not be well tailored to the psychological and emotional needs of students in this region. This is a knowledge gap that demonstrates the critical need of qualitative research that will allow the collection of thick rich personal narrative as well as realities in context.

Consequently, this research aims at qualitatively examining how social intelligence can contribute to cutting down social anxiety and leading to resilience among secondary school students of District Swat. HUSSAIN, A. 2024). The research seeks to establish how social intelligence develops, how it is perceived, and how it is practised in real life and the effects of social intelligence to the psychological adaptation of the students in schools and the community. It is really a timely and necessary investigation. It has the potential to educate contextually relevant learning methods, psychological health procedures, and policy choices that support the needs of the students in disadvantaged areas In addition, this research can aid educators, school counselors, and parents to understand the necessity of fostering social knowledge by boosting their curriculum, instruction of life skills, and emotional literacy activities. Finally, social intelligence also has the capability to empower young learners in Swat against their social fears and become resilient and psychologically robust and socially competent individuals.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Social Intelligence in Educational Contexts

The acquisition of social intelligence has become an underlying pattern of the psychological and interpersonal skill with far-reaching consequences as adolescents proceed through the intricacies of contemporary schooling systems. Social intelligence is a set of skills defined by three components, namely social awareness, social cognition, and social facility to explain the term social intelligence, one must comprehend its elements (Ellis et.al, 2020). The value of such competency especially comes across in school environments where students are expected to work in groups, exercise their negotiation skills and other aspects of interacting as peers that ultimately determine how they perform in their academic and social lives. Social intelligence has come to be identified more and more as an instigator of academic achievement, as well as of social-emotional performance (KoÃ, A. 2022). In low-resource and collectivist cultures, such as the one in Pakistan, social leveling of what the students undergo is intertwined with cultural norms, regard to authority, and social worth of the people. This implies that the students who portray high social intelligence tend to more competent in terms of maintaining harmony, interpreting non-verbal communication, and being in accordance with the socially expected behaviors but not internalizing stress (Gul, et.al, 2025). Social intelligence is also associated with self-regulation and empathy aspects which enable the students to develop peer relationship founded on mutual understanding as opposed to dominance or avoidance. Adolescents who had greater social intelligence state that they have easier conflict resolving capabilities and more possibilities to participate in pro-social Higher social intelligence adolescents are more inclined to help, share their resources and be involved in cooperative learning. Social intelligence should be nurtured even more in an educational setting impacted by poverty or post-conflict trauma settings such as in Swat. A history of violence and instability experienced in the region has developed a canvas of a generation of learners who are either emotionally closed or socially withdrawn. Still, social intelligence provides an avenue to reintegrating the students with their communities and restoring a sense of credulity and reliance (Sanaullah. 2024). The importance of learning to read social signals and calibrating a response to that signal in secondary schools where relationship with peers becomes one of the central aspects of identity formation is that reading social signals enables students not only to prevent conflict but also allows them to build a secure base against which they may explore academic and personal development.

A recent study by (Ashraf et.al, 2023) demonstrated the importance of school-based interventions to improve social and emotional learning (SEL) in which the elements of social intelligence, such as emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal effectiveness, would be taught directly. These interventions showed a great improvement with regards to classroom climate, minimized bullying, and enhanced self-esteem of the students. Absence of formal psychological support in the bulk of the public schools in the province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa means that development of social intelligence through interactive encounters and demonstration by teacher can be an inexpensive, high output intervention, which promotes socio-emotional growth and development of the students.

Relationship between Social Intelligence and Social Anxiety

The increasing rate of social anxiety among young people and adolescents in particular has made researchers specializing in this field seek protective factors that prevent the impact of social anxiety. Social anxiety is that condition, which is generally perceived by the fear of criticism, evasion of social settings, and a weak belief in social communication (Mahmood, et.al,2023). Although genetic and environmental factors play a major role, other recent literature points towards moderating effect of social intelligence in the same context. High social intelligent

students have fewer chances to recognize neutral social cues as hostile and are better accustomed to stressful interpersonal scenarios; they do not consider social interaction as a threat but rather as a chance to connect, which decreases the level of anxiety that people feel during interaction significantly. Emotional awareness and control are also one of the key processes of social intelligence neutralizing social anxiety. These students will be more responsive in adapting to stressful social situations (Nasir et.al, 2025) with higher emotional clarity and the ability to read the emotions of others brought about by emotional clarity and ability to read the emotions of others will likely help to insure these students against the self-conscious extrapolation that is characteristic of social anxiety during social interactions. Such persons can easily make eye contact, begin speaking, and overcome social fumbles behaviors that lead to the construction of confidence and elimination of fear as one progresses in time. Anxiety is a normal occurrence and in Pakistani secondary schools; it is increased by the features of competitiveness, public assessment and rigid discipline present in it. Under these conditions, students who are lacking social intelligence might develop conquest of shame or fear thus manifesting the absence characteristics like missing school or speaking during a classroom discussion. On the contrary, the highly socially intelligent ones tend to seek assistance of teachers, upcoming group activities and have no fear in expressing their needs (Ijaz et.al, 2024). When we do these sorts of behaviors, it supports social efficacy that has been found to be negatively associated with social anxiety symptoms. In addition a qualitative study done in a rural area in Punjab with students found out that adolescents who had habit of attending activities in that community or religious groups, as they involved social interaction and perspective taking those had nearly 50 per cent less symptoms of social anxiety. These are informal but highly efficient activities of developing social intelligence. Notably, according to the findings, there is a justification to incorporate culturally respectful community-based engagements in school programs as a way to enhance social confidence and minimize isolation.

It is also important to look at the gendered nature of social anxiety at the local level. The literature indicates that teenager girls in conservative societies tend to experience a significant increase in social anxiety, as it is caused by the limited freedom to go out, gendered perception, and fear of judgment (Sterian, M. 2024). But as girls get safe places to express themselves and acquire interpersonal skills as in a workshop of girls only or peer mentoring programs their social intelligence improves and the level of anxiety decreases. This reveals the inherent urgent need to apply gender-sensitive innovations whether as a preventive and/or corrective measure in the use of social intelligence.

Fostering Resilience through Social intelligence in Marginalized School Settings

Resilience is a concept of psychology which has become of great importance in the psychology of adolescence development, particularly those places that are characterized by instability, deprivation or trauma. In educational psychological terms, resilience can be explained as a positive adaptation to stress and a recovery quickly after falling ill, losing, or being snubbed. Social intelligence has been found in recent literature to be a crucial precursor and mediator in the resilience (Cahill et.al, 2024) of an adolescent particularly those raised in marginalized school environments such as rural Pakistan. This relation has been based on the fact that social intelligence empowers young people to develop robust support networks, accurately decipher social interactions as well as to react to difficult inter-personal situations in a productive manner. At least in one school, District Swat where students have experienced years of social rupture caused by political discord, poverty, and little availability of psychosocial support, it is important not only that resilience is developed but is essential. The schools in such areas are usually ill equipped with regard to dedicated counselors or psychological intervention strategies. As a result, social

intelligence is a form of buffer of the hardship which is learnt naturally. These adolescents are more inclined to calling upon peer resources, expression of needs, and relationship with mentors, all of which are resilience resources in the development of resilience, and also such students tend to be less prone to the maladaptive coping styles robbery, withdrawal, or substance use.

A qualitative study among low-income school kids in southern Punjab revealed that students who were trained to use interpersonal communication styles and empathy not only became more resilient but also more a part of something and very optimistic. These results illustrate the importance of education of soft skills even in their informal form in improving the capacity of adolescents to cope with challenges in life. When there is no built mental health infrastructure, relational intelligence offers the easiest and longest possible means of emotional protection. The practice of relationships with peers is central to the process of building resilience as well. The high social intelligence child is regarded as trustworthy and will be followed, and usually, the students end up assuming the role of leadership or fellow students turn out to be his or her mentors. Those roles not only enhance their self-worth and emotional regulation but also enhance the resilience of the peers. The peer-mediated emotional support, as confess, is the most powerful informal protective system within the schools in which the institutions of mental health support lack. In such a manner, social intelligence will be able to produce a ripple-down effect that will increase resilience levels of an entire student body. Culturally, there are also ways of balance in the connection between resilience and social intelligence. Youngsters in conservative societies are usually socialized in such a way that it affects the levels of their coping. The example can be given of gender norms that do not allow girls to openly demonstrate distress and turn to help. Nonetheless, on the condition that the girls are armed with interpersonal skills, namely, using assertive communication and reading emotions, the likelihood of making it through hostile settings is high. (Mendieta, C. A. B. 2024). One can utilize a safe place in schools to facilitate social intelligence and, in turn, resilience, i.e., girls-only discussion group or student-created club meetings. One should also mention the role of teachers in the development of social intelligence as well as resilience. At schools where we foster student independence, empathy in learning, and collaborative interactions, the students tend to learn relational values which foster resilience. In a case study of public schools in Swabi District, it was revealed that when the teachers were mentoring their learners on empathy, active listening, and problem-solving, the learners grew biased-free emotional endurance and interpersonal assurance. These attributes had direct impact on how the students dealt with failure, bullying or family related stress in academics. Building social intelligence in the school environment does not only work towards resilience of individuals but that of the school environment as a whole. With seesawing, when students can see, hear, and feel empowered in their social and emotional needs, it is more likely that they will interact positively with their education and future aspirations (Khan, I. 2024). In the marginalized areas such as Swat, where education and its outcomes are strongly associated with community reconstruction and youth empowerment, it becomes a potent and culturally appropriate measure of treating psychosocial development. Finally, resiliency is not necessarily a consequence of personal determination but it is a social process, especially in communities such as District Swat. When formal resources to afford professional treatment are unavailable, adolescents with high social intelligence have a better chance of learning how to work the system of relationships, read difficult social signs and use informal support networks. All these characteristics provide them with a resilience protective armor against any stressor including the pressure of academics, family conflict or social alienation. Since, the system in the deprived regions of the country is fragile and schools in the said regions desire to produce psychologically stronger students, encompassing social intelligence training both in curricula and as extra-curricular activities is a cost-effective, long term as well as culturally flexible policy. In unstable educational settings, particularly, those

with socio-political dislocation, socially smart students not only become more resilient but eventually turn into guardians of stability and empathy to the locals. Indeed, the new evidence supporting the integration of emotional and social skills training pedagogy in secondary schools as Social intelligence is not just a boon to individual students, but also develops resilience capacity of whole learning environments, tending to the future communities and peace prospects in post-war areas such as Swat (Shah et.al,2020), schools also make a positive contribution to the health of individuals as well as to eventual societal integrity and peace in conflict-afflicted zones and truths such as Swat (Shah et.al,2020).

Methodology

The research study was a qualitative research design, aiming to discuss the possibilities of social intelligence in eliminating social anxiety and fostering resilience among the students of secondary schools in District Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Qualitative inquiry was chosen to develop deeper contextual insights about what students lived, perceived, and dealt with in the socio-cultural context. Since there is little literature on the psychological experiences of adolescents in this region, particularly written based on their own accounts, the qualitative method was the most suitable in appropriating the subtle social and emotional potentialities of their school experiences. Students in government and private secondary schools of Swat District were sampled to constitute the population in the study; both male and female students were included. Participants were chosen according to a purposeful sampling framework in which a teacher or school counselor referred to their students based on characteristics that would reflect on their high or low social intelligence, visible signs of social anxiety, or a high level of resilience. They were 18 participants taken; 9 boys and 9 girls aged between 13-17 years. The number of sampled schools included three schools located in different geographical and socio-economically diverse regions of the district: a rural, semi-urban and a urban school, so that diverse schools were represented and that the pattern of student experience would be diverse. The information was gathered using semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were in-depth since they gave students the space to openly talk about their ideas, emotions and social interactions having some level of control. An interview protocol was elaborated to address three major domain areas: (1) how social intelligence is understood and applied to interact with others in the everyday life; (2) how they experience feelings of social anxiety, and how they deal with fear or uneasiness in social situations; and (3) how they deal with challenges or react to failures, especially at school. Interventions consisted of 30 to 45 minutes interview in Urdu or Pashto which is later transcribed and translated to English. A follow-up interview was carried out in certain circumstances to clarify the previous answers and expand beyond them. More than interviews, informal observations in classrooms have been conducted to place the reported behaviour of the participants in a broader context. These observations were carried out with regard to their social participation in classes, interactions with peers, form of communication, and emotional control in classes, during breaks, group work. Triangulation and the enhancement of the richness of data were ensured by field notes.

Thematic analysis was followed by data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 6 steps model of data analysis). Data were read severally after transcription in order to familiarize with the data. The first codes were created following repetitive phrases, ideas or feelings, and sorted into broader themes that corresponded with the research questions. These were: Navigating Peer Pressure via Social Skills, Emotional Avoidance in Public Places and Support-Seeking as a Resilience Strategy. To help in organizing and coding the data in a qualitative way, we applied NVivo software. Informed consent signed by the school authorities, participants, and parents/ guardians was achieved prior to the data collection to allow meeting of ethical standards. It was very clearly explained what the research was about, that it is voluntary, that answers will be kept confidential

and that she can back out any time she wishes. The name of the students was also concealed as all of the scribed transcripts and findings used pseudonyms. During the conducting of the research, the ethics committee of the linked institution also reviewed and approved the research, as stipulated by the country on research ethics. To demonstrate credibility, a number of methods of validation were used. Trust was enhanced with participant validation, participants were used to communicate major or significant themes to a sample of students to ensure the themes were well interpreted. Reliability was provided by specific description of the research methodology such as interview methods, observation practices and the method of analysis. The idea of transferability was also justified with detailed, contextual description of the school settings, social processes and students backgrounds. Confirmability was upheld by ensuring that the findings were based on what participants wrote in their own word and the results were checked through quotes and written observation.

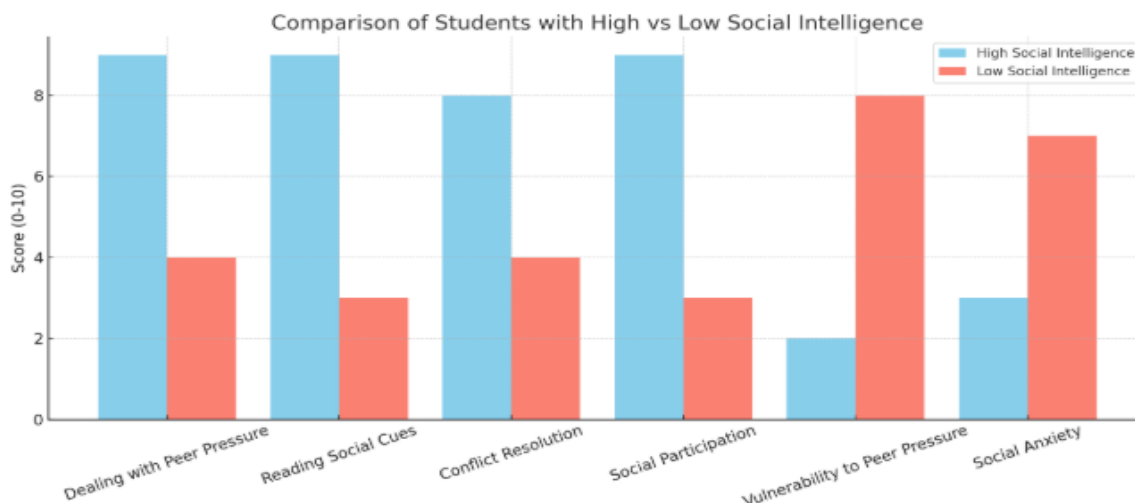
Results

The result of data analysis has expressed some important themes on the importance of social intelligence in mitigating social anxiety and instilling resilience among secondary school students in District Swat. Themes In the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, three themes were identified as forming the core of the thematic analysis: Navigating Peer Pressure via Social Skills, Emotional Avoidance in Public Places, and Support-Seeking as a Resilience Strategy.

Navigating Peer Pressure Via Social Skills

The capacity to avoid the peer power is a vital feature of teenage development and especially in the setting where the force of a group and the peer pressure are quite noteworthy. With regard to District Swat, students who had high social intelligence had well developed social skills which enabled them to deal effectively with peer pressure. Such students were seen to be well versed in social cues and as a result, they are able to evaluate a situation and act on it without getting overly stressed. As an example, students with high social intelligence might be able to read body language or facial expressions of their peers, and then understand how groups work and how to avoid situations, which could cause an anxiety state or conflict. Moreover, these students were very good in solving interpersonal problems through the application of excellent communication skills. Instead of raising the tension, they would have peaceful conversations, they would share their opinions without looking down on the opinions of others. This skill to be open and understanding assisted them in ensuring that they could have harmonious relations with their peers, hence there were fewer chances of having social anxiety. Moreover, their social consciousness permitted them to become involved comfortably in collective games, including those in a classroom (suggestion groups or group projects) when it was necessary to communicate and collaborate with other people and be able to use the negotiation skills. Conversely, students who portrayed lower scores in social intelligence skills were usually observed to have difficulties in relating with peers. Such students were more vulnerable to the misinterpretation of social signals, which gave rise to misunderstandings and even the social conflict. This made them feel alone or left out in group activities which added to their social anxiety. These children had difficulty in expressing themselves in their social life and as such, they have withdrawn or refused social interactions. The negative effects of peer pressure were more evident on these students since they would not have the skills on how to deal with situations in the society especially on how to handle relationships hence its susceptibility to peer pressure thereby making them worry, anxious and even nervous during social interaction. The importance of social intelligence in dealing with peer pressure strengthens the role this concept plays in the social and emotional well being of adolescents. High

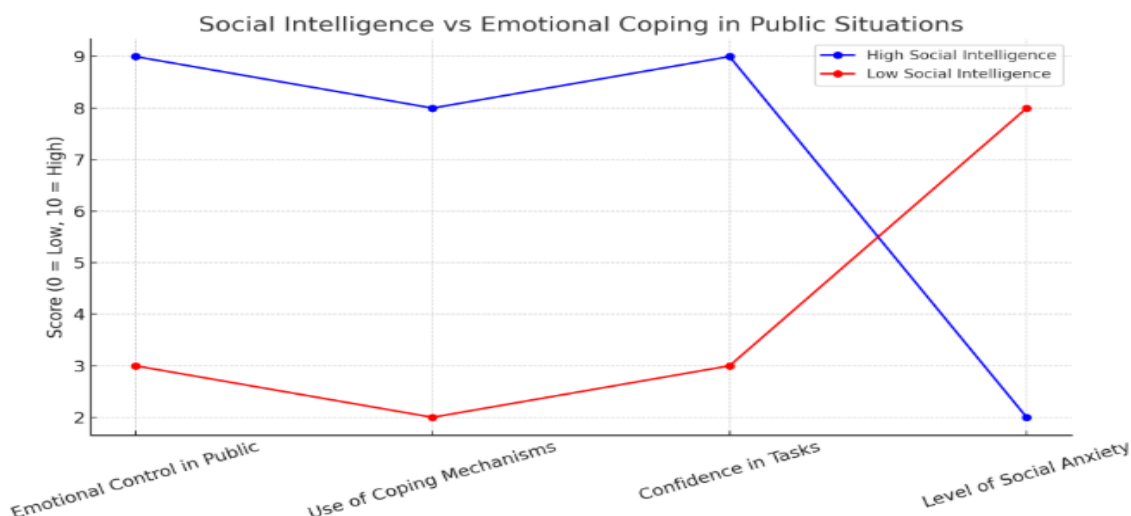
social intelligence students not only learn to deal with the peer pressure, but also develop a healthy social atmosphere which helps them to stay mentally healthy and strong.



Emotional Avoidance in Public Places

The relationship between social intelligence and avoidance of emotions in the public domain was one of the most impressive themes found in the given study. Social anxiety is most often brought about by a setting that makes the pupils feel like they are being watched or judged especially in the classroom setting, school activities, and amongst fellow kids. The high-social-intelligence students transpired exceptional skills to control their emotions in these environments. They portrayed good emotional control when they are under pressure, and this enabled them to no longer give in to anxiety when they are being taken through their activities in school. To illustrate, in case of a difficult social condition, which is communication with the rest of the peers, or verbalizing in the class, or working in a group, these students applied coping mechanisms, like deep breathing, or mental reframing to deal with their anxiety. These learners knew the importance of emotional understanding and the ability to control it. Their acknowledgment of their emotive reactions towards social situations allowed them to select coping mechanisms that are suitable and, as such, their discomfort levels were greatly reduced. In addition, they had expressed confidence in their skills of dealing with both slide presentation, social interactions, and performance tasks which further made them stronger and develop resilience and overcome vulnerability to social anxiety.

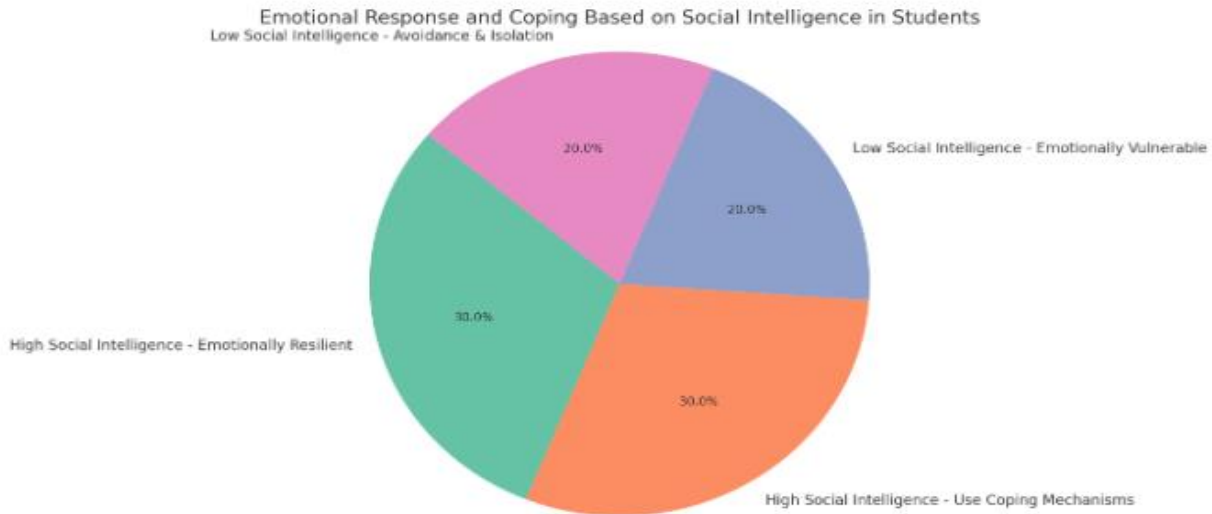
The emotional intelligence allowed them to interact socially without the fear of judgment and failure. Conversely, learners who were less socially intelligent proved to be less able to scene their emotions appropriately at the public. Such students became so anxious whenever they face a social or performance situation. They were also more likely to or tend not to face such a situation thereby social isolation feelings were further enhanced. This affective avoidance was specifically manifested in school or classroom whereby such students would not speak or engage in group discussions as they feared negative perception of either peers or teachers. This tendency strengthened their fear of social situations, which in turn formed a cycle of avoidance that compromised their development in social and academic areas. Psychological well-being of adolescents requires skills of regulating emotions when in public sphere. Socially intelligent students have the ability to face difficult social situations using the skills they have, and this ability consequently allows them to get rid of the social anxiety and significantly participate in the academic and social life.



Support Seeking as a Resilience Strategy

The relationship between social intelligence and avoidance of emotions in the public domain was one of the most impressive themes found in the given study. Social anxiety is most often brought about by a setting that makes the pupils feel like they are being watched or judged especially in the classroom setting, school activities, and amongst fellow kids. The high-social-intelligence students transpired exceptional skills to control their emotions in these environments. They portrayed good emotional control when they are under pressure, and this enabled them to no longer give in to anxiety when they are being taken through their activities in school. To illustrate, in case of a difficult social condition, which is communication with the rest of the peers, or verbalizing in the class, or working in a group, these students applied coping mechanisms, like deep breathing, or mental reframing to deal with their anxiety. These learners knew the importance of emotional understanding and the ability to control it. Their acknowledgment of their emotive reactions towards social situations allowed them to select coping mechanisms that are suitable and, as such, their discomfort levels were greatly reduced. In addition, they had expressed confidence in their skills of dealing with both slide presentation, social interactions, and performance tasks which further made them stronger and develop resilience and overcome vulnerability to social anxiety. The emotional intelligence allowed them to interact socially without the fear of judgment and failure.

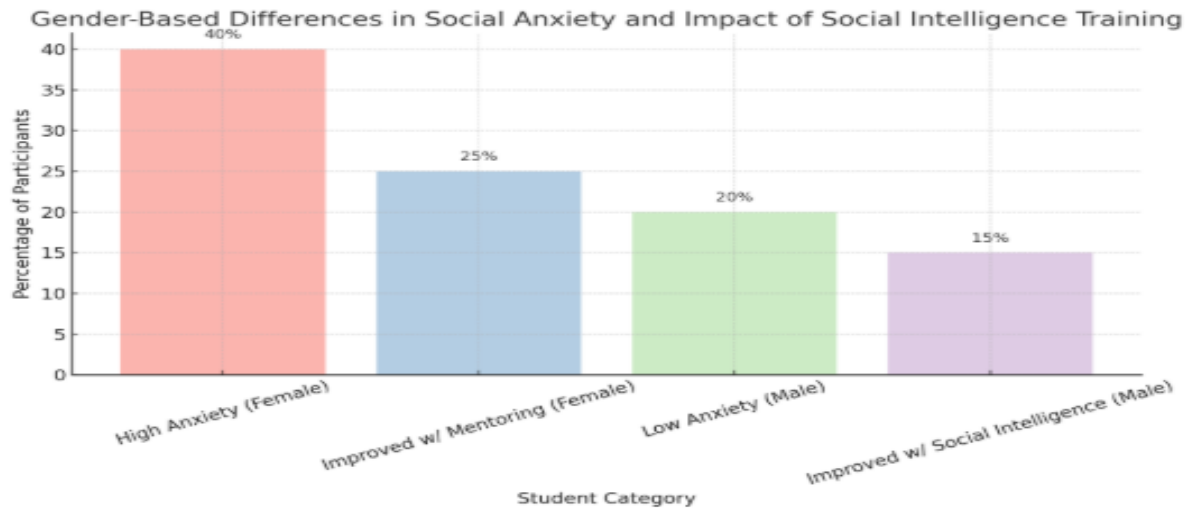
Conversely, learners who were less socially intelligent proved to be less able to scene their emotions appropriately at the public. Such students became so anxious whenever they face a social or performance situation. They were also more likely to or tend not to face such a situation thereby social isolation feelings were further enhanced. This affective avoidance was specifically manifested in school or classroom whereby such students would not speak or engage in group discussions as they feared negative perception of either peers or teachers. This tendency strengthened their fear of social situations, which in turn formed a cycle of avoidance that compromised their development in social and academic areas. Psychological well-being of adolescents requires skills of regulating emotions when in public sphere. Socially intelligent students have the ability to face difficult social situations using the skills they have, and this ability consequently allows them to get rid of the social anxiety and significantly participate in the academic and social life.



Gender Differences

A significant observation achieved after conducting this research is that social anxiety and the use of social intelligence is gender-based. Gender norms are important aspects of defining the experiences of adolescents in their social anxiety in conservative societies such as District Swat. Culturally, the female students especially who are of more conservative backgrounds tend to experience a higher social anxiety level because of the expectations that the culture has on the female students. Such students have more pressure to adjust to the norms of the society in terms of conducting themselves, dressing, and relationships. Consequently, most of the girls in the study expressed their fears about being judged or criticized in the process of being in a park. Nevertheless, the research also discovered that female study participants, who were exposed to female-only works or to a personal mentoring program with an emphasis on social intelligence, also recorded a decrease in their social anxiety.

These activities were an opportunity to join a safe and supportive environment that enables them to express their thoughts freely and learn interpersonal skills. Their social intelligence became better and therefore they became more confident on their capability to cope with social situations and hence their anxiety level reduced greatly. The students of male sex, conversely, were mostly not influenced by gender expectations, and their social anxiety was more rooted in personal attitudes of self-esteem and academic pressure. These students had better chances of interacting socially without experiencing judgment in the same implemented manner that their female counterparts faced against them. Nonetheless, there were a few groups with better social intelligence amongst the students and their discovery was that similar to the female students, they still realized enhanced communication ability that enabled them to grapple better with peer pressure and academic difficulties. These gendered variations in the levels of social anxiety reveal the necessity of the development of the interventions directed at meeting the needs of both male and female students in the environment of the District Swat. Social anxiety is something that can be minimized in both males and females with gender-sensitive methods through safe and supportive social intelligence training.



Discussions

This qualitative study shows that social intelligence is very important and multifaceted in its contribution to assist secondary school students in District Swat to cope with social anxiety and build up resilience. The higher the level of social intelligence, the greater the ability of the student to interpret the social signals, establish trusting relationships with peers, and apply to adults (teachers or family members) to seek the necessary support. It was noted that these students were much more self-confident and more willing to participate in classroom discussion and group work-behavior studies showed opposite side of withdrawal and avoidance that characterizes social anxiety. In addition to this, the study participants have often explained how they have used emotionally intelligent communication and understanding of peers to recover after experiencing the negative consequences of an event, like failure to perform to expected standards in schoolwork, rejection at home or at school, or stress related to either school or family problems that happen rather regularly in under-resourced and post-conflict schooling environments like that of Swat. Based on such findings, it is indicated that on one hand social intelligence prevents the development of anxiety symptoms, but on the other hand, it cultivates vital resilience skills in terms of emotional control, optimism, and social solutions to problems.

The second important finding of the present research is that the social intelligence is culturally-based and local as well. The culture in Swat is collectivist where people are expected to present interpersonal harmony, respect and modesty and as such students resort to social intuition and non-verbal interactions to understand their relationship. Most participants claimed that the awareness of the community demands and being able to follow the norms all the time but not at the expense of individuality enabled them to stay both in balance psychologically and be accepted by others. But there was one more important factor which became gender and girls mostly had more limitations concerning social mobility and self-expression. However, given adequate conditions of support, including girls-only discourses or emotionally engaging teachers, they as well accomplished the improvement in social confidence and resiliency. These two observations highlight the urgency of education plans that are relevant to the context and build social perception as a channel and an enabler to mental health as well as educational interest.

Practical Implications

This study has important practical implications especially to educators, school administrators and mental health professionals within low resourcing or conflict-afflicted educational systems. The results, first of all, cement finding a way to incorporate social intelligence training into the curricular element of secondary school. Students can be provided with life skills programs on emotional self-regulation, good communication, empathy, and perspective-taking, meaning they are better equipped to cope with the social pressure and desire to balance anxiety-causing situations. District Swat and other such schools ought to introduce peer mentoring schemes in which more socially advanced students can assist others who are having problems socializing. Also, professional development in social anxiety should contain the provisions on training teachers how to identify the elements of social anxiety and how to develop the socially supportive classroom conditions that would promote respectful communication, cooperation, and expression of emotions. The other main practical implication is that it is important that gender-sensitive interventions be used. Safe contrasting places like the girls-only membership, the role plays, the peer dialog of confidence, and efficacy to overcome social expression barriers relating to cultural barriers can enhance female students who already experience some form of additional limits to social expression as cultural consensus. The school counselors, in as much as they are present, must also incorporate strategies of culturally relevant counseling which would not aim at dealing with the symptoms of anxiety but concentrate on enhancing the social intelligence. On the policy level, at the national and provincial level, the education department ought to think about the incorporation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework in the national and provincial curriculum with an appropriate adjustment to the socio-cultural realities of such districts as Swat. School and local community-based collaboration, which helps to promote group activities, cultural events and discussion groups, may also assist in building resilience through interpersonal trust and suppression of social isolation among the students.

Limitations and Future Directions

The research is of help to the understanding of the importance of social intelligence in having less social anxiety and enhancing resilience among students in secondary schools of District Swat. Nevertheless, a number of limitations should be admitted. To begin with, the size of the population sampled purposefully in the study is small (18 students) which restricts the generalization of the results to the wider one. In addition, it is possible that future studies might give a better idea of the phenomenon by having a greater selection or even a mixed-methods study. Secondly, the self-reported data which was used in the form of interviews might have been affected by social desirability, as a respondent might fill in his anxiety level higher than the real state to seem a stronger person. The future research could solve this problem through triangulation of teacher-assessment, peer ratings, and behavior observation. Thirdly, the study focused on gender excluding any other social attribute that may contribute towards social intelligence such as disability, religion and even trauma. Intersectional approach would give a more complete picture of the role of different identities in the shaping of development. Having said that the research was in a different cultural and geographical setting that makes it hard to use the findings in urban students or elite based students. An investigation of the impact of school climates and cultural domains on social intelligence may be brought to the foreground through a comparative study among various regions. Finally, the research focused on the students only, and in order to get more rounded picture, future research is recommended to involve opinions of teachers, parents and school administration. Future research is necessary to find out the long-term effect and outcomes of social intelligence programs as well as an investigation of digital social intelligence in post-pandemic society.

Conclusion

Social intelligence and its effect on psychological well-being of secondary school students in Swat District were examined in context of the secondary school students in District Swat, including social anxiety and resilience. The results indicated that social intelligence also constitutes an essential part of socio-emotional competencies in which the students can tap their capabilities to change amicably stored as well as classroom relations, social assumptions. Students who had greater social intelligence were more emotionally controlled, have more skills at communicating, and a more developed group of peers, which leads to reduced rates of social unease and a more robust willingness to overcome academic and personal difficulties. Other factors that make up social intelligence brought out in the study were the role of cultural and contextual issues. Social norms, expectations on gender, and values of the community that live in the conservative and collectivist environment of Swat contributed largely to the way students interacted with others and the way they dealt with emotional issues. Nonetheless, among these limitations, the students showed adaptive behaviour based on empathy, perspective taking, and relationship building among others, which are the main elements of the social intelligence. The female students, who were less free in their social engagements, were found to be strong in circumstances where they were helped in gender-sensitive and emotionally safe approaches. The study calls on our schools and policy makers to embrace the importance of social intelligence as critical in the development of their students in underserved areas. By incorporating social-emotional learning (SEL) in curricula, improvising empathetic behavior of the teachers and developing a system of support amongst peers, the secondary education can equip students on academics outstanding with successful social and emotional life. To sum up, social intelligence is an effective tool to eliminate anxiety and a strong buffer mechanism, which is why it is very important to students of Swat and other places. This is one of the skills that should be developed in the future studies and the policy to provide students with a good basis to succeed.

References

- Husain, W., Kamal, A., Ijaz, F., Husain, M. A., Trabelsi, K., Ammar, A., & Jahrami, H. (2025). Redefining social intelligence through self-efficacy and personal autonomy: Development and validation of the efficient social intelligence scale. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 1-19.
- Chen, B., Sun, X., Huang, X., & Yao, L. (2024). Examining the reciprocal link between social anxiety and social relationships spanning from childhood to adulthood: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Developmental Psychology*, 60(1), 170.
- Adam, S., Ahmad, K. B., Khan, Y., & Rowland, D. L. (2025). An Exploration of Predictors of Psychological Help-Seeking Attitudes in a Transgender Population in a Non-Western Context. *Sexes*, 6(2), 25.
- Ayık, A., Sezer, T., & Koçyiğit, S. (2025). The mediating effects of self-concept on the relationship between parenting styles and young children's social problem-solving in Türkiye. *Frontiers in Psychology*,
- Saba, N., & Khalid, H. (2021). Exploring post-Conflict Community Resilience Options for Reintegrated Individuals of Swat. *Policy Perspectives on Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan*, 95.
- Lau, J. (2016). Social intelligence and the next generation. *London: National Service Citizen*.
- Ali, G., & Hussain, E. (2020). *Perspectives on Contemporary Pakistan*. Routledge.
- Pirzada, G., Yousaf, A., & Masood, S. (2024). Issues, Challenges & Opportunities of Education for Marginalized Communities in Pakistan. *Indus Journal of Social Sciences*,

- Rafiq, M., Saeed, M., & Golam Hassan, A. A. (2024). The Quagmire of Internal Displacement: Reinstatement Challenges and Counter Strategies in District Swat, Pakistan. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, .
- Akbar, N., Yousafzai, M. T., & Akbar, S. (2023). Measuring the impact of green brand positioning on green brand attitudes in the context of Pakistan. *Journal of Managerial Sciences*,
- Bhatti, H. A. (2015). *Development and conflict: The economic impacts of civil war in Swat: Pakistan* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Waikato).
- HUSSAIN, A. (2024). EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF BULLYING ON THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL COMPETENCE OF PAKISTANI ADOLESCENTS.
- Ellis, D., & Tucker, I. (2020). *Emotion in the digital age: Technologies, data and psychosocial life*. Routledge.
- KoÃ, A. (2022). Examining the Relationship between Teachers' Emotional Intelligence and their Openness to Change. *i-Manager's Journal on Educational Psychology*, sss
- Gul, S., Fatima, B., & Akhtar, N. (2025). Gender Equality in Education: Addressing Structural Barriers and Social Norms Asian Context. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*,
- Yong, G. H., Lin, M. H., Toh, T. H., & Marsh, N. V. (2023). Social-emotional development of children in Asia: A systematic review. *Behavioral Sciences*,
- Sanaullah. (2024). Civilians' Strategies of Post-Conflict Social Revival in Northwestern Pakistan. *Ethnopolitics*,
- Ashraf, S., Jahan, M., Fida, F., & Fatima, I. (2023). Analyzing the Needs of General Education Teachers to Teach Students with Visual Impairment in Inclusive Settings. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*,
- Mahmood, Q. K., Jalil, A., Farooq, M., Akbar, M. S., & Fischer, F. (2023). Development and validation of the Post-Pandemic Fear of Viral Disease scale and its relationship with general anxiety disorder: a cross-sectional survey from Pakistan. *BMC Public Health*,
- Nasir, M., Qureshi, M. A., Nazir, R., Abbasi, P. N., Ali, I., & Arshad, F. (2025). Associations between Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Nomophobia: Mediated By Self-Control and Smartphone Addiction among University Students. *Journal for Social Science Archives*,
- Ijaz, S., Rohail, I., & Irfan, S. (2024). School-based intervention for anxiety using group cognitive behavior therapy in Pakistan: a feasibility randomized controlled trial.
- Sterian, M. (2024). SOCIAL ANXIETY AND THE PERCEPTION OF CONTROL OVER ANXIOGENIC EVENTS WITH STUDENTS OF EDUCATION SCIENCES-GENDER DIFFERENCES AND FIELD OF ACTIVITY. *Euromentor Journal*,
- Cahill, H., & Gowing, A. (2024). Approaches to understanding youth well-being. In *Handbook of children and youth studies* (pp. 77-101). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Khan, M. M., & Iqbal, S. (2025). Evaluating the Cultural and Social Impacts of the 2009 Military Operation in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK): A Case Study of Operation Rah-e-Rast. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, .
- Mutahi, J., Kangwana, B., Khasowa, D., Muthoni, I., Charo, O., Muli, A., & Kumar, M. (2024). Integrating mental health management into empowerment group sessions for out-of-school adolescents in Kenyan informal settlements: a process paper. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, .
- Mendieta, C. A. B. (2024). *The Development of Youth Voice in a Community-Based Social Action Program*. Western Michigan University.

- Khan, I. (2024). The Shifting Constitution of Space, Gender, and Mobility in a Context of Social and Infrastructural Change: A Case Study of Swat, Pakistan.
- Shahrukh, M. W., & Mahmood, A. (2023). ASSESSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO SUSTAIN POST-CONFLICT PEACEBUILDING PROCESS IN SWAT. *PAKISTAN*, .
- ROMANOVSKA, L., & NOVAK, M. (2024). The role of teacher-student relationships in providing social and psychological support to participants of the educational process. *Social work and education*,
- Shah, Q. A., Nawab, B., & Mehmood, T. (2020). The Role of Stakeholders in Post Conflict Peacebuilding in Swat, Pakistan. *Lex Localis: Journal of Local Self-Government*,