

# The Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence in the Causal Relationship Between Spiritual Intelligence and School Attachment and Academic Achievement Among Lower Secondary School Students

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## 1. Round 1

### 1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the introduction (first paragraph), the statement “students’ success cannot be explained exclusively through cognitive ability or instructional exposure” is theoretically sound but lacks a clear positioning within a specific theoretical framework (e.g., socio-emotional learning, ecological systems theory); it is recommended to anchor this claim in a named theoretical model to strengthen conceptual rigor.

In the paragraph discussing the mediating role, the sentence “One of the most plausible explanatory pathways is emotional intelligence” is theoretically plausible but insufficiently justified; it is recommended to include a more explicit mediation rationale grounded in prior empirical mediation studies rather than general theoretical reasoning.

In the methods section (Study Design and Participants), the phrase “cluster random sampling” is used, but the description of the procedure is limited; more detail is needed regarding how clusters were defined, how many schools/classes were selected, and whether sampling weights or design effects were considered.

In the same section, the sentence “municipal districts 2, 4, and 6 of Tabriz were initially selected as clusters” raises concerns about representativeness, as it is unclear whether these districts are socioeconomically representative of the broader population of 76,000 students.

In the measures section, the description of the Spiritual Intelligence Questionnaire includes components such as “extrasensory perception” and “spiritual trauma”, which are conceptually controversial; the manuscript should justify the inclusion of these dimensions and discuss their relevance to educational outcomes.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

## 1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the second paragraph of the introduction, the claim “school attachment... has been repeatedly associated with persistence, psychological adjustment, and reduced risk of disengagement” would benefit from a more explicit operational definition distinguishing it from closely related constructs such as school engagement or school bonding, as the current wording risks conceptual overlap and ambiguity.

In the third paragraph of the introduction, the phrase “academic achievement has been conceptualized... as the product of intertwined cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral processes” is appropriate but overly general; it is recommended to specify which dimensions of achievement (e.g., GPA, standardized test scores, self-reported performance) are being referenced to align with the measurement instrument used later.

In the emotional intelligence section, the sentence “Emotional intelligence refers broadly to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions effectively” would benefit from specifying the theoretical model adopted (e.g., ability model vs. mixed model), as different models imply different measurement and interpretation approaches.

In the paragraph discussing empirical literature on emotional intelligence, the statement “meta-analytic and primary studies have shown...” is not sufficiently precise; it is recommended to indicate at least one concrete meta-analysis or effect size to strengthen the evidential basis of this claim.

In the section introducing spiritual intelligence, the sentence “Spiritual intelligence is typically understood as a higher-order human capacity...” lacks conceptual consensus in the literature; the manuscript should acknowledge ongoing debates regarding the construct validity of spiritual intelligence and its distinction from personality traits or religiosity.

In the paragraph beginning “The relevance of spiritual intelligence to education becomes even more apparent...”, the argument would benefit from a clearer causal logic linking spiritual intelligence specifically to school attachment, rather than general educational engagement, to better justify the proposed model.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

## 2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.