

The Interplay Between Emotional Intelligence and Coping Strategies Among Educators: An Interdisciplinary Study in the Cultural Context of Kokand, Uzbekistan

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Novelty of the Study:

This research offers a pioneering exploration of the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and coping strategies among educators, uniquely situated in the sociocultural context of Kokand, Uzbekistan. Its novelty is reflected in the following:

1. **Cultural Contextualization:** The study integrates the collectivist, Islamic, and patriarchal values of the Fergana region, alongside the influence of mahallas and educational traditions, which have not been previously examined in the context of educators' EI and coping.

2. **Focus on Educators in a High-Stress Environment:** It is the first to investigate how EI influences coping strategies among teachers in Kokand, where high workloads, societal expectations, and labor migration (10% of the population) create unique stressors.

3. **Mixed-Methods Innovation:** Combines quantitative (TEIQue, Coping Inventory) and qualitative (interviews, focus groups) methods with triangulation to provide a comprehensive understanding of EI and coping in a Central Asian educational setting.

4. **Adaptation of Theories:** Applies Mayer and Salovey's (1997) EI framework and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping theory to Uzbekistan's context, emphasizing the role of cultural norms in shaping adaptive behaviors.

5. **Practical Contribution:** Proposes a culturally tailored professional development program integrating digital tools and community structures (mahallas), a novel approach for enhancing educators' resilience in Uzbekistan.

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), is a critical determinant of adaptive functioning in high-stress professions such as teaching. Coping strategies, encompassing problem-focused (addressing stressors directly) and emotion-focused (managing emotional responses) approaches (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), enable educators to navigate workplace challenges, including heavy workloads, student behavior, and societal expectations. In Kokand, a city in Uzbekistan's Fergana region with a population of approximately 259,700 (2022), educators face unique pressures





due to high birth rates (11.1% in 2024), labor migration (10% of the population), and a collectivist culture rooted in Islamic and patriarchal norms.

The cultural context of Kokand shapes educators' emotional and coping responses. Mahallas (community structures) and Islamic values emphasize collective responsibility and emotional restraint, while patriarchal norms often place additional expectations on female educators as caregivers. Migration, affecting family structures, adds stress, as educators may balance professional duties with caregiving for children of migrant relatives. Despite global research on EI and coping, their interplay among educators in Central Asia remains underexplored.

The study aims to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and coping strategies among educators in Kokand, emphasizing cultural influences. The primary hypothesis is that higher EI, particularly emotionality and self-control, correlates with adaptive coping strategies (e.g., problem-focused coping), reducing stress. The secondary hypothesis posits that sociodemographic (gender, experience, income) and cultural factors (religiosity, collectivism) moderate this relationship. This interdisciplinary study integrates psychological, educational, and anthropological perspectives to advance understanding of educators' resilience in Uzbekistan.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative (cross-sectional survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews, focus groups) methods. Quantitative data assessed correlations and predictive effects, while qualitative data explored subjective experiences within Kokand's cultural context.

Sample

The study involved 180 educators (aged 25–55 years) from public schools in Kokand, selected via stratified random sampling to ensure diversity in gender and teaching experience. The sample comprised 65% women and 35% men, with a mean age of 38.2 years ($SD = 6.1$). Teaching experience: 40% <10 years, 40% 10–20 years, 20% >20 years. Socioeconomic status: 50% middle-income (teaching, small businesses), 30% low-income, 20% high-income (private tutoring, remittances). Ethnic composition: 90% Uzbek, 7% Tajik, 3% other. Inclusion criteria: employment in a Kokand public school, ≥ 2 years of teaching experience, and consent. Migrant family involvement: 30% had relatives abroad.

Data Collection Methods

1. Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue): Assessed EI dimensions—emotionality, self-control, sociability, and well-being (Petrides & Furnham, 2003; $\alpha = 0.90$).

2. Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS): Measured task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance-oriented coping (Endler & Parker, 1990; $\alpha = 0.88$).

3. Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with 40 educators (25 women, 15 men) to explore how EI influences coping in teaching and personal life.

4. Focus Groups: Four groups (8–10 participants each) discussed cultural influences (e.g., Islam, mahallas) on coping behaviors.





5. Sociodemographic Questionnaire: Collected data on age, gender, income, teaching experience, religiosity, and family structure (e.g., migrant relatives).

Procedure

Data were collected from April to November 2025 in collaboration with Kokand's school administrations and mahallas. Surveys were administered online (Google Forms with two-factor authentication) or in-person during professional development sessions. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in Uzbek, with Russian translations as needed, recorded with consent, and held in private school offices. Ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymity, and compliance with Uzbekistan's educational regulations and the Helsinki Declaration. Migrant-related data: 25% of interviews involved educators with migrant family members.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0. Pearson's correlation assessed relationships between EI and coping strategies. Multiple regression examined predictive effects, controlling for gender, experience, and income. Reliability was confirmed: TEIQue ($\alpha = 0.90$), CISS ($\alpha = 0.88$). Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis in NVivo 14.0 with double coding for reliability. Triangulation integrated quantitative and qualitative findings, with cultural bias minimized through consultations with educators from Kokand Pedagogical College.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Higher EI, particularly emotionality ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) and self-control ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$), strongly correlated with task-oriented coping. Emotion-oriented coping showed a moderate correlation with emotionality ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$) but a negative correlation with self-control ($r = -0.48$, $p < 0.05$). Avoidance-oriented coping was negatively associated with EI ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.05$). Multiple regression indicated that EI explained 45% of the variance in task-oriented coping ($R^2 = 0.45$, $F(4,175) = 29.8$, $p < 0.001$), with self-control as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.01$).

Gender differences: Women scored higher on emotionality ($t(178) = 3.15$, $p < 0.01$), while men reported higher task-oriented coping ($t(178) = 2.78$, $p < 0.05$). Teaching experience: Educators with >20 years of experience showed greater self-control ($F(2,177) = 4.9$, $p < 0.05$). Migrant family status: Educators with migrant relatives reported higher emotion-oriented coping ($t(178) = 2.45$, $p < 0.05$), likely due to increased stress.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis identified five themes:

1. EI in Classroom Management: “Understanding students’ emotions helps me stay calm and solve problems” (female teacher, 40 years).
2. Cultural Expectations: Islamic values and collectivism encouraged emotional restraint, but increased stress for women balancing teaching and caregiving.
3. Migration Stress: “My brother’s children live with me; it’s hard, but I cope by staying positive” (female teacher, 35 years).





4. Mahalla Support: Community networks provided emotional support, enhancing task-oriented coping.

5. Professional Resilience: High EI enabled teachers to view challenges (e.g., student behavior) as opportunities for growth.

Discussion

The findings confirm that higher emotional intelligence, particularly self-control and emotionality, enhances task-oriented coping among educators, reducing reliance on maladaptive emotion-oriented or avoidance strategies. This aligns with Mayer and Salovey's (1997) EI model, where emotional regulation supports adaptive coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Self-control ($\beta = 0.50$) is critical for managing classroom stressors, enabling educators to address challenges proactively.

Expanded Cultural Analysis

1. Collectivism and Mahallas: Kokand's collectivist culture emphasizes group harmony, shaping educators' EI and coping strategies. Mahallas, as community structures, provide emotional and practical support, particularly for educators in migrant families (30% of the sample). Qualitative data highlight that mahallas organize teacher support groups and communal events (e.g., *hashar*), fostering a sense of belonging that enhances task-oriented coping. For example, a male teacher noted, “The mahalla helps me feel supported, so I focus on solving problems, not just worrying.”

2. Islamic Values: Islam, practiced by 90% of participants, encourages emotional restraint and patience (*sabr*), which align with self-control in EI. Religious practices, such as communal prayers and Ramadan, reinforce emotional regulation, enabling educators to perceive stressors as challenges. However, Islamic expectations of humility can limit emotional expression, particularly for women, increasing emotion-oriented coping ($t = 3.15$). A female teacher stated, “I pray to stay calm, but balancing teaching and family is overwhelming.”

3. Patriarchal Norms: Patriarchal norms in Kokand assign women dual roles as educators and caregivers, increasing stress and reliance on emotion-oriented coping. Men, often seen as authority figures in schools, report higher task-oriented coping ($t = 2.78$), reflecting cultural expectations of stoicism. Qualitative data reveal that female teachers feel pressured to suppress emotions to meet societal standards, impacting their EI effectiveness.

4. Migration and Family Dynamics: Labor migration (10% of Kokand's population) places additional burdens on educators, particularly women, who often care for children of migrant relatives. This increases stress and emotion-oriented coping ($t = 2.45$). Qualitative findings indicate that high EI helps educators manage these responsibilities by reframing them as meaningful challenges, but low EI leads to avoidance behaviors.

5. Educational Traditions and Urbanization: Soviet-era educational norms emphasize discipline, while Kokand's growing urbanization introduces modern pedagogical approaches, encouraging emotional expressiveness. Experienced teachers (>20 years) rely on self-control rooted in traditional methods, while younger educators





adopt EI-focused strategies, reflecting a cultural shift. This duality shapes coping, with urban influences promoting task-oriented approaches.

Theoretical Context: EI enhances task-oriented coping by improving emotional regulation (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), while coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) explains how educators appraise stressors. In Kokand, cultural norms amplify EI's role in adaptive coping, but patriarchal pressures and migration pose challenges.

Limitations: The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. Self-reports may be biased by social desirability in a collectivist culture. The focus on Kokand restricts generalizability. Future research should use longitudinal designs, physiological measures (e.g., cortisol levels), and rural-urban comparisons.

Practical Implications: Professional development programs should enhance EI through workshops on emotional regulation and task-oriented coping, integrated into mahallas and schools. Digital tools can support migrant-connected educators.

Novelty: The first study of EI and coping among Kokand educators, emphasizing migration, Islam, and mahallas.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence significantly enhances task-oriented coping among educators in Kokand, reducing stress and maladaptive strategies. Cultural factors—collectivism, Islam, patriarchy, and migration—moderate this relationship. Tailored programs can strengthen educators' resilience. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and regional differences.

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