

Navigating sustainable leadership: the role of organizational culture in shaping Pakistani women leaders' emotional intelligence and high-performance

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines the mediating role of organizational culture (OC) in the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and high-performance leadership (HPL) among women leaders in Pakistani universities. It investigates in what way emotional competencies and institutional culture interact to shape sustainable leadership in higher education. Grounded in contemporary frameworks of leadership education and development (Allen *et al.*, 2022), the study emphasizes the need to integrate emotional and cultural dimensions into leadership preparation for women in academia.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, using a structured questionnaire administered to 200 women leaders from both public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The results revealed that leaders in private universities demonstrated higher levels of EI, OC and HPL compared to those in public institutions. Emotional intelligence emerged as a strong predictor of high-performance leadership, while organizational culture significantly mediated this relationship.

Findings – The findings emphasize that emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to promote a supportive organizational culture, which in turn enhances leadership performance. In general, the study highlights the importance of advancing leadership education and development initiatives that cultivate emotionally intelligent and culturally responsive women leaders to promote equity, institutional resilience, and sustainable leadership in higher education.

Originality/value – This study is original because it uniquely explores how organizational culture shapes the emotional intelligence and high-performance of Pakistani women leaders, a group that remains significantly under-researched in leadership and management literature, particularly within South Asian cultural and organizational contexts.

Keywords Emotional intelligence, High-performance, Organizational culture, Leadership effectiveness, Influence, Academics

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Sustainable leadership addresses the dynamic interplay between women leaders' emotional intelligence (EI) and the organizational culture (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Organizational culture acts as a basis that either supports or restrains women's leadership growth, precisely in male-chauvinistic societies (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). When institutions promote values such as trust, inclusivity, collaboration and psychological safety, women leaders are more likely to exercise emotional self-awareness, empathy and adaptability as an essential element of EI (Goleman, 1998; Carmeli, 2003). These emotionally intelligent behaviors promote

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participatory decision-making and resilience in complex work environments, mirroring a sustainable leadership style that balances people-oriented and performance-oriented priorities (Allen, Rosch, & Riggio, 2022). Therefore, a positive, equity-driven organizational culture acts as a catalyst for nurturing emotionally intelligent women leaders who can lead with integrity, empathy and long-term vision (Bilderback, 2025).

In addition, sustainable leadership is not only one aspect about attaining direct organizational goals but also about cultivating long-term well-being and ethical excellence (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Pakistani women leaders who navigate cultural expectations, workplace biases and resource constraints often rely on emotional intelligence to sustain high performance under pressure (Chaudhary & Dutt, 2022). Their ability to manage emotions, build robust interpersonal relationships and motivate diverse teams allows them to transform challenges into opportunities for innovation and inclusivity (Riggio, Eaton, & Funder, 2020). In such environments, leadership sustainability is reinforced when organizations deliberately embed gender-sensitive practices, mentorship opportunities and emotional intelligence development into their culture (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008). Therefore, the synergy between a supportive organizational culture and women leaders' emotional intelligence results in enduring high performance that benefits individuals, institutions and society at large (Fullan, 2020; Bilderback, 2025).

Considering the women sustainable leadership in Pakistani universities, they continue to encounter entrenched barriers rooted in patriarchal norms, limited mentorship and gendered organizational practices (Bhatti & Ali, 2020). Despite their qualifications and potential, female academicians often struggle for recognition and career progression due to persistent stereotypes and exclusionary professional networks (Ali & Rasheed, 2021). In the higher education sector, women represent about 42% of the academic workforce but remain significantly underrepresented in senior roles such as vice chancellors and deans, holding fewer than 10% of such positions nationwide (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023; HEC, 2025). Even when women-only institutions are included, the number rises only moderately to around 15%, signifying ongoing disparities in leadership representation (Lashari, 2023). These systemic challenges highlight the need not only to increase women's access to leadership roles but also to strengthen their leadership capacities through emotional intelligence (EI). Leaders with high EI demonstrate self-awareness, empathy, adaptability and interpersonal competence, all critical for navigating complex academic environments (Duan, Zhang, & Chen, 2023a, Duan, Zhang, & Liu, 2023b; Raghav & Bhargavi, 2025). For women leaders, EI serves as a strategic tool to counter gender bias, manage conflicts and foster inclusive decision-making (Khan, Alzahrani, & Gazzaz, 2024; Gander & Sharafizad, 2025).

This study underpins on the framework of leadership education and development (Allen *et al.*, 2022), which has shifted from traditional managerial training to promoting self-awareness, ethical judgment and emotional intelligence (EI) as essential competencies for effective leadership. Contemporary frameworks emphasize experiential and reflective learning that enables emerging leaders to engage critically with complex, real-world organizational challenges. Within higher education, such approaches are particularly relevant for developing women leaders who must navigate gendered norms and institutional barriers with empathy, adaptability and strategic insight. By integrating emotional intelligence into leadership education, institutions can cultivate transformative and inclusive leaders capable of promoting sustainable change and equity in academia.

Closely linked to EI is high-performance leadership (HPL), defined by visionary thinking, strategic decision-making, and the ability to foster a collaborative and high-achieving culture. Women leaders who demonstrate HPL traits contribute to institutional resilience and inclusivity even in male-dominated environments (Duan *et al.*, 2023a, b). However, the extent to which these leadership attributes translate into effective outcomes often depends on the surrounding organizational culture (OC) (Sumiyati, Riyanto, Zaharuddin, & Supriyadi, 2025). A supportive culture that values diversity, open communication and professional growth amplifies the positive effects of EI, while restrictive or patriarchal cultures may

suppress them (Aslam, 2023; Khan & Ahmed, 2022). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the mediating role of organizational culture in the relationship between emotional intelligence and high-performance leadership among female academicians in Pakistan. By exploring these interconnections, the study seeks to generate evidence-based insights for leadership education and development initiatives that empower women in academia and foster sustainable institutional growth.

Literature review

Sustainable leadership (SL) in education highlights long-term stewardship, distributed responsibility, ethical practice and attention to equity and the well-being of stakeholders rather than short-term technical fixes (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Contemporary analyses define SL as a multi-dimensional orientation that values depth of learning, leadership succession, diversity and resourcefulness to support positive educational outcomes over time (Fullan, 2020). This perspective reframes leadership as an ecological and systemic practice in which emotionally intelligent leaders promote cultures, policies and routines that conserve human capital and empower others to lead (Arbues *et al.*, 2025; Jaiswal & Karabiyik, 2025).

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is recognized as a key determinant of leadership effectiveness across organizational and academic settings (Dogru, 2022; Hwang, 2024). It involves perceiving, understanding, and regulating one's own emotions while responding effectively to the emotions of others (Burcea & Sabie, 2020). EI enhances communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making core attributes of high-performing leaders (Fitriani & Thelma, 2023). Wong and Law's (2002) framework, a widely validated model (Nguyen, 2022; Acosta-Prado & Zarate-Torres, 2022; Masood & Akhtar, 2023; Rathore & Chadha, 2021), defines EI through four dimensions: self-emotional appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, regulation of emotion and use of emotion. These dimensions form the basis of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, which has been extensively applied in leadership and organizational research (Kato, Mugizi, Kasule, & Kyozi, 2023; López González *et al.*, 2024; Garcia & Lopez, 2023).

Within the broader context of global leadership and gender inclusion, emotionally intelligent leadership has been shown to empower women leaders to overcome institutional barriers and drive organizational transformation (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). Women with high EI often demonstrate superior interpersonal and adaptive leadership skills, contributing to collaboration, innovation and employee well-being (Khan & Ahmed, 2022). However, the effectiveness of these competencies is contingent upon supportive organizational cultures that value inclusivity and equity, which enable emotionally intelligent leaders, especially women to realize their full leadership potential.

High-performance leadership

High-performance leadership (HPL) reflects a leader's ability to inspire, manage and drive organizational success through vision, competence and emotional intelligence. In academic settings, effective leadership fosters teamwork, innovation, and sustainable growth (Elrehail, Emeagwali, Alsaad, & Alzghoul, 2020). HPL encompasses behaviors such as building trust, empowering others, setting goals, managing resources and creating a progressive environment. It is typically defined by five dimensions building relationships, attracting talent, delivering results creating the future and personal leadership validated across public and higher education contexts (Naz, Ahmad, & Saeed, 2023). These competencies align with contemporary leadership demands emphasizing adaptability, innovation and employee well-being (Moss, 2024). Research consistently links emotionally intelligent leadership with improved employee engagement and institutional innovation (Kato *et al.*, 2023; Noor & Musarat, 2024).

Organizational culture

Organizational culture (OC) encompasses the common assumptions, values, practices and symbols that shape the behaviors and expectations of individuals within an institution. In the context of higher education, organizational culture considerably influences faculty engagement, leadership style and institutional performance (Adekoya, Ajayi, Suhrab, & Oliyide, 2022). It offers the contextual environment that enables leaders in applying emotional intelligence and achieving high performance. The Denison model (1990) of organizational culture, which emphasizes four key dimensions: involvement (I), consistency (C), adaptability (A) and mission (M) remain a leading framework for understanding organizational culture in academic settings. This model has been widely applied and supported in recent research (Bhowmik *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, components such as values, people, narrative and vision are instrumental in shaping the cultural tone of leadership practices (Kato *et al.*, 2023).

Influence of emotional intelligence on organizational culture

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a vital role in shaping organizational culture by promoting empathy, open communication and positive relationships. Leaders with high EI create inclusive and supportive environments that enhance collaboration, trust and employee engagement. In a study of Indonesian public universities, Sumiyati *et al.* (2025) found that EI and organizational culture significantly influenced employee creativity, explaining 83.2% of the variance. Similarly, Gujral and Singh (2022) reported a strong positive correlation between EI and organizational culture among 213 academicians in India, highlighting that effective emotion management enhances an organization's ability to adapt to change.

The study revealed a strong positive correlation between EI and organizational culture, particularly emphasizing that effective emotion management was thoroughly associated with an organization's capacity to navigate and manage change (Sumiyati *et al.*, 2025).

Influence of emotional intelligence on high-performance leadership of women

Recent research has increasingly examined the link between emotional intelligence (EI) and high-performance leadership, emphasizing how emotionally intelligent leaders enhance strategic vision, motivation and institutional success (Khan, Rehman, & Iqbal, 2023a, b; Duan *et al.*, 2023a, b). In Malaysia, Islam, Wang, and Gao (2023) found that mid-level managers with higher EI showed greater leadership effectiveness, especially in communication and decision-making. Similarly, Kanuto (2024), in a study of 360 bank employees in Southern Sudan, reported that EI significantly improved leadership effectiveness and employee engagement, supporting the inclusion of EI in leadership training. Focusing on women leaders, Khan and Ahmed (2022) found a strong positive correlation between EI and leadership effectiveness among 504 female faculty members in Lahore's universities.

Influence of organizational culture on high-performance leadership

Recent research highlights the critical role of organizational culture (OC) in shaping high-performance leadership across educational and corporate contexts (Jeffrey, 2025; Sharma *et al.*, 2025; Osman, Mohamad, & Kasbun, 2024; Jabbar, Cheema, & Hassan, 2024). Osman *et al.* (2024) found that in Malaysian open and distance learning institutions, OC significantly influenced leadership performance through leader engagement and self-efficacy. Similarly, Riza, Hutahayan, and Chong (2025), studying 21 Indonesian public universities, revealed that a supportive OC strengthened the link between participative leadership, innovation and organizational commitment. Muzondiwa, Swarts, and Schultz (2022) further identified OC as a mediator between transformational leadership and organizational effectiveness in an African multinational, emphasizing that leadership impact depends on a strong and supportive culture, especially in dynamic environments.

Mediating effect of organization culture in the influence of emotional intelligence on high performance leadership

Recent studies confirm the mediating role of organizational culture (OC) in the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and high-performance leadership. [Duan, Ren, Liu, and Riggio \(2022\)](#), studying 290 women leaders in China, found that OC strengthened the positive impact of EI on leadership, particularly in strategic thinking and team motivation. Similarly, [Wei, Wang, and Yuan \(2021\)](#) reported that OC fully mediated the link between EI and leadership practices among Malaysian college lecturers. [Paredes-Saavedra, Vallejos, Huanchuire-Vega, Morales-García, and Geraldo-Campos \(2024\)](#) also found OC to mediate the relationship between EI and team performance among Peruvian university employees. In Pakistan, a study of 351 university teachers revealed that hierarchy culture moderated the relationship between EI dimensions and work commitment, underscoring culture's influence on leadership outcomes. Collectively, these findings highlight OC's critical role in enhancing emotionally intelligent leadership; however, its mediating effect between EI and women's leadership performance in Pakistani academia remains unexplored.

Research hypotheses

In the context of leadership development in higher education, emotional intelligence (EI) has been widely recognized as a foundational attribute for effective and sustainable leadership ([Baba, Makhdoomi, & Siddiqi, 2021](#); [Duan et al., 2023a, b](#)). EI enables leaders to understand and regulate their own emotions while recognizing and responding appropriately to the emotions of others, thereby enhancing communication, empathy and conflict resolution ([Duan et al., 2023a, b](#)). This capability is particularly critical for women university leaders in Pakistan, who frequently operate within patriarchal institutional structures and must exercise a heightened degree of emotional competence to navigate professional challenges ([Khan et al., 2024](#)). At the same time, a positive organizational culture (OC) characterized by inclusion, trust, collaboration and shared values can amplify leadership effectiveness by providing a supportive environment for emotionally intelligent behavior ([Aslam, 2023](#)). Together, EI and OC are essential for achieving high-performance leadership (HPL), which is marked by vision, innovation and the capacity to mobilize teams toward shared goals. The first hypothesis guiding this study states:

- H1.* There is a positive relationship among emotional intelligence, organizational culture and high-performance leadership among women university leaders.

The individual effects of EI and OC on leadership performance have also been well documented. Leaders with high EI tend to exhibit superior interpersonal skills, manage stress effectively, motivate their teams and make sound decisions under pressure ([Raghav & Bhargavi, 2025](#)). Likewise, a strong and inclusive organizational culture that values professional development, diversity and open communication provides the structural and psychological support necessary for leaders to thrive ([Aslam, 2023](#); [Aurangzeb, Lohana, Bibi, Rehman, & Alizai, 2021](#)). When both EI and OC are present, they interact synergistically to foster HPL behaviors such as strategic visioning, adaptability and proactive decision-making ([Gander & Sharafizad, 2025](#); [Northouse, 2021](#)). The second hypothesis guiding this study states:

- H2.* Emotional intelligence and organizational culture significantly predict high-performance leadership among women university leaders.

However, leadership effectiveness is not solely determined by emotional or organizational factors – it may also vary according to demographic characteristics such as age, marital status, education, academic discipline, years of experience, leadership position and type of institutional sector. These characteristics influence leaders' perceptions, emotional maturity and access to decision-making authority ([Khan et al., 2023a, b](#); [Waris, Ahmad, & Ahmad, 2024](#)). For instance,

age and experience may shape leadership style and emotional regulation, while education and discipline can affect analytical and management approaches. Similarly, sectoral differences (public vs. private) often determine the extent of autonomy and resource availability within academic institutions (Iqbal, Mustafa, & Naz, 2023; Alvi, Habib, & Sittar, 2024). Prior research indicates that these demographic factors can significantly influence EI levels, perceptions of OC and the manifestation of HPL behaviors (Bhatti & Ali, 2020). The third hypothesis guiding this study states:

- H3. Demographic variables (age, marital status, type of sector, academic discipline, years of experience, position, education and number of subordinates) significantly influence women university leaders’ emotional intelligence, organizational culture and high-performance leadership.

Finally, recent research has emphasized the importance of mediating mechanisms that connect emotional intelligence to leadership outcomes (Wei *et al.*, 2021; Paredes-Saavedra *et al.*, 2024). Among these, organizational culture has emerged as a critical pathway through which emotionally intelligent behaviors translate into effective leadership performance. A culture that values empathy, communication, and collaboration enable emotionally intelligent leaders to inspire trust and drive institutional progress (Al-Naqbi & Aderibigbe, 2024; Aslam, 2023). Conversely, an unsupportive or patriarchal culture can restrict the expression of emotional competence and weaken leadership impact (Punjabi *et al.*, 2025). Examining the mediating role of organizational culture thus provides deeper insight into how EI contributes to HPL in higher education contexts (Duan *et al.*, 2023a, b). The fourth hypothesis guiding this study states:

- H4. Organizational culture mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and high-performance leadership among women university leaders, such that emotional intelligence positively influences organizational culture, which in turn enhances high-performance leadership.

These hypotheses are illustrated in the study’s conceptual model (see Figure 1), which depicts the direct and mediated relationships among emotional intelligence, organizational culture and high-performance leadership within the context of women’s academic leadership in Pakistan.

Methodology

Research design

This study employed quantitative research through a correlational survey design (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018) using a structured questionnaire survey to investigate the impact of organizational culture on female leaders’ emotional intelligence and high-performance

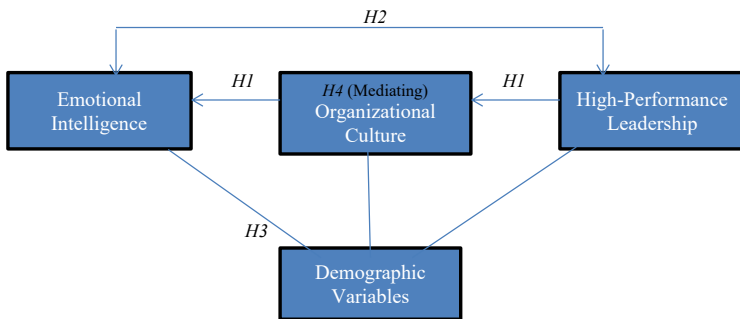


Figure 1. Conceptual model

leadership within universities located in the Lahore district of Pakistan. By concentrating on female academic leaders, it investigates how institutional culture supports or restricts their emotional competencies and leadership effectiveness, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of leadership development in higher education.

Methodological rigor was ensured using a well-structured and validated questionnaire, enhancing the reliability and validity of the data collected. The correlational survey design allowed for objective measurement and analysis of complex relationships among organizational culture, emotional intelligence and leadership performance (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation of female leaders from both public and private universities in Pakistan. The population included department heads, deans, directors and coordinators. Universities were first categorized by sector, and participants were randomly selected within each stratum to capture variations in organizational culture, emotional intelligence and leadership performance. Where official contact lists were unavailable, convenience sampling through professional networks and university websites was used to supplement responses. Participants were invited via email with details of the study and consent information, followed by two reminders at one-week intervals. The overall response rate was approximately 75% considered satisfactory for leadership research. Statistical analyses were conducted systematically to test the hypothesized relationships, while ethical standards including informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality were strictly maintained. These methodological procedures collectively strengthened the credibility, consistency and validity of the study's results, ensuring that the conclusions accurately reflect the dynamics of women's leadership within higher education institutions.

Sample size and participants

Data were collected from public and private universities in the Lahore district. Female leaders holding positions in public and private universities within the Lahore district were recruited for this study. Ethical approval was obtained from the authors' institution through the Institutional Review Board (IRB), ensuring informed participation from female leaders across various academic disciplines. The sample consisted of 200 female leaders, with 58.5% from private universities and 41.5% from public universities existing in Lahore. Participants were categorized by age: 38.5% were between 30 and 39 years, 33% between 40 and 49 years and 24% between 20 and 29 years. A small proportion (3%) were aged 50 or above. In terms of marital status, 62.5% of participants were married, 33% were single and 4.5% were divorced. Regarding academic disciplines, 27.5% were from the social sciences, 25.5% from the humanities, 19% from business/economics and 14% from STEM fields. Leadership roles varied among participants, with 31% serving as Deputy/Assistant Deans or Assistant Heads of Departments, 26% as Program Coordinators, 18% as Registrars or Assistant Registrars and 13% as Deans or Heads of Departments. The remaining 12% held other administrative roles. Regarding years of experience in leadership, 37% had 3–5 years of experience, followed by 30.5% with 6–8 years and 10% with 9–11 years of experience. Educational qualifications varied, with 71.5% holding a Ph.D., 17.5% a master's degree, 8% a post-doctoral qualification and 3% a bachelor's degree. In terms of leadership responsibilities, the majority (92.5%) managed teams of 5–20 individuals, while only 5% led teams of 21–30 individuals (see Table 1).

Research instrument

This study utilized a demographic sheet and structured questionnaires to assess emotional intelligence, organizational culture and high-performance leadership among female university leaders.

Table 1. Background information of the participants

Variables	Category	F	%
Age	20–29	48	24%
	30–39	77	38.5%
	40–49	66	33%
	50–51	6	3%
	60 and above	3	1.5%
Marital status	Single	66	33%
	Married	125	62.5%
	Divorce	9	4.5%
University type	Public	83	41%
	Private	117	58.5%
Department	STEM	28	14%
	Social Sciences	55	27.5%
	Humanities	51	25.5%
	Business/Economics	38	19%
	Other	28	14%
Position in the current organization	Registrar/assistant registrar	36	18%
	Program Coordinator/HOP	52	26%
	Deputy/Assistant Dean/Assistant HOD	62	31%
	Dean/Head of Department	26	13%
	Others	24	12%
Experience against current position	Less than 3 years	10	5%
	3–5 years	74	37%
	6–8 years	61	30%
	9–11 years	20	10%
	More than 11 years	35	17%
Qualification	Bachelor's	6	3%
	Master's Degree	35	17%
	Ph.D.	143	71%
	Post-Doctorate	16	8%

The Emotional Intelligence (EI) scale, adapted from [Wong and Law \(2002\)](#), consisted of 16 items (e.g., “I am aware of the emotions I experience”). The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.87$.

The Organizational Culture (OC) scale, based on Denison's model ([1990](#)), comprised 25 items (e.g., “There is a clear mission that gives meaning and direction to our work”). The scale exhibited good reliability, with a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.85$.

The High-Performance Leadership (HPL) scale, developed by PerformNuanca ([2010](#)), included 20 items (e.g., “I regularly set and communicate high performance expectations for my team”). This scale showed high internal consistency, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.89$.

Items in the emotional intelligence scale were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), while organizational culture and high-performance leadership items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

The questionnaires were presented to the reviewers to ensure their contextual suitability for construct validity and then further pilot testing on a sample of ($N = 30$) participants confirmed their appropriateness to employ them for this study.

Data analysis and results

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 26) and the PROCESS macro (version 4.2) ([Hayes, 2022](#)). To test the study hypotheses, the analysis proceeded in three phases. First, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among organizational

culture, emotional intelligence and high-performance leadership among women university leaders. Second, multiple linear regression analyses were performed to assess the predictive power of organizational culture and emotional intelligence on high-performance leadership. Additionally, regression analysis was used to determine the influence of demographic variables, including age, marital status, type of sector, academic discipline and years of experience, position, education and number of subordinates on emotional intelligence, organizational culture and high-performance leadership. Third, mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 4 to examine whether organizational culture mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and high-performance leadership. All analyses were conducted at a 95% confidence level.

Correlation analysis of emotional intelligence, organizational culture and high-performance leadership

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among emotional intelligence (EI), organizational culture (OC) and high-performance leadership (HPL). Pearson correlation measures the strength and direction of the relationship among variables. All correlations were statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, indicating meaningful and positive relationships among the variables. Emotional intelligence showed a strong positive correlation with high-performance leadership ($r = 0.670$), suggesting that emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to demonstrate high-performance leadership behaviors. Organizational culture was also positively correlated with both emotional intelligence ($r = 0.470$) and high-performance leadership ($r = 0.670$), highlighting the interconnected nature of these constructs. These findings indicate that a supportive organizational culture and strong emotional intelligence both contribute significantly to the development of effective leadership. Thus, Hypothesis 1: there is a positive relationship among emotional intelligence, organizational culture and high-performance leadership among women university leaders is supported by the results (see Table 2).

Predicting high-performance leadership: stepwise regression analysis of emotional intelligence and organizational culture

Table 3 shows the stepwise multiple linear regression analysis conducted to predict the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) and organizational culture (OC) and high-performance leadership (HPL) among women university leaders. The regression model was statistically significant, $F = 553.14$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that the combined predictors accounted for a substantial portion of the variance in HPL. The model explained approximately 84% of the variance in high-performance leadership ($R^2 = 0.84$), suggesting a strong overall fit. Organizational culture emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.59$), indicating that a positive and supportive organizational culture is highly associated with enhanced high-performance leadership. Emotional intelligence also significantly predicted HPL ($\beta = 0.37$), demonstrating that emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to exhibit high-performance leadership

Table 2. Correlation matrix of variables among women leaders' emotional intelligence, organizational culture and high-performance leadership

Variables	1	2	3
1 EI			
2 Org	0.47**		
3 H.P. L	0.67**	0.67**	

Note(s): EI = Emotional Intelligence; Org = Organizational culture; Ldr = High Performance Leadership
* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3. Stepwise regression analysis: emotional intelligence (EI) and organizational culture (org) as predictors of high-performance leadership (HPL)

Variables	R	ΔR^2	B		F	CI 95%	
			B	B		LL	UL
Model	0.92	0.84					
Constant			6.15		553.14	0.57	11.72
EI			0.34	0.37		0.25	0.43
Org			0.59	0.05		0.48	0.69

Note(s): CI = Confidence Interval; LL = lower limit; UL = Upper limit. Dependent variable is High Performance Leadership (HPL)

traits. These findings reinforce the importance of both organizational context and emotional capabilities in shaping effective leadership practices. Thus, the results support the [2nd hypothesis](#): Emotional intelligence and organizational culture significantly predict high-performance leadership among women university leaders (see [Table 3](#)).

Demographic predictors of emotional intelligence among women university leaders: stepwise regression results

[Table 4](#) presents the stepwise multiple linear regression analysis conducted to assess the predictive power of demographic variables including age, years of experience, position and education on emotional intelligence (EI) among women university leaders. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F = 1731.25, p < 0.001$, explaining approximately 89% of the variance in emotional intelligence ($R^2 = 0.89$), indicating a very strong model fit. Years of experience emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.94, p < 0.001$), suggesting that more experienced leaders tend to exhibit higher emotional intelligence. Age also positively predicted EI ($\beta = 0.82, p < 0.001$), indicating that older participants demonstrated greater emotional intelligence. Position ($\beta = 0.79, p < 0.001$) and education ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$) also significantly contributed to the model, though to a lesser extent. These results suggest that demographic characteristics meaningfully influence emotional intelligence among women university leaders. Thus, the [3rd hypothesis](#): Demographic variables (age, marital status, type of sector, academic discipline, years of experience, position, education and number of subordinates) significantly influence women university leaders' emotional intelligence, organizational culture and high-performance leadership, is supported by the results (see [Table 4](#)).

Table 4. Stepwise regression analysis: age, experience, position and education as predictors of emotional intelligence

Variables	R	ΔR^2	B		F	CI 95%	
			B	B		LL	UL
Model	0.94	0.89					
Constant			64.41		1731.25	62.50	66.31
Age of respondent			13.76	0.82		12.35	15.10
Years of experience			12.58	0.94		11.98	13.17
Position of respondent			9.36	0.79		8.35	10.37
Education			6.48	0.28		3.36	9.61

Note(s): CI = Confidence Interval; LL = lower limit; UL = Upper limit. Dependent variable is Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Demographic predictors of organizational culture among women university leaders: stepwise regression analysis

Table 5 presents the stepwise multiple linear regression analysis conducted to examine the extent to which demographic variables including age, years of experience, marital status and position of the respondent predict organizational culture among women university leaders. The overall model was statistically significant, $F = 21.33, p < 0.001$, accounting for approximately 47% of the variance in organizational culture ($R^2 = 0.47$), indicating a moderate model fit. Position of the respondent emerged as the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = 0.68, p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals in higher positions tend to perceive a stronger organizational culture. Age also significantly predicted organizational culture ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$), indicating that older respondents are associated with more favorable perceptions of organizational culture. Years of experience were another significant predictor ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.001$), showing that more experienced individuals are more likely to report stronger organizational culture perceptions. Marital status was excluded from the model during stepwise regression due to its insignificant contribution. These findings suggest that leadership position, age and experience meaningfully influence perceptions of organizational culture among women university leaders. Thus, the 3rd hypothesis is supported by the results (see Table 5).

Institutional context and leadership load as predictors of high-performance leadership: stepwise regression analysis

Table 6 presents the stepwise multiple linear regression analysis conducted to assess the predictive role of the type of sector and number of subordinates on high-performance leadership (HPL) among women university leaders. The overall model was statistically significant, $F = 232.82, p < 0.001$, accounting for 85% of the variance in high-performance leadership ($R^2 = 0.85$), indicating a strong model fit. Type of sector emerged as a highly significant positive predictor ($\beta = 0.92, p < 0.001$), suggesting that the sector in which a woman leader works has a substantial influence on high-performance leadership outcomes. In contrast, the number of subordinates had a small but significant negative effect on high-performance leadership ($\beta = -0.06, p < 0.05$), indicating that as the number of subordinates increases, perceived high-performance leadership slightly decreases. These results emphasize the importance of institutional context and workload in shaping effective leadership performance. Thus, the 3rd hypothesis is supported by the results (see Table 6).

Mediating role of organizational culture in the relationship between emotional intelligence and high-performance leadership

Table 7 illustrates the total, direct, and indirect effects of emotional intelligence and organizational culture on high-performance leadership with organizational culture serving as a

Table 5. Stepwise regression analysis: age of respondent, year of experience, marital status and position of the respondent as predictors of organizational culture

Variables	R	ΔR^2	B	B	F	CI 95% LL	UL
Model	0.68	0.47					
Constant			86.47		21.33	97.87	115.43
Age of respondent			3.74	0.28		6.08	1.40
Year of Experience			2.12	0.27		2.24	0.00
Position of the respondent			5.26	0.68		4.35	6.16

Note(s): CI = Confidence Interval; LL = lower limit; UL = Upper limit. Dependent variable is High Performance Leadership (HPL)

Table 6. Stepwise regression analysis: type of sector and no of subordinates as predictors of high-performance leadership (HPL)

Variables	R	ΔR2	B		F	CI 95%	
						LL	UL
Model	0.92	0.85					
Constant			67.90		232.82	64.26	71.54
Type of sector			19.06	0.92		17.94	20.18
No of subordinates			-2.57	-0.06		-4.97	-0.18

Note(s): CI = Confidence Interval; LL = lower limit; UL = Upper limit. Dependent variable is High Performance Leadership (HPL)

Table 7. Mediation analysis of organizational culture, emotional intelligence and high-performance leadership

Predictor variable	Outcome variable	B	P	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Total Effect 0.74 < 0.001 0.65 0.84					
Direct Effect					
EI	HPL	0.50	<0.001	0.38	0.61
HPL	Org	0.40	<0.001	0.27	0.52
Org	EI	0.67	<0.001	0.52	0.70
Indirect Effect					
EI	HPL through Org	0.24	<0.000	0.14	0.35

Note(s): EI = Emotional Intelligence; HPL = High performance leadership; Org = Organizational Culture; B = UN-standardized Coefficient; S.E = Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval; UL = Upper Limit; LL = Lower Limit

mediator. Direct effects indicate that emotional intelligence significantly predicts high-performance leadership ($B = 0.50, p < 0.001$) and organizational culture ($B = 0.67, p < 0.001$). Similarly, organizational culture significantly predicts high-performance leadership ($B = 0.40, p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of emotional intelligence on high-performance leadership through organizational culture was also significant ($B = 0.24, p < 0.001$), highlighting the mediating role of organizational culture. The total effect of emotional intelligence on high-performance leadership was $B = 0.74 (p < 0.001)$, with a confidence interval of 95% CI (0.65, 0.84). It is concluded that emotional intelligence, both directly and through organizational culture, significantly influences high-performance leadership, explaining a substantial portion of its variance. Thus, the last **4th hypothesis**: organizational culture mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and high-performance leadership among women university leaders, such that emotional intelligence positively influences organizational culture, which in turn enhances high-performance leadership, is supported by the results (see [Table 7](#)).

Mediation analysis

[Figure 2](#) illustrates a mediation model where organizational culture partially mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence (IV) and high-performance leadership (DV). Emotional intelligence has a strong positive effect on organizational culture ($a = 0.61, p > 0.001$) and a direct effect on high-performance leadership ($c = 0.50, p > 0.001$). Organizational culture also significantly impacts leadership performance ($b = 0.36, p > 0.001$), leading to an indirect effect of 0.24 ($p > 0.001$). Since both direct and indirect effects are significant, the findings suggest that emotionally intelligent leaders enhance

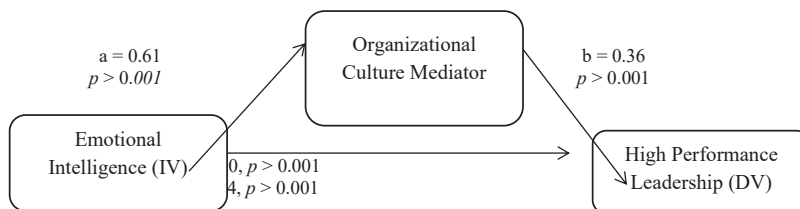


Figure 2. The mediation model illustrates the role of organizational culture between emotional intelligence and high-performance leadership

leadership performance both directly and by fostering a strong organizational culture. Thus, the last hypothesis is supported by the results. The figure below presents the mediation model that emerged from the analysis (see Figure 2).

Discussion

This study examined the mediating role of organizational culture (OC) in the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and high-performance leadership (HPL) among women leaders in Pakistani universities. The findings reveal that EI and OC are significantly and interdependently associated with leadership effectiveness, highlighting their significance to women's leadership development in higher education. Results from multiple regression and mediation analyses confirmed hypotheses H2, H3, and H4, demonstrating strong positive associations among EI, HPL and OC. These outcomes are consistent with prior research (Afzal, Naz, & Khan, 2023; Hwang, 2024; Lopez Gonzalez *et al.*, 2024; Noor & Musarat, 2024), which confirms that emotionally intelligent leaders reveal superior performance, relational awareness and organizational commitment. The results further reinforce the leadership education and development perspective (Allen *et al.*, 2022), emphasizing that emotional competencies reinforce effective leadership learning and practice. Furthermore, the mediating role of organizational culture aligns with empirical evidence that a supportive, inclusive and learning-oriented culture enhances the positive influence of EI on leadership outcomes (Duan, Wang, & Zhang, 2021). In the context of Pakistani higher education, these findings highlight the necessity of cultivating emotionally intelligent leaders and developing positive institutional cultures as complementary strategies for strengthening women's leadership ability and promoting sustainable institutional performance.

Emotional intelligence as a significant driver of high-performance leadership

Another significant finding of this study suggests that women leaders with high EI tend to demonstrate stronger leadership performance, as EI has a substantial direct effect on high-performance leadership. This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the vital role of both EI and supportive organizational culture in shaping effective leadership outcomes (Riza *et al.*, 2025; Duan *et al.*, 2023a, b).

These results emphasize the need for leadership development programs that prioritize EI training, principally for women in leadership roles, to promote inclusive, empathetic and high-performing leadership in diverse organizational settings. The significant contribution of this study lies in testing and validating the mediating role of organizational culture in the relationship between EI and high-performance leadership. These findings assist in addressing a gap in the literature by delivering a practical confirmation on what extent organizational culture acts as a mediator in this relationship precisely within the context of Pakistan.

The role of organizational culture in enhancing leadership

Organizational culture was found to be a strong predictor of high-performance leadership among women university leaders. The regression analysis indicated that both EI and organizational culture significantly contributed to effective leadership outcomes, with organizational culture emerging as the most influential factor. These findings indicate that organizational values, shared norms and workplace environment play a crucial role in shaping leadership behaviors and effectiveness. Organizational culture demonstrated a strong positive relationship with high-performance leadership, accounting for a significant portion of the variance in leadership outcomes. This aligns with prior research (Afzal *et al.*, 2023; Riza *et al.*, 2025; Duan *et al.*, 2023b), which focuses that supportive, trust-based cultures enhance leadership by promoting collaboration, innovation and psychological safety. The results confirm the hypothesis that organizational culture considerably impacts on leadership effectiveness and emphasize the need for cultivating inclusive and empowering institutional climates especially to intensify the leadership potential of EI women leaders.

Demographic factors as predictors

The study further revealed that demographic variables such as years of experience, age, education and position that significantly anticipated EI, with years of experience being the strongest contributor. These findings propose that emotional competencies develop and mature over time, and that experience in leadership roles may offer greater exposure to emotionally perplexing situations that build resilience and compassion. Likewise, position, age, and experience were found to significantly predict perceptions of organizational culture, suggesting that senior women leaders may be more attuned to institutional norms and better equipped to understand or influence the organizational climate. These findings support the fourth hypothesis and align with prior research (Khan *et al.*, 2023a, b; Lopez Gonzalez *et al.*, 2024), which stresses the role of demographic factors in influencing EI and organizational perception. This focuses on the significance of identifying in what ways leadership development efforts can be personalized across career stages to reinforce cultural alignment and increase leadership impact.

Institutional context and leadership

Interestingly, sector type (public vs. private) had a substantial influence on high-performance leadership, while the number of subordinates revealed a slight but negative association. This proposes that administrative burden and role overload may hamper leadership effectiveness, particularly in contexts with inadequate support structures. These findings are consistent with the study of Tang and Vandenberghe (2021), who found that role overload can lead to psychological strain, diminishing leadership capacity when interpersonal or institutional support is insufficient. The results emphasize the need for workload management and supportive leadership environments to sustain high performance, particularly in challenging administrative roles. The results emphasize that institutional context plays a critical role in influencing leadership experiences and increasing leadership errands without adequate support structures may deter performance. Due to greater bureaucracy and organizational politics, public-sector organizations often diminish the efficacy of leadership in empowering employees, whereas private-sector settings show robust leadership impact under comparable conditions (Bhowmik *et al.*, 2024).

Mediating role of organizational culture

The most compelling insight from this study comes from the mediation analysis, which revealed that organizational culture partially mediates the relationship between EI and high-performance leadership among women university leaders. EI significantly predicted organizational culture, and in turn, organizational culture had a significant impact on

leadership performance. The indirect effect of EI on high-performance leadership through organizational culture was also significant, confirming the mediating role and supporting the last hypothesis. These findings are in line with previous research by [Wei et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Duan et al. \(2023a, b\)](#), both of whom found that emotionally intelligent leaders promote organizational cultures that promote effective and high-performing leadership. These findings indicate that while emotionally intelligent leaders are directly capable of influencing performance, the presence of a robust and supportive organizational culture magnifies this effect. In this spirit, women's leadership efficacy is not solely a personal capability but is also shaped by the institutional context in which it is exercised.

Conclusion

This study confirmed that emotional intelligence and organizational culture significantly influence high-performance leadership among women leaders in Pakistani higher education, with organizational culture serving as a key mediator. It highlights the importance of inclusion and gender inclusion in promoting equitable leadership environments that enable women to thrive and lead effectively. The findings further emphasize that demographic and contextual factors shape leadership effectiveness, offering a valuable model for leadership development that promotes inclusive and gender-responsive practices. Moreover, this study contributes to the broader discourse on global leadership, aligning with international efforts to advance equitable, emotionally intelligent and culturally adaptive leadership across higher education systems. While partial in scope, the findings provide practical implications for policy and training and add to the growing body of literature on gendered and inclusive leadership in academic contexts.

Implications for policy and practice

This study's findings should be interpreted with caution due to its methodological limitation, as the data were derived solely from self-reports provided by women in leadership positions. Such reliance on self-perception measures may introduce common method bias and self-assessment limitations ([Cohen et al., 2018](#)), as participants might inadvertently overstate their emotional intelligence or perceive their organizational culture more favorably. To strengthen the validity of future research, it is recommended that multi-source assessment approaches be employed, incorporating perspectives from colleagues, subordinates and institutional records to provide a more comprehensive and objective understanding of leadership dynamics. Adopting a qualitative approach alongside the quantitative data would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

This study highlights the pressing need for Pakistani higher education institutions to cultivate inclusive and gender-responsive organizational cultures that empower women in leadership roles. Sustainable leadership development programs should embed emotional intelligence (EI) training as a core component, addressing the specific challenges women face in academia. Strengthening EI within supportive and equitable cultures can enhance leadership performance, inclusivity and institutional resilience. Universities should adopt equity-focused policies that include mentoring, EI coaching and regular assessments of organizational culture to sustain inclusive leadership pipelines. Future research should examine the long-term impact of gender-inclusive leadership development, comparing institutional types and regions to understand how EI and culture interact to influence women's leadership experiences. Broader and longitudinal studies are needed to explore how sustained institutional support shapes leadership trajectories and the retention of women in senior academic roles.

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