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- Author (s):** Faria Kiani<sup>1</sup> and Salma Naeem<sup>2</sup>
- Affiliation (s):** <sup>1</sup>Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan  
<sup>2</sup>Foundation University, Islamabad, Pakistan
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# ESL Teachers' Emotional Intelligence and Favoritism's Effects on Students' Motivation in Pakistani Public and Private Sector Universities: A Computational Analysis

Faria Kiani<sup>1</sup>\*  and Salma Naeem<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Foundation University, Islamabad, Pakistan

## Abstract

The study aims to explore how ESL teachers emotional intelligence and favoritism hinder the quality of education in Pakistani private and public sector universities, focusing on students perceptions. Previous studies have overlooked the relationship between emotional intelligence, favoritism and students motivation under a single study. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how these factors negatively affect students motivation and well-being, which have a lasting impact on their academic experience. This study is guided by Albert Banduras Social Cognitive Theory. This study adopted a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected from 150 BS and MS English students using a Likert-scale questionnaire to answer Research Questions 1 and 3. To address Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 in greater depth, qualitative data were collected through group discussions with 50 ESL teachers. The quantitative and quantitative data were analyzed through R to see how the selected themes reflect teachers perception. The participants of the study were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The analysis shows students' mixed perceptions as an area for future improvement in teacher training. The findings conclude that university administrators and English department heads should consider policies to minimize favoritism and promote socioemotional learning. The findings also reveal that students are aware of gendered and class-based advantages, which could feed into a broader dialogue on equity in Pakistani higher education.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, ESL teachers, favoritism, R programming, social cognitive theory

## Introduction

English is a lingua franca, so learning English as a second language is essential for succeeding in this globalized world (Marlina & Xu, [2018](#)).

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\*Corresponding Author: [Fariakiani1234@gmail.com](mailto:Fariakiani1234@gmail.com)

However, Pakistani students face challenges in learning English as a second language due to many emotional and environmental factors (Tariq et al., [2013](#); Zaidi et al., [2024](#)). Considering these factors, teachers' emotional intelligence and favoritism play an important role in academic institutes (Muhammad & Sheikh, [2023](#); Naeem et al., [2025](#)). However, the significance of a teachers emotional intelligence is inevitable. According to Rahman et al. ([2024](#)), students may feel angry when they are affected by unfair treatment in the class. Emotions, explicitly, are complex cognitive processes that influence ones thoughts and behaviors, and each emotional entity triggers a specific behavioral response as confirmed by Abbou ([2021](#)).

Similarly, teachers' emotional intelligence is considered a significant factor in fostering a positive learning environment. It has been highlighted that teachers with high emotional intelligence enhance students motivation and learning achievements. A teachers emotional intelligence is equally crucial in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL), particularly in addressing specific barriers such as cultural and linguistic differences. Emotional intelligence is the ability to acknowledge someones emotions, and influence others positively, especially in educational settings (Thao et al., [2023](#)). According to Khassawneh et al. ([2022](#)), researchers have emphasized the relationship between emotional intelligence and students learning. Moreover, other researchers have shown that ESL teachers with high emotional intelligence can perform well and play a positive role in teaching English as a second language.

Favoritism, as stated by Rahman et al. ([2024](#)), also poses a threat to the positive learning environment. Favoritism occurs when someone gives preference to others unfairly, irrespective of others performance. This means that favoritism means treating somebody not because of his/her performance, but merely because of his/her comfort. A similar perception was shared by Xu et al. ([2025](#)) that biased behavior towards students affects their learning process, interpersonal relationships, and motivation. Favoritism depends on several factors, including socioeconomic, gender based, and personal elements (Friedmann & Efrat-Treister, [2022](#)). A study conducted by reveals that one of the most significant issues faced by students is favoritism, which has a detrimental effect on their motivation to learn. The study further states that students who are unfairly favored, just because of socioeconomic status and gender related privileges, may receive

better opportunities than those who are bright and intelligent.

While, discussing controversial issues in the classroom, Wansink et al. (2023), stated that some of the students feel afraid to speak out against this biased behavior by the teachers. Favoritism also has detrimental effects in university settings for the students who feel neglected and mistreated (Zaki et al., 2023). According to Banduras social learning theory and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), human behavior is heavily influenced by the behaviors of others, personal factors, and environmental factors (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012). This explains how a teachers emotional intelligence and favoritism affect the classroom dynamics and students learning outcomes (Zaki et al., 2023). Based on this discussion, this study aims to explore how computerized analysis provides insight into the relationship between ESL teachers emotional intelligence and favoritism, as well as their impact on students learning outcomes in public and private universities .

### **Literature Review**

The synergistic relationship between emotional intelligence and favoritism, according to Arockia and Sangeetha (2020), has become an important area of study among learners. This shift is primarily due to its significant impact on students motivation and academic performance. The literature review examines the existing research on emotional intelligence and favoritism, particularly, research on emotional intelligence in ESL teachers in Pakistan, as well as favoritism in Pakistani universities, followed by a research gap.

In a study exploring ESL teachers, Anwar et al. (2021) stated that their efficacy is affected by emotional intelligence and their self-efficiency. The findings concluded that effective teaching is strongly linked to educators emotional intelligence. They further suggest that emotional intelligence reinforces the relationship between effective teaching practices and positive learning outcomes for university students. These finding were supported by Muzafar et al. (2023), whose study focused on the college level ESL teachers' emotional intelligence in order to evaluate ESL learners' self-efficacy, proficiency, and motivation in the context of Pakistan. Similarly, the extent of ESL students' learning motivation and academic engagement, impacted by ESL teachers' emotional intelligence, in regards to reading and writing proficiency was examined by Khoso et al. (2022). The study also confirmed positive effect of teachers' emotional intelligence on learners' active roles in classrooms. This resulted in a significant uplift in students'

reading and writing proficiency. In regards to developing teachers' emotional intelligence, Usmani et al. (2023) mentioned that developing teachers' emotional Intelligence should be part of their professional training, and workplace environments must support teachers to manage their stress effectively.

While discussing Emotional Intelligence, Todmal et al. (2023) also stated that it plays a vital role in education because it shapes the teaching and learning experiences of both teachers and students in educational institutions. The findings conclude that teachers with high emotional intelligence can create a more effective classroom environment and enhance students learning. Sadig (2024) explored similar issues and concluded that teachers' higher emotional intelligence is particularly relevant in the context of English as a Second Language, where communication and motivation are essential to enhance foreign language related fluency.

According to Rahman et al. (2024), teachers emotional intelligence can positively influence their students' confidence and motivation. The study involved a sample of 20 ESL teachers and 400 students, using surveys and IELTS-based tests for data collection from private English medium colleges. The results showed that teachers with high emotional intelligence tend to have more motivated students. These findings also emphasized the importance of teaching emotional intelligence to teachers in order to create a more effective English language teaching environment.

Similarly, Jaberi et al. (2024) stated that students concentrate better in class room lessons and school if ESL teachers provide support and deliver prompt feedback on assignments. The absence of teachers emotional intelligence in classroom settings may have a particularly negative impact on average and below-average learners, as it can contribute to the development of a poor self-image. For slow learners, the emotional and psychological support from teachers can likely improve their behavioral practices. The study conducted quantitative research using a correlational approach to investigate the relationship between teachers emotional intelligence and students academic success. The findings concluded that teachers' emotional intelligence directly influences students motivation and academic performance. The results demonstrated students' better learning outcomes in a classroom with a highly emotionally intelligent teacher.

The relationship between teachers emotional intelligence and students

motivation has been widely documented across diverse educational contexts. Grounded in Banduras social cognitive theory (Bandura, [1986](#)), previous research suggests that teachers with higher emotional intelligence are better able to create learning environments that promote students motivation (Nabavi & Bijandi, [2012](#)). Consistent with these findings, Rahman et al. ([2024](#)) examined this relationship in Bangladeshi universities and found that instructors emotional intelligence positively influenced students academic motivation. Their study extends the existing body of evidence by demonstrating that this relationship also holds in the context of higher education in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, the element of favoritism has also been studied in the context of Pakistani higher education sector. Favoritism, as Zaki et al. ([2023](#)) states, remains a significant issue in Pakistani universities, where social and economic pressures dictate the interaction between teachers and students. Cultural factors, such as socioeconomic differences and personal biases, can exacerbate the difficulty of overcoming favoritism (Im & Chen, [2020](#)). Hence, teachers with high emotional intelligence are less likely to exhibit favoritism and more able to create an unbiased environment (Verma, [2023](#)). Teacher-student favoritism occurs when the teacher shows preferential treatment to certain students, which significantly affects the learning outcomes of the students who are not favored. For instance, quantitative research by Zaki et al. ([2023](#)) explored how the extent of favoritism reduced students self-confidence, further slowing down effective learning processes. These findings were confirmed by Ali et al. ([2018](#)) highlighting the causes of favoritism. The study recorded that exchange of gifts, learners' socio-economic status, teachers' political ideology, blood relation between parents and teachers, and learners' physical appearance are the main causes of teachers' favoritism. The study further mentioned that favoritism, due to the above-mentioned factors, affects students' boldness, mutual trust and respect. Such practices may encourage students to seek favoritism rather than focus on learning, negatively affecting the overall learning environment and, ultimately, their academic, career, and professional development (Ali et al., [2018](#)). Moreover, favoritism negatively affects overall classroom management (Saleem & Akhtar, [2025](#)). Saleem and Akhtar ([2025](#)) recorded that unbiased classroom management techniques foster feelings of security, satisfaction, self-confidence, emotional comfort, increased academic engagement, strong trust in teachers, equitable learning opportunities, academic

diversity, and positive learning environment for students in higher education institutes (Saleem & Akhtar, [2025](#)).

Pakistani studies showed that students are sensitive to favoritism in ESL classrooms. Furthermore, teachers favoritism plays a crucial role in determining students success or failure in every educational institution. This was testified by Arshad ([2023](#)) who conducted research on the students of the University of Okara, aiming to assess the effect of teachers' favoritism on students learning achievement. Research has shown that teachers' favoritism hinders students motivation and learning outcomes. This study emphasizes the need to understand this problem to create a positive learning environment.

The above discussion has shown that emotional intelligence and favoritism affect students motivation significantly (Noreen & Kazim, [2022](#)). Teachers' professional training, classroom observations, and student-teacher meetings should be catered seriously to minimize the element of favoritism. On the other hand, learners should be trained to keep their focus on their long-term targets while leaving all the obstacles behind. Teachers, on the other hand, must also remember that teaching as a profession, carries a huge responsibility. Teachers, throughout the world, build nations by teaching moral values to students, and a positive teacher-student relationship is key to build a strong nation. Statistically, there lies a significant gap in the existing literature as none of these studies have examined the combined effect of teachers' emotional intelligence and favoritism on ESL students from private and public sector universities in Pakistan (Amjad & MacLeod, [2014](#)). The current study also aims to fill in the gap by using computerized tools to analyze these factors and provide valuable insights.

## Problem Statement

The goal of this study is to explore how ESL teachers emotional intelligence and favoritism hinder the quality of education in Pakistani private and public sector universities, focusing on students perceptions. Previous studies such as Ali et al. ([2023](#)) have examined the effect of teachers emotional intelligence on students motivation and learning outcomes. However, these studies have overlooked the relationship between emotional intelligence, favoritism, and students motivation. This research fills this gap by investigating how these factors negatively affect students

motivation and well-being, which have a lasting impact on their academic experience.

### **Research Objectives**

- To examine the moderating effect of ESL teachers' emotional intelligence on the relationship between favoritism and student motivation.
- To assess the impact of ESL teachers emotional intelligence and favoritism on students learning and motivation.
- To explore students perception of ESL teachers emotional intelligence and favoritism at private and public universities in Pakistan.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the perceptions of ESL students about their teachers favoritism and emotional intelligence in Pakistans private and public sector universities?
- What is the level of emotional intelligence and favoritism among ESL teachers in Pakistans private and public sector universities?
- How does favoritism moderate the relationship between teachers emotional intelligence and students learning outcomes?

### **Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology**

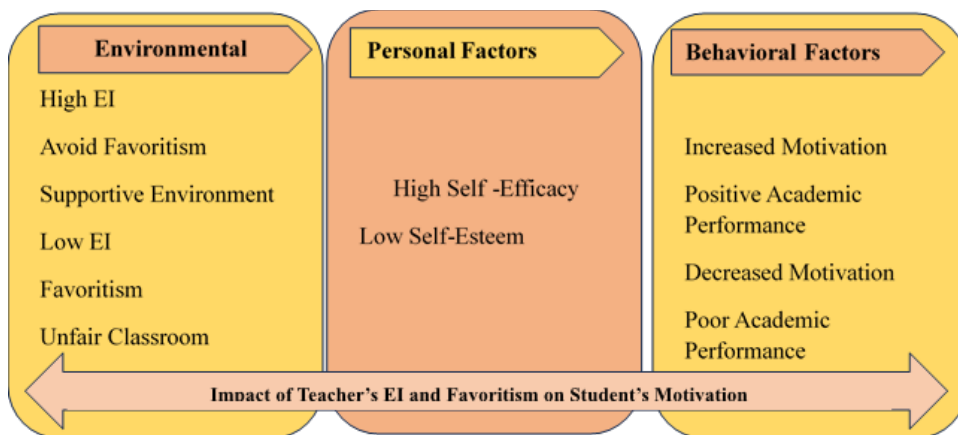
This study is guided by Albert Banduras Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, [1986](#)), which provides a valuable lens for understanding the role of ESL teachers emotional intelligence and favoritism in influencing students motivation and learning outcomes in Pakistans public and private universities. This theory offers valuable insights into the dynamic interactions between environmental influence, personal factors, and behaviors. Teachers, with high emotional intelligence, can create a positive learning environment, foster motivation and reinforcement, and build a strong relationship with students. On the other hand, favoritism creates a hostile environment in the class that leads to frustration, anger, and insecurity.

This theory explains how teachers with high emotional intelligence avoid favoritism and ensure equality and a positive learning environment, in contrast to teachers with low emotional intelligence who may not recognize how their favoritism affects students, which lowers their self-

esteem and self-efficacy. Within the framework of this study, the Bandura Social Cognitive Theory serves as a foundational concept for exploring the interplay between teachers emotional intelligence, and favoritism, as well as their mutual effect on students motivation. Figure 1 below presents a graphic illustration of Albert Banduras Social Co gnitive Theory (1986), which the researcher has designed in tabular form.

**Figure 1**

*Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986)*



This diagram illustrates how teachers emotional intelligence and favoritism affect students motivation through environmental, personal, and behavioral factors. Teachers with high emotional intelligence avoid favoritism and create a supportive learning environment. This promotes students self-efficacy, which leads to increased motivation and better academic performance. Teachers with low emotional intelligence tend to show favoritism, leading to an unfair classroom setting. This lowers their self-esteem and learning motivation, resulting in poor academic performance. Overall, the diagram illustrates how these environmental, personal, and behavioral factors are interconnected to each other that can positively or negatively impact the teaching and learning outcomes.

The next section explains the methodology, data collection procedure, and analysis methods, as well as the sampling technique respectively. The mixed-methods study uses both qualitative and quantitative data to investigate the effect of teachers emotional intelligence and favoritism on students motivation in Pakistani public and private sector universities. The

mixed method studies are reliable as they provide a clear picture of the collected data and its analysis (Ahmed et al., [2024](#); Wasti et al., [2022](#)). The quantitative data were collected from ESL teachers and students using google form, while the qualitative data were gathered from teachers. The questionnaire was used as a tool to collect data from students. The validity and reliability of the questionnaires were approved from the selected ESL teachers who already had completed their PhD from reputable institutes in Pakistan. Their names were not shared for data safety purposes. For further enquiry of the questionnaires' validity and reliability, pilot tests were conducted on a small-scale sample of the larger population (Ranganathan & Caduff, [2023](#)). An open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from the teachers. A 5 Likert scale questionnaire was employed to answer questions 1 and 3 from students. The qualitative data were gathered through ESL teachers to answer questions 1, 2, and 3 using a group discussion. The quantitative data were analyzed through R. The data were collected, prepared on excel, and then the excel file was uploaded on R. This file was further proceeded for changing the data into numerical codes, named as structure for R programming. Using this numerical structure, where R Version 4.5.1, (Altmann et al., [2025](#)), was adjusted to receive percentage of the given data, it was included in the command to bring in visualization of the data in the form of color-coded bars. Once a color-coded image of a bar chart was generated, it was downloaded and saved in the selected folder. The same procedure was used to analyze data collected from teachers. For analyzing the relationship between different variables, R was given different commands such as, Boxplot was generated to compare Emotional Intelligence and the distribution of favoritism scores among ESL teachers in public and private universities. The difference in boxplots reflected the difference of opinion. Then, a regression analysis and coefficient analysis were used to define linear relationship between ESL teachers Emotional Intelligence (EI) scores and students' motivation levels, and how different variables (predictors) influence motivation. However, the qualitative data were examined through codes and themes and how the selected themes reflect teachers perceptions regarding questions 1, 2, and 3. Each color-coded theme was counted. The collected numerical data was again transformed into an excel file. This excel file was uploaded to R and a unique commercial structure was generated for further analysis.

The study population consisted of 50 ESL lecturers and 150 ESL students from private and public sector universities in Pakistan. The

participants of the study were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The 150 ESL students were enrolled in BS and MS English programs in their final year in different universities in Punjab, Pakistan. On the other hand, a total of 50 ESL teachers were teaching BS and MS English programs to the same ESL students. These ESL teachers were PhD holders and serving in the department of English in different public and private universities in Punjab, Pakistan. This sample size was manageable, ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives from the participants, and was sufficient to gain meaningful insights from both perspectives

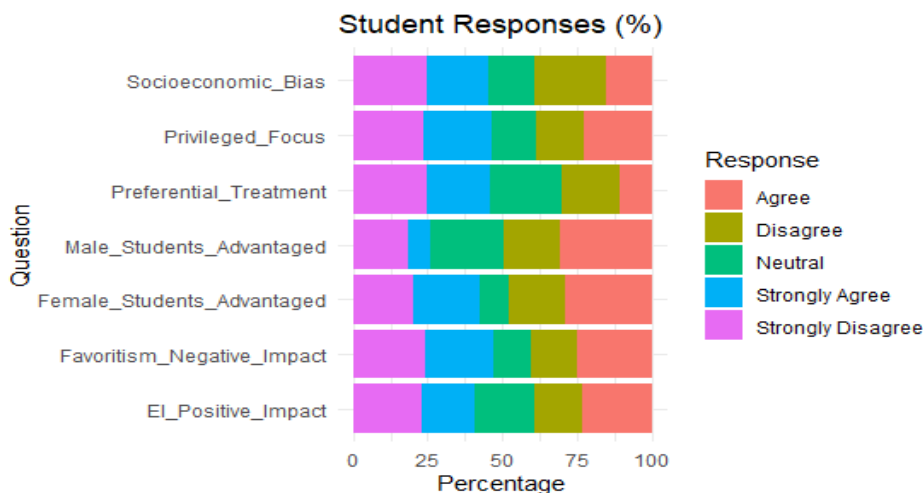
### Data Collection and Analysis

An adaptive questionnaire was used to collect data from the ESL students and teachers through Google Forms. The data were subjected to computerized analysis, which was performed using R programming.

### Results

**Figure 2**

*Students' Responses Using R Programming*



This stacked bar chart shows the percentage of student responses to different survey questions, and bias in an academic context. The Y-axis lists Socioeconomic Bias, Privileged Focus, Preferential Treatment, Male Students Advantaged, Female Students Advantaged, Favoritism's Negative Impact, and EI Positive Impact. The X-axis presents the percentage of responses (0% to 100%). In the figure, each question has a stacked bar

where the total adds up to 100% of responses. For most questions, there is a fairly even distribution across the 5 response categories, which suggests that student opinions are quite diverse—no single opinion dominates completely. The Agree (red) and Disagree (dark green) segments seem to take a larger portion in some questions like *Male Students Advantaged* (60% to 100%), *Female Students Advantaged* (60% to 100%), and *EI Positive Impact* (75% to 100%). The Strongly Disagree segment is present, but is smaller for all questions—indicating relatively fewer students strongly oppose the statements.

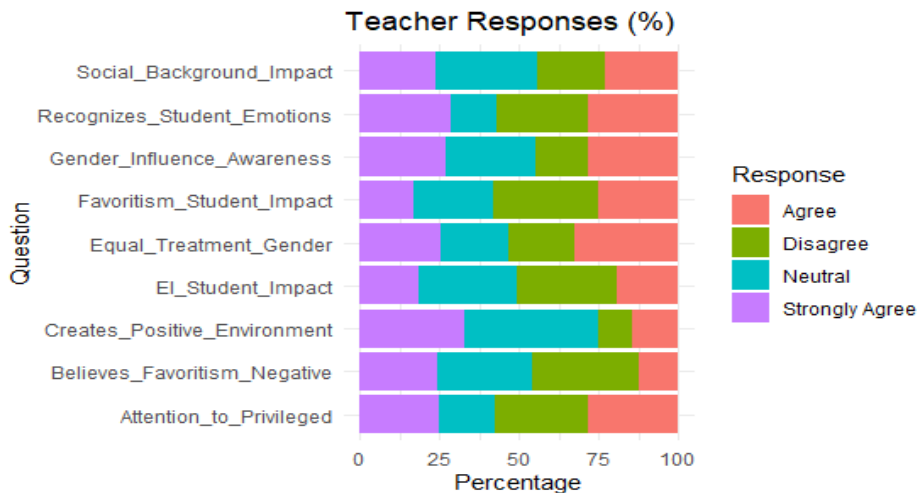
For Socioeconomic Bias (30%), Privileged Focus (30%), Preferential Treatment (32%), responses are fairly spread—moderate agreement and disagreement with a notable amount of neutral and strongly disagree responses. For Male Students Advantaged, a stronger lean toward Agree (75%), with smaller amounts of Strongly Disagree (20%), and Neutral (40%)—suggests more students perceive that male students are advantaged. For Female Students Advantaged, similar to the previous—slightly more balanced, but still more agreement than strong disagreement, that is 25%. For Favoritism Negative Impact, 40% Strongly Disagree and 60% Agree responses, show that many students feel that favoritism has a negative impact. For EI Positive Impact, there is a balance between Agree (35%), and Disagree (30%), which might suggest students are undecided or divided on whether EI has a positive impact. This shows that students do not universally agree or disagree on these issues; their perceptions vary. They are slightly more likely to feel that male and female students receive advantages in certain situations. Many students acknowledge that favoritism can negatively impact learning dynamics (Zaki et al., [2023](#)). These results showed no strong consensus about the positive impact of emotional intelligence—suggesting this area might need more awareness or clearer impact, that is also confirmed by Ghaith et al. ([2025](#)). In regards to cultural and social sensitivities in Pakistani higher education, especially in English departments, students are often exposed to discussions of gender, class, privilege, and emotional intelligence (Shoaib & Ullah, [2026](#)). However, certain biases may be deeply ingrained in social and institutional practices, sometimes going unchallenged, as stated by Donzelli ([2026](#)). The students recognize that socioeconomic status and privilege can influence teachers' behavior (Doyle et al., [2022](#)).

A mixed set of responses here reflects that some students clearly notice

biases, while others may have not personally experienced them (especially in a diverse student body from public and private universities). This aligns with the findings provided by Thoman et al. (2021). The results also reflected that Pakistani society, including universities, sometimes favors male students (e.g., greater leniency, leadership roles) (Buriro et al., 2026). Gender perceptions are not one-directional; even female advantage is noted in some contexts (perhaps in female-led departments). Both genders seem to be perceived as occasionally advantaged, suggesting institutional inconsistencies — different teachers or campuses may show varying preferences.

### Figure 3

#### *Teachers' Responses Using R Programming*



The Figure 3 is a stacked bar chart of ESL lecturers' responses to 9 questions/statements about social background, student emotions, gender influence, favoritism, Emotional Intelligence (EI), Equity and classroom climate. The X-axis presents a percentage of teacher responses (0–100%). The Y-axis shows survey questions. The themes shown in Figure 3 interpret various impressions. The theme of *Social\_Background\_Impact* shows 65% neutral opinion, *Attention\_to\_Privileged* shows 70% disagree opinion. This suggests that teachers *partly recognize* the role of socioeconomic privilege but may not be fully conscious or prepared to address it. The theme of *Recognition of Emotions* and *Gender Awareness* reflected upon 80% of Strongly Agree responses that lean toward agreement, but *Gender*

*Awareness* showed substantial Neutral responses that is around 75%. This implies that while some lecturers practice emotional awareness and gender sensitivity, others are undecided or unsure how these affect their teaching (Kanwal et al., 2018). The fourth and fifth themes, *Favoritism\_Student\_Impact* and *Believes\_Favoritism\_Negative* showed 85% agreement, that favoritism negatively impacts students — encompassing positive awareness here. However, the Neutral segment remains sizable with 65% and 70% respectively — some lecturers may not actively reflect on favoritism. The theme of *Equal\_Treatment\_Gender* shows roughly around 76% of the majority answering with Agree or Strongly Agree — shows that many lecturers believe they treat genders equally. These results confirm the findings of UNESCO (2023). But again, some Neutral and Disagree responses, in both the above categories, hint at inconsistency or uncertainty in actual practice. Themes of *EI\_Student\_Impact* and *Creates\_Positive\_Environment* show strong neutral responses that stand at 79% — teachers being largely doubtful about the value of emotional intelligence (EI) and the importance of fostering a positive environment. The 30% *Strongly Agree* ratio here than in other questions — shows lack of confidence in these pedagogical aspects.

**Figure 4**

*Emotional Intelligence by Sector Using R Programming*

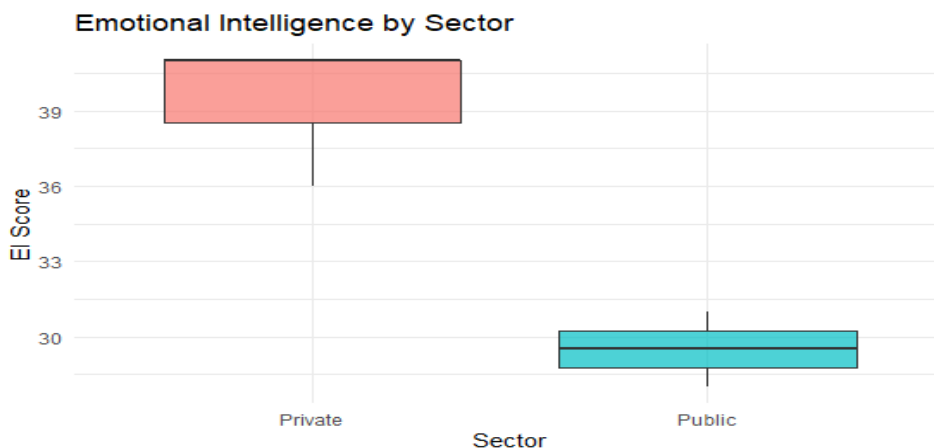


Figure 4 is a Boxplot comparing Emotional Intelligence (EI) scores between private and public sectors: The Y-axis shows EI score — numerical values of teachers' emotional intelligence, while the X-axis shows private

and public sectors. The findings of this analysis reveal that private university ESL lecturers show higher EI scores, up to 43%. This ratio is higher than those in public universities, stopping at 31%. The boxes do not overlap — this suggests a clear difference between the two sectors. The boxplot shows that median EI score of private sector universities is around 36–43 percent and for public universities it is around 0–31 percent. The private universities' EI scores are consistently high, showing less variability — most private sector teachers scored between 36 and over 40. The teachers at public sector universities' EI scores are lower and tightly clustered — suggesting a narrow band of lower EI scores. The possible reasons to this could be that private sector universities in Pakistan often invest more in teacher training, especially on soft skills and modern pedagogy. Furthermore, the private sector universities have performance evaluation systems, and encouraging EI competencies. They have student-centered teaching cultures (Tahira et al., [2020](#)). Public universities may face heavier workloads, less emphasis on professional development, and traditional teaching methods with less focus on EI (Khattak et al., [2025](#)).

Considering these findings, the study argues that sectoral differences influence teachers' development of EI skills. This raises the need for training programs to raise EI competencies in public university ESL lecturers. It suggests that institutional support and teaching culture play a key role in fostering EI.

**Figure 5**

*Favoritism by Sector Using R Programming*

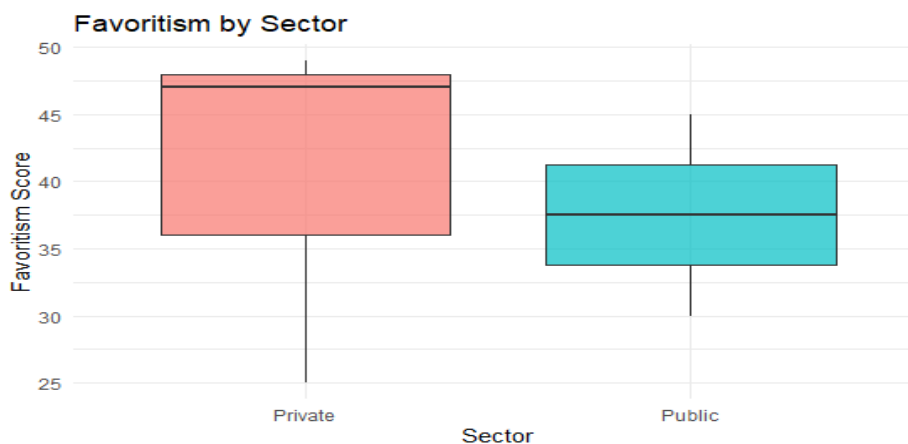
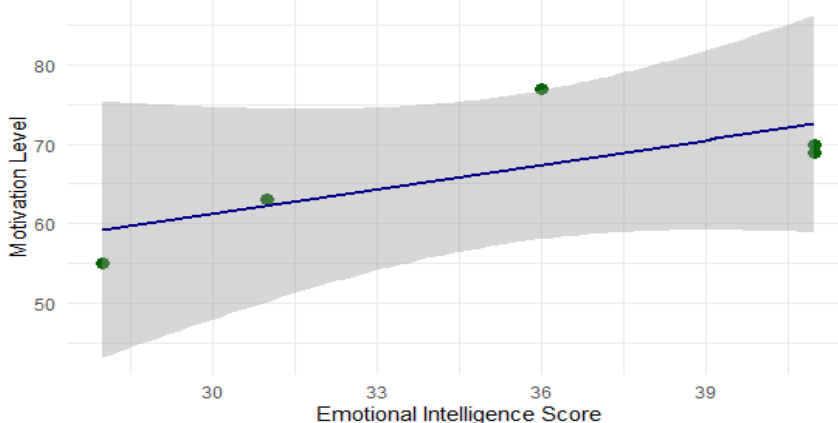


Figure 5 shows the boxplot that illustrates the distribution of favoritism scores among ESL teachers in private and public universities in Pakistan. This visualization is crucial for addressing the second research question. From the chart, it is evident that private sector teachers exhibit higher levels of perceived favoritism compared to those in the public sector with the difference of around 6%. The median favoritism score in the private sector is notably higher, hovering around 47%, whereas in the public sector, it is approximately 37%. Additionally, the range and interquartile spread are broader in the private sector, suggesting greater variability in favoritism perceptions. These findings imply that students in private universities may perceive more differential treatment or biased behavior from ESL teachers (Hamilton et al., [2025](#)). Such favoritism, if not managed by emotional intelligence, can negatively impact students' motivation and learning outcomes, fostering feelings of exclusion or discouragement (Johari et al., [2025](#)). In contrast, the relatively lower favoritism scores in public universities may indicate a more consistent and impartial teaching approach, potentially contributing to a more equitable learning environment.

When interpreted alongside measures of emotional intelligence, this data can help determine whether higher EI in teachers serves to moderate or mitigate the negative effects of favoritism, especially in the private sector. If EI is lacking, favoritism may directly diminish student engagement and academic performance.

### Figure 6

*Effect of Emotional Intelligence on Motivation Using R Programming*



To address the third question, this plot alone shows the direct effect of EI on motivation, but does not account for favoritism as a moderator. However, when interpreted in conjunction with the earlier boxplot (favoritism by sector), a conceptual inference can be drawn that shows that in environments where favoritism is perceived to be high (e.g., private sector), the positive impact of EI on motivation may be weakened (Hamilton et al., [2025](#)). Even if a teacher scores high on emotional intelligence, the presence of favoritism could erode trust and fairness, undermining student motivation (Johari et al., [2025](#)). Conversely, in settings with low favoritism (e.g., public sector), EI may have a stronger and more consistent positive effect on learning outcomes, as students are more likely to perceive their teachers as fair, supportive, and emotionally attuned (Saleem & Akhtar, [2025](#)).

Thus, the counter analysis of the data shows that favoritism acts as a potential moderator in this relationship—dampening or amplifying the benefits of emotional intelligence depending on its presence and level. A moderated regression analysis is recommended to statistically verify this interaction and determine whether favoritism significantly influences the strength or direction of the EI-motivation link.

### Figure 7

#### *Effect of Favoritism on Learning Using R Programming*

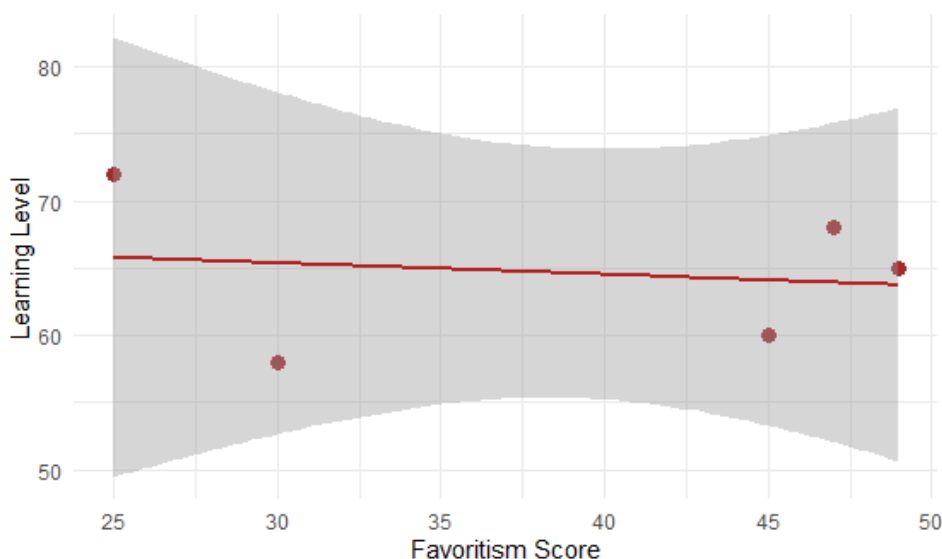


Figure 7 shows the scatter plot to display the relationship between students' perceived favoritism and their learning levels. The X-axis represents Favoritism Scores — higher values mean more perceived favoritism. The Y-axis represents Learning Level — higher values indicate better learning outcomes. Each point shows an individual observation; the red line represents the trend (regression line) and the shaded area shows the margin of error (confidence interval). The regression line slopes slightly downward, indicating that as favoritism increases, students' learning levels tend to decrease. Although the slope is relatively flat — suggesting that the relationship is weak — the trend points in a negative direction, implying that perceived favoritism by teachers may undermine students' learning outcomes. Statistically, Favoritism scores 29.2 and 45 for mean and median respectively. For learning levels, scores are 64.6 and 65 as mean and median respectively. The Pearson correlation statistics stand at  $(r): \approx -0.18$  showing a negative outcome. This suggests that when students perceive their teachers as showing favoritism, they may feel less motivated or less fairly treated. This can reduce their engagement, effort, or sense of belonging (Johari et al., 2025). As a result, their learning performance may decline (Arshad, 2023). Thus, the plot provides crucial evidence that favoritism has a negative relationship with learning outcomes in a way that more favoritism causes lower learning levels.

### Figure 8

#### *Regression Coefficient Using R Programming*

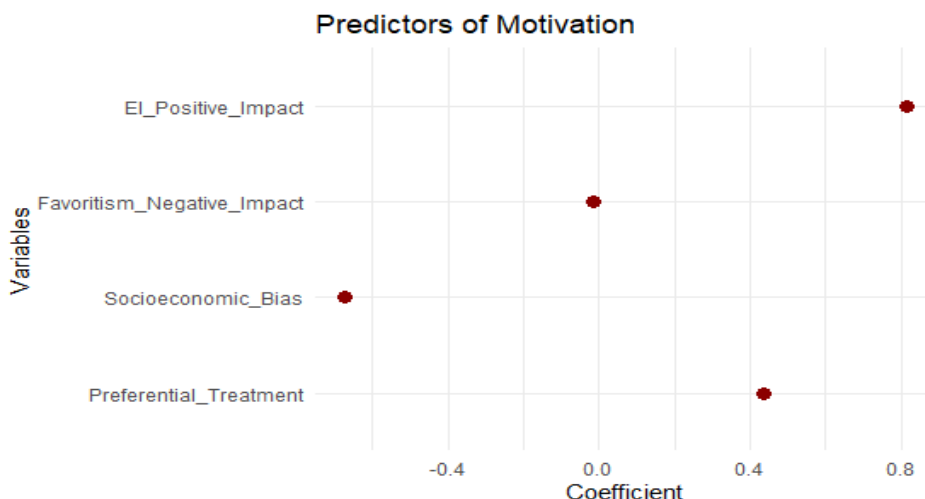


Figure 8 is a coefficient plot showing how four different variables (predictors) influence motivation, which can be considered a proxy for students' learning outcomes. Different variables show different impacts. The *EI\_Positive\_Impact* (Coefficient  $\approx +0.81$ ) shows strong positive effect. The *Favoritism\_Negative\_Impact* (Coefficient  $\approx -0.01$ ) shows near-zero, negligible direct negative effect. The *Socioeconomic\_Bias* (Coefficient  $\approx -0.67$ ) displays strong negative effect. The *Preferential\_Treatment* (Coefficient  $\approx +0.44$ ) variable shows moderate positive effect. The *EI\_Positive\_Impact (Strong Positive Influence)* indicates that teachers' emotional intelligence strongly enhances students' motivation (Randa & Tasnim, 2025). It means that emotional intelligence likely creates a supportive, inclusive, and empathetic learning environment. The variable of *Favoritism\_Negative\_Impact (Near-Zero Coefficient)* indicates that favoritism on its own doesn't directly impact motivation significantly. This suggests that favoritism might not *directly* reduce motivation—but its interplay with other factors (like EI) could matter more. The analysis might interpret that in environments where preferential treatment exists, the positive effect of EI might be reinforced, but only for favored students (Xuan, 2025). Conversely, for students not receiving preferential treatment, the benefits of teacher's EI may be dampened due to perceived unfairness or demotivation. This concludes that favoritism moderates the relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and students' learning outcomes by potentially amplifying positive effects for some (those favored), while nullifying or reducing it for others (Saleem & Akhtar, 2025). In line with the above statistics, the net coefficient effect of favoritism is small, indicating that this moderating role may not apply uniformly across the population. It concludes that favoritism acts as a conditional moderator (Arasli et al., 2021). When low or absent, EI's positive effect on student motivation is likely more equitable and impactful across the board. When present, EI might only boost motivation selectively, reducing the overall fairness and effectiveness of emotionally intelligent teaching practices.

## Discussion

The analysis of student responses regarding biases and emotional intelligence in the classroom reveals nuanced perceptions among BS English students across public and private universities in Pakistan. The findings indicate that students are aware of socioeconomic bias, privileged focus, and preferential treatment in academic settings, though responses are

mixed, reflecting both recognition and variability in personal experience. Notably, a significant portion of students perceive that both male and female students may receive advantages in certain contexts, suggesting institutional inconsistencies and complex gender dynamics within university environments which is also linked to Feng et al. (2023). Moreover, a clear majority of students recognize that favoritism exerts a negative impact on learning outcomes and classroom dynamics, underscoring the importance of fair and transparent teaching practices (Zaki et al., 2023). Conversely, responses to the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on teaching outcomes are more divided, which may point to a lack of emphasis on EI in pedagogical approaches or insufficient visibility of its benefits in classroom interactions. These findings align with the conclusion provided by Keefer et al. (2018) who highlighted the need for targeted professional development initiatives focused on bias awareness, inclusive teaching strategies, and the integration of emotional intelligence competencies within English departments in Pakistani higher education institutions.

The comparative analysis of Figure 2 suggests that teachers appear more confident about the importance of EI, positive classroom climate, and gender equity than about addressing privilege and socioeconomic bias which can be aligned to the findings concluded by Heinz et al. (2025). It is also concluded that favoritism is recognized as harmful, but awareness may not be uniform across all teachers' communities (Bayram et al., 2024). The presence of substantial Neutral responses suggests that some ESL lecturers may lack formal training on these issues, or they might be unaware of how their own teaching could unintentionally reflect bias or favoritism. The mixed results also indicate institutional variability — practices and teacher perspectives may differ between public and private universities, or even among departments. This implies that professional development should go beyond emotional intelligence, and also address equity issues (gender, class, privilege), bias awareness, strategies to reduce favoritism in student engagement and assessment. Universities should provide structured reflection opportunities for ESL lecturers on how unconscious biases affect their teaching. The fact that EI and positive environment get stronger agreement suggests potential entry points for broader training — building on existing strengths that aligns with the findings provided by Bhatt (2024).

The comparative analysis of emotional intelligence (EI) scores among ESL lecturers in public and private universities in Pakistan reveals a marked

difference between the two sectors (Anwar et al., [2021](#)). These findings may reflect institutional differences in professional development opportunities, pedagogical expectations, and the emphasis placed on soft skills and emotional competencies. Private universities, with typically more competitive environments and greater investment in teacher training, may foster greater awareness and application of EI in teaching practices (Trad et al., [2022](#)). In contrast, public universities, often constrained by larger class sizes, traditional teaching norms, and limited resources, may provide fewer avenues for the cultivation of emotional intelligence (Muse, [2010](#)). This disparity underscores the need for targeted interventions and training programs in the public sector to enhance the emotional competence of ESL lecturers and promote more supportive and emotionally attuned classroom environments (Dewaele et al., [2018](#)).

The analysis of the relationship between ESL teachers' emotional intelligence and students' motivation reveals a positive correlation, indicating that higher levels of teacher EI are generally associated with enhanced student motivation—an essential component of effective learning. However, when favoritism is introduced as a moderating factor, the dynamics of this relationship become more complex as concluded by Lasisi et al. ([2022](#)). Favoritism, particularly in the private sector as seen in earlier visualizations, may weaken the beneficial impact of emotional intelligence by fostering a classroom environment perceived as biased or unequal (Zaki et al., [2023](#)). Zaki et al. ([2023](#)) further stated that in such cases, even emotionally intelligent teachers may struggle to maintain students' trust and motivation if favoritism is evident. On the other hand, in more equitable contexts like the public sector—where favoritism scores are lower—the positive influence of EI on motivation may be more fully realized (Isabel & María-Dolores, [2023](#)). These findings align with the conclusion provided by Todmal et al. ([2023](#)) who suggest that while emotional intelligence is a valuable asset for fostering student engagement, its effectiveness is contingent upon a fair and inclusive teaching environment. Therefore, institutions aiming to improve learning outcomes should not only promote emotional intelligence training among faculty but also implement strategies to reduce favoritism in classroom practices.

The analysis suggests that perceived favoritism has a negative effect on students' learning outcomes. As shown in the figure 5, higher favoritism scores are associated with slightly lower learning levels, indicating that

when students are treated with prejudice, it may undermine their motivation, engagement, or sense of fairness in the classroom. Although the effect appears modest and should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size, this trend highlights the importance of maintaining fairness and equal treatment to foster a supportive learning environment for all students. Teachers and school leaders should aim to minimize favoritism to support all students equally and maintain high levels of learning as suggested by Muhammad and Sheikh ([2023](#)).

## Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the effect of ESL teachers' emotional intelligence and favoritism on the quality of education in Pakistani private and public sector universities, integrating students' perceptions. For teachers and policy makers, this study concludes that professional development on bias awareness, inclusive teaching, and emotional intelligence would be very useful for English departments (Xuan, [2025](#)). Since students perceive favoritism as damaging, universities should encourage transparent grading and equal participation (Johari et al., 2025). These patterns may differ across public and private institutions—further analysis (e.g., comparison by institution type) could reveal more. The lack of strong consensus on EI's benefits could be improved with curriculum design that includes EI-based teacher training and classroom activities (Edwin et al., [2025](#)). The study concludes students' mixed perceptions as an area for future improvement in teacher training. The study argues that university administrators and English department heads should consider policies to minimize favoritism and promote socioemotional learning (Attiah & Alhassan, [2023](#)). It is also note worthy that students are aware of gendered and class-based advantages, which could feed into a broader dialogue on equity in Pakistani higher education.

The study delivers a clear awareness that favoritism harms learning and student morale (Arshad, [2023](#)). This is crucial as students are conscious of fairness and the need for equitable teaching. The study also confirms that emotional intelligence is not always practiced openly by instructors or is not universally valued in Pakistani academic culture (Shahzad, [2025](#)). This also indicates that students are unsure regarding how EI translates into actual teaching quality or learning outcomes (Xuan, [2025](#)).

The study also concludes that favoritism, while not universally

detrimental, may differentially influence student outcomes (Zaki et al., 2023). However, this comes at a cost to overall equity, as unfavored students may perceive the classroom climate as unjust, potentially diminishing the positive effects of EI for those individuals (Erasmus et al., 2022). As such, favoritism emerges as a moderating factor that shapes the distribution—but not necessarily the direction—of EI’s impact on motivation (Dorrough et al., 2015). The study highlights important implications for educational practice, emphasizing the need for emotionally intelligent teaching to be coupled with fairness and impartiality to ensure that its motivational benefits are equitably realized by all students. For future practice, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, Pakistan align its educational policies with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all learners (United Nations [UN], 2026). In addition, teacher training programmes should be designed in accordance with the United Nations' educational framework, with a particular emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Implementing these recommendations would also be consistent with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which highlights the role of supportive learning environments in fostering positive educational outcomes.

#### Author Contribution

**Faria Kiani:** conceptualization, data curation, investigation, methodology, project administration.

**Salma Naeem:** formal analysis, supervision, validation, writing, review & editing.

#### Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

#### Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

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