



Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding through Education: Perspectives of Emotional and Social Intelligence

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Abstract: Conflict is increasing globally, with a notable rise in fatalities in Europe and Middle East due to the Russia-Ukraine war and severe losses in Gaza. South Asia is tense with India-Pakistan disputes and militancy, while Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Sudan, faces growing casualties and humanitarian issues. Smaller areas, such as Manipur, struggle with ethnic conflicts, highlighting the urgent need for peace education. The “Taleem-e-Amn” program in Pakistan demonstrates how community education can foster tolerance. The mid-2020s bring heightened conflict, with global military expenditure reaching \$2.7 trillion, making security feel more fragile. This paper examines how incorporating psychological intelligence in education can help resolve conflicts and promote peace. It aims to analyse conflict dynamics, explore Emotional and Social Intelligence's roles, develop a framework for school curricula, and offer policy recommendations. The study pulls together research from 2020 to 2026 using the SALSA framework i.e., search, appraisal, synthesis, and analysis to map out what sustainable peacebuilding might look like (Torraco, 2016; Klang et al., 2014). The literature points to a stubborn gap that we still don’t know enough about how to transform mindsets in communities most vulnerable to conflict (Sanik, 2024). What’s clear is that if we want lasting peace, we need to embed EI and SI into national education systems. EI aids emotional regulation, and SI helps navigate social complexities, together creating meaningful change. That means investing in teacher training and creating emotionally safe spaces what some call “brave spaces” where students can practice empathy and resilience. These steps are vital for making real progress on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 16. In the

end, this study charts a path forward. By harnessing psychological intelligence, we can build a stronger defence against global chaos rooted not in weapons, but in the human mind.

Keywords: *Peacebuilding, Emotional Intelligence, Social Intelligence, Positive Peace, Sustainable Development Goals.*

1. Introduction

Conflict today looks very different depending on where you stand in the world. Europe, for one, has seen the sharpest shift since 2021. Fatalities tied to conflict there doubled between 2023 and 2024 driven mostly by the escalating war between Russia and Ukraine. In the Middle East and North Africa, Gaza's crisis has reached a breaking point that more than 45,500 people have died, and by 2024, 90% of Gazans have been forced from their homes.

Look to South Asia, and the India-Pakistan border stands out as a flashpoint. In 2025, cross-border fire between the two hit its worst level in decades. Militant attacks, like the Pahalgam incident in April 2025, only pour fuel on the fire, prompting India to launch "Operation Sindoor" in a direct effort to dismantle terror networks. These eruptions show just how delicate peace can be in the region and how quickly violence can unravel diplomatic progress.

Sub-Saharan Africa, though, holds the grim distinction of hosting the largest number of active conflicts. The civil war in Sudan alone is responsible for about a quarter of all conflict deaths in the region. The toll is staggering that over a thousand nutrition centers shut their doors, cutting off life-saving care for hundreds of thousands of children suffering from malnutrition.

Meanwhile, the ethnic violence in Manipur, a state in northeastern India, throws into sharp relief why we desperately need to weave Emotional and Social Intelligence into peace education. What began as a dispute between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities in May 2023 spiraled into open conflict. More than 60,000 people lost their homes, the death toll climbed above 260, and by 2025, the government imposed president's rule as law and order broke down entirely. Arson, attacks on religious sites, and mass displacement became the new normal.

Pakistan offers a hopeful counterpoint. Facing decades of sectarian violence and extremism, initiatives like "Taleem-e-Amn" (Education for Peace) have taken a broader view, aiming to change attitudes not just in classrooms, but across entire communities. The result is a ripple of tolerance that pushes far beyond school walls.

By the mid-2020s, the world finds itself at a crossroads. Old systems meant to keep the peace are starting to buckle under the weight of renewed large-scale wars and new, more complex forms of aggression. Global military spending has soared \$2.7 trillion in 2025, up

nearly 10% in a year, eating up 2.5% of the world's GDP. This surge in militarization marks a world sliding back toward major interstate wars, especially in Europe and the Middle East, all while civil conflicts burn on in Africa and Southeast Asia. On the ground, the numbers are staggering that record-high fatalities seen, over 120 million people displaced, and communities torn apart. The fallout threatens to wipe out hard-won progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. In the middle of all this chaos, education stands out as a rare beacon which is a force that can actually change mindsets and lay the groundwork for peace. It's not just about teaching facts; it's about shaping the way people think, addressing the roots of violence and intolerance.

Traditional diplomacy and military solutions just aren't enough anymore. That's where emotional and social skills come in and it is the "soft architecture" of peace. Emotional Intelligence (EI), the ability to recognize and manage one's own feelings and Social Intelligence (SI), the knack for navigating relationships and social dynamics are now seen as essential for building a culture of peace. These qualities let people defuse tension, foster empathy, and communicate without violence. When schools nurture EI and SI, they become more than places to learn math or history and they become hubs of peace making.

But there's still a big problem. Despite all the talk about the importance of EI and SI, research on how these skills actually change people's mindsets, especially among those living on the margins or in conflict zones is sorely lacking. School systems are overloaded, frameworks for social-emotional learning (SEL) are missing, and the promise of SEL is mostly unrealized in national peacebuilding strategies.

This inquiry aims to close those gaps. It seeks to understand how individual emotional awareness and collective social harmony connect, and how nurturing EI and SI might shift attitudes, especially in the toughest environments.

2. Conceptual Background and Theoretical Foundations

Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding: A Conceptual Overview

We don't have to see conflict as something bad. It's more like a natural clash of interests or opinions which is something that just happens when people gather (McCathy, 2022). Researchers break it down into two main types i.e., functional conflict, which can actually help teams make better decisions and spark creativity, and dysfunctional conflict, which leads to personal grudges and chaos within organizations (Jehn, 1997; Rahim, 2002).

Modern peacebuilding theory started with the difference between negative peace, just the absence of violence and positive peace, which is deeper. Positive peace means tackling the root causes like inequality, injustice, exclusion (Galtung, 1969; UNESCO, 2023). Danesh's

Integrative Theory of Peace (2006) takes it further, arguing that real peace depends on our ability to think and feel in ways that support unity. Then you have the 4Rs framework i.e., Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation which gives us a way to see if institutions are actually healing old wounds and breaking down barriers (Pherali, 2021).

Education for Peace and Social Cohesion

Education for peace isn't just about teaching kids to behave. It's about giving them the tools and values to actually change the world (UNESCO, 2024). This idea connects closely to Global Citizenship Education (GCED), which pushes for solidarity and human rights everywhere. Schools and universities play a special role here. They become "brave spaces" where students can talk honestly, challenge their own biases, and use arts and literature to imagine a better society (Harber, 2018; Sanik, 2024). The real aims are to build up skills like nonviolent communication, critical thinking, and civic ethics which are necessary for creating peaceful communities, not just quiet classrooms.

Emotional Intelligence (EI): Theoretical Perspectives

Mayer and Salovey (1990) kicked off the study of Emotional Intelligence (EI), calling it the ability to monitor both your own and others' emotions to guide what you do. Daniel Goleman (1995) brought it into the mainstream, laying out five key elements i.e., self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and managing relationships.

EI matters in conflict because it helps people stay cool and think clearly instead of lashing out or letting emotions run wild (Goleman, 1998; Pollack, 2025). People with strong EI tend to choose collaborative ways to handle conflict and they're more likely to listen, empathize, and find common ground (Jordan & Troth, 2002; Shahin, 2020).

Social Intelligence (SI): Theoretical Perspectives

Social Intelligence has been around as a concept since Thorndike (1920), who described it as the knack for understanding and working with people (Crowne, 2009). Unlike EI, which is mostly about managing your own feelings, SI is about reading other people and navigating social situations.

Albrecht's S.P.A.C.E. model (2007) breaks SI down into five parts i.e., Situational Awareness, Presence, Authenticity, Clarity, and Empathy. In peacebuilding, SI is crucial as it lets people pick up on unspoken rules and connect across cultures (Silvera et al., 2001). By helping people move past stereotypes and really listen, SI becomes the bridge for honest conversation and real cooperation, especially where conflict runs deep.

2. Review and Synthesis of Related Literature

Linking Emotional Intelligence with Conflict Management and Regulation

Researchers keep coming back to the same point that Emotional Intelligence (EI) strongly predicts how well people handle conflict. When people know themselves and show empathy, they don't just react but they step back, keep their cool, and think things through (Goleman et al., 2023). In the heat of a dispute, folks with high EI don't default to fighting or avoiding. Instead, they go for an "integrating" or collaborative approach, the kind that actually balances personal needs with keeping the peace (Maniago & Alamri, 2020; Shahin, 2020).

Emotional regulation plays a key role here. It keeps people from falling into "amygdala hijack" which is the moment when emotions take over and reason gets sidelined. With good emotional regulation, people pause, assess the situation, and choose a response that calms things down instead of making them worse (Lazarus, 1991; Pollack, 2025). Across age groups, from teens to working professionals, higher EI goes hand-in-hand with more confidence in handling conflict and less burnout (Malik et al., 2023; Ravanbakhsh Esmaeili et al., 2015). Gender shows up as a factor too; studies often find that female adolescents score higher in EI and lean more toward cooperative ways of resolving conflict.

Social Intelligence and Interpersonal/Intergroup Harmony

Social Intelligence (SI) is a different animal. Where EI is inward-looking, SI is all about reading other people and fitting into social situations (Thorndike, 1920). SI means picking up on cues, adapting to group norms, and understanding what's unsaid (Albrecht, 2007; Goleman, 2006). When researchers use the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS), they find that people who are better at processing social information and staying aware of their surroundings are happier and more satisfied with life (Silvera et al., 2001). SI matters for big-picture harmony too. It helps people step into others' shoes, break down prejudice, and resist the urge to stereotype just to make sense of things quickly. This is especially crucial in multicultural settings, where relational cultural intelligence (RCI) helps people handle stress and build bridges across differences.

Educational Interventions for Peace and Social Harmony

Education has started to catch on, making Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) a foundation for building peace that lasts. Massive studies over half a million student show that Universal School-Based (USB) SEL programs really do work. Students gain social skills, get along better with peers, do better in school, and show fewer problems like anxiety and aggression (Durlak et al., 2011; Yale School of Medicine, 2023). Programs such as RULER

and mindfulness-based emotional intelligence training (MBEIT) give students practical skills for navigating relationships.

Deeper change comes from transformative peace education, which uses the 4Rs framework i.e., Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation, to dig into the root causes of social division (Pherali, 2021). By weaving peace concepts into teacher training, schools turn educators into “multipliers of change.” These teachers don’t just talk about justice and mediation but they model it in their daily work (Ali & Hussain, 2021; Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

2.1 Identified Gaps and Inconsistencies in Existing Literature

Gaps and inconsistencies stand out in the current literature. While theories around these intelligences sound promising, researchers haven’t really dug into how peace education actually changes social mindsets over time, especially among people who are marginalized, poor, or can’t read and write (Sanik, 2024). Theoretical inconsistencies are also found; for instance, while high EI is generally linked to collaboration, some studies among healthcare managers and young adults appear that no statistical correlation between overall EI and specific conflict resolution styles, suggesting that organizational complexity or cultural contexts may moderate these effects.

There’s also a big problem with how these ideas get worked into national curricula. Most systems are already overloaded, and too often, the changes are more about appearances than real and lasting reform. Then there’s the digital world. Research barely scratches the surface when it comes to how EI and SI can tackle problems like digital misinformation or online conflicts. We just don’t have much evidence yet on how these intelligences play out in the age of cyber disruption.

3. Objectives of the Paper

This paper digs into how psychological intelligence, when woven into education, can actually help resolve conflicts and lay the groundwork for lasting peace. The main goal is to pull apart and analyze, from several angles, exactly how these ideas connect and can be used in real-world settings. Specifically, the objectives are as follows:

- i. To analyse current global and local conflict dynamics to underscore the urgent need for education as a preventative tool for peacebuilding in a highly militarized 2026 landscape.

- ii. To investigate the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence linking Emotional Intelligence (EI) sub-competencies such as self-regulation and empathy to effective conflict management styles.
- iii. To explore the role of Social Intelligence (SI) in fostering intergroup harmony, bridging cultural divides, and reducing prejudice within educational and professional environments.
- iv. To develop a conceptual framework that integrates EI and SI within school curricula, pedagogy, and climate to empower students as active agents of social change.
- v. To identify critical research gaps and provide actionable policy recommendations aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 16 for long-term social harmony.

4. Methodology

For this research, the researcher used an Integrative Literature Review (ILR), a qualitative approach perfect for examining new, evolving intersections like psychological intelligence and peace education. This method lets the researcher critique, compare, and stitch together existing research to build new theoretical models. The process unfolds in four phases i.e., conceptual, empirical, interpretative, and synthesis. I gathered material from interdisciplinary databases such as Scopus and ResearchGate, as well as policy documents from UNESCO and conflict trend reports from SIPRI, focusing on works published between 2020 and 2026. The analysis follows the SALSA framework (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, and Analysis), which keeps the review transparent and repeatable. The study paid special attention to gaps in practical implementation, especially in marginalized contexts, and to theoretical mismatches between emotional sub-competencies and conflict styles. By drawing on examples from healthcare, leadership, and classroom environments, this method aims to build a unified “soft architecture” model for sustainable peacebuilding.

Conceptual Framework for Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

The core idea here is to blend Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Social Intelligence (SI) as the foundation, the “soft architecture” for peacebuilding in schools. The integration happens by treating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as a thread running through educational practice, turning classrooms from passive sites of information into active spaces for peace making.

Pathways of Influence

EI and SI shape conflict resolution through different, but complementary, channels. EI gives people the internal regulatory mechanisms necessary to prevent “amygdala hijacks” as it

enable themselves to pause and choose thoughtful, non-violent responses over impulsive aggression (Lazarus, 1991). Empathy is key because it turns internal awareness into real collaborative problem-solving. Meanwhile, SI works externally, providing the skills to read social cues, understand unspoken rules, and navigate complex group dynamics.

Role of Stakeholders and Environmental Moderators

Moving from individual change to collective peace depends on four essential pillars (Mahoney et al., 2021):

- **Teachers:** They're "multipliers of change," modeling EI every day and setting the emotional tone for the entire school.
- **Curriculum:** Peace concepts can't be tacked on as afterthoughts but they need to be built into the core curriculum to drive real, lasting change.
- **Pedagogy:** Methods like dialogue circles and storytelling foster empathy and help students exercise their "moral imagination."
- **School Climate:** The overall environment matters. Creating a "brave space" gives students the psychological safety to practice conflict resolution without fear of judgment.

Educational Implications for Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

Schools need to move beyond old-school behaviour management. Instead, they should structurally embed EI and SI into the heart of their curricula (Msila, 2011). Peace education shouldn't be an optional add-on; it belongs in subjects like History and Literature, where it can get at the roots of conflict and division (Pherali, 2021). This way, students build the cognitive and emotional tools they need for real, long-term social harmony.

Teaching strategies should focus on participation and dialogue while critical thinking and empathy are the real goals here (Freire, 1970). Techniques like dialogue circles, Non-Violent Communication (NVC), and "brave spaces" help students explore identity, question prejudice, and work through disagreements. Group projects and cooperative learning give them hands-on practice in resolving disputes without defaulting to aggression or avoidance (Bolanle, 2021).

All of this hinges on teachers. They're at the centre of this shift, modelling restorative justice and emotional regulation for their students (Ali & Hussain, 2021). Professional development needs to address the current shortage of trained faculty and provide ongoing institutional support to prevent burnout and sustain educators in high-stress, conflict-affected contexts (Patti & Stern, 2024).

Policy and Practice Implications

Educational policy needs to move past empty gestures and actually embed peace education in national standards and teacher certification (Msila, 2011). This isn't just about tweaking lessons here and there but it calls for a multidimensional policy that links social support with personal growth. Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Social Intelligence (SI) can't remain side notes, they have to become core outcomes for all students (UNESCO, 2023). These changes line up directly with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace and Justice), because they open access to skills that build non-violence and social justice (UN Office for Partnerships, 2023).

In practice, this work has to reach beyond schools, building peace "ecosystems" at both institutional and community levels. Projects like "Taleem-e-Amn" show how involving whole communities can actually shift social attitudes, not just classroom behaviour (Sanik, 2024). Schools need to adopt restorative justice and peer mediation, making young people active peacemakers instead of passive learners (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). For achieving these outcomes, systematic funding to support marginalized populations and long term professional capital development for educators to sustain these transformative practices are required (Mahoney et al., 2021).

Research Implications and Future Directions

There's a huge gap in research around how peace education actually changes social attitudes (Sanik, 2024). The framework here creates space for serious empirical work. Future studies should use Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and standardized tools like the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) to map out how different kinds of intelligence relate to specific conflict management outcomes (Silvera et al., 2001). But numbers aren't enough. Qualitative work, long-term case studies and thematic analysis can dig into the experiences of people in marginalized communities (Ali & Hussain, 2021).

A mixed-methods approach is the way forward, especially when it comes to integrating cultural and spiritual intelligence (McDonald, 2025). Future research should focus on peace capacity in pre-service teacher training and higher education (Ndwandwe, 2024). In fragile regions like South Asia, studies must look at how curricula with psycho-social support for displaced populations can promote real healing (Pherali, 2021).

Synthesis and Strategic Outlook

The evidence gathered here points to a clear problem, as countries ramp up for "war footing" in 2026, they ignore what actually works for building peaceful, inclusive societies.

When military spending balloons, it often drains support from social programs and aid, which only deepens the grievances that drive extremism.

Actionable Recommendations for a Peaceful Future

- **Integrate EI/SI into National Curricula:** Make emotional and social competencies a real part of the core curriculum, not just an afterthought.
- **Institutionalize Teacher Training:** Focus on developing emotional intelligence in teachers and school leaders so they can set the example.
- **Harness Technology for Dialogue:** Use AI and digital platforms to widen citizen engagement and improve conflict analysis, while also teaching students to spot digital manipulation.
- **Promote the Positive Peace Paradigm:** Redesign the curriculum to tackle the roots of conflict i.e., inequality, structural violence, and the absence of social justice.

4. Conclusion

The findings here make one thing clear that resolving conflict, whether global or local, demands a shift away from militarization and toward preventative, intelligence-driven education. The big conceptual insight in study is that Emotional Intelligence offers the self-control needed to check aggression, while Social Intelligence gives the empathy and social awareness required to navigate complex relationships. When schools embed these skills, education stops being just a way to transfer knowledge and becomes a force for real, positive peace.

This study contributes significantly to the fields of education, peace studies, and psychology forward by constructing a unified framework that the position of teachers as “multipliers of change” and school climates as “brave spaces” for social healing. By mapping out how psychological skills can dismantle prejudice and counter hate speech, it strengthens the peace education paradigm, even as the world faces a record \$2.7 trillion military burden and new digital threats in 2026.

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