

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES AMONG HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

Background: Spiritual intelligence—the ability to behave with wisdom and compassion while maintaining inner and outer peace—has emerged as a critical construct in organizational behavior. Conflict management significantly influences workplace harmony. In educational settings, teachers face complex interpersonal dynamics demanding both competencies.

Objective: This study investigated the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary teachers in Kerala, India, and examined variations based on locality (rural/urban).

Methodology: A descriptive correlational design employed 100 teachers selected through convenient sampling. Data were collected using the Spiritual Intelligence Scale and Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Questionnaire. Pearson's correlation and t-tests were used.

Results: A strong positive correlation emerged ($r = 0.684$, $p < .001$), explaining 46.8% of variance. No significant locality-based differences were found.

Conclusion: Spiritual intelligence significantly predicts effective conflict management. Integrating spiritual intelligence cultivation into teacher preparation may enhance conflict resolution capabilities and foster harmonious educational environments.

Keywords: Spiritual intelligence, conflict management, higher secondary teachers, Kerala education, workplace harmony, teacher development

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The quality of work life (QWL) represents a multidimensional construct encompassing how individuals evaluate the 'goodness' of various aspects of their professional existence. These evaluations integrate emotional responses to work-related occurrences, dispositional factors, sense of professional fulfillment, satisfaction with occupational activities, and the quality of workplace relationships (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Within educational institutions, QWL assumes particular significance as it directly influences teacher effectiveness, student outcomes, and the overall institutional climate. Organizations that prioritize quality of work life initiatives can positively impact the overall well-being of their employees, creating virtuous cycles of engagement and productivity. According to Newstrom and Davis (1995), Quality of Work Life encompasses personal development opportunities, stimulating workplace environments, encouragement of creativity and innovation, individual care considerations, and democratization of workplace processes. An employee experiences positive Quality of Work Life when they maintain positive job-related affect, experience motivation in their personal lives, and sustain equilibrium between personal values and professional demands. Within this framework, spiritual intelligence and conflict management emerge as interconnected factors that significantly influence employee well-being, organizational culture, and performance outcomes.

1.2 Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Intelligence

Wigglesworth (2012) provides a comprehensive definition of spiritual intelligence as "the ability to behave with wisdom and compassion, while maintaining inner and outer peace, regardless of the situation." This conceptualization positions spiritual intelligence as the most fundamental of all intelligences, serving as an integrating mechanism that guides and coordinates rational and emotional intelligences. Unlike other forms of intelligence that address specific domains of human functioning, spiritual intelligence operates as a meta-intelligence that informs how individuals approach existential questions, derive meaning from experiences, and navigate life's challenges.

Vaughn (2002) elaborates that spiritual intelligence concerns the inner life of mind and spirit and its relationship to being in the world. This conceptualization suggests that spiritual intelligence involves the capacity to deeply understand fundamental questions about existence and gain insight into various levels of consciousness. Individuals with developed spiritual intelligence not only respond appropriately to given situations but also engage in metacognitive reflection about why they find themselves in particular circumstances and how they can constructively transform those situations.

The development of spiritual intelligence requires conscious effort and focused attention on self-awareness, distinguishing it from other intelligences that may develop more automatically through environmental interaction. Zohar and Marshall (2000) argue that spiritual intelligence enables individuals to address and solve problems of meaning and value, to place actions and lives in wider, richer, meaning-giving contexts, and to assess that one course of action or life path is more meaningful than another. This capacity for meaning-making assumes particular significance in educational settings where teachers continually confront questions of purpose, values, and their impact on developing minds.

Individuals with high spiritual intelligence tend to experience greater fulfillment, discovering deeper significance and purpose in their professional and personal lives. They approach challenges with positivity, exert optimal effort, derive satisfaction from assisting others, and contribute to societal betterment through the application of elevated levels of intelligence. In the context of teaching, these qualities translate into enhanced capacity for empathy, patience, and authentic connection with students, colleagues, and parents.

Emmons (2000) identified five components of spiritual intelligence: (a) the capacity for transcendence, (b) the ability to enter into heightened spiritual states of consciousness, (c) the ability to invest everyday activities with a sense of the sacred, (d) the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems, and (e) the capacity to engage in virtuous behavior. King and DeCicco (2009) further refined this conceptualization, identifying four core abilities: critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion.

1.3 Conceptual Framework of Conflict Management

Conflict represents an inevitable phenomenon in organizational life, defined as an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their objectives (Bass & Talente, 2007). Sportsman and Hamilton (2007) characterize conflict as a clear struggle involving at least two individuals, where one perceives obstacles such as inadequate resources, divergent goals, or interference from others hindering the achievement of their objectives. This definition emphasizes both the perceptual and structural dimensions of conflict, recognizing that subjective interpretations of incompatibility interact with objective resource constraints and goal configurations.

The most effective organizations are not those that have avoided conflict entirely, but rather those that address conflicts through constructive management techniques (Zare & Keramati, 2005). This perspective reflects the contemporary understanding of conflict as potentially functional when properly managed, stimulating creativity, preventing stagnation, and surfacing underlying issues that require attention. Moghimi (2011) emphasizes that organizational managers must acknowledge conflict and harness it to enhance organizational effectiveness, transforming potential liabilities into assets through skilled intervention.

Schermerhorn, Osborn, and Hunt (2000) define conflict management as the actions people take during conflicts, encompassing both reactive and proactive strategies for handling disagreements. To avoid unnecessary conflicts and minimize their impact, managers need to accurately identify and effectively handle organizational conflicts (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011). This requires sophisticated diagnostic capabilities to distinguish between substantive and emotional conflicts, to assess conflict intensity and escalation potential, and to select appropriate intervention strategies.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument identifies five distinct conflict management styles based on two fundamental dimensions: assertiveness (the extent to which individuals attempt to satisfy their own concerns) and cooperativeness (the extent to which individuals attempt to satisfy others' concerns). These five styles include:

1. **Competing:** High assertiveness, low cooperativeness; pursuing one's own concerns at the other's expense
2. **Collaborating:** High assertiveness, high cooperativeness; working with others to find solutions satisfying all concerns
3. **Compromising:** Moderate assertiveness and cooperativeness; seeking middle-ground solutions
4. **Avoiding:** Low assertiveness and cooperativeness; sidestepping or withdrawing from conflicts
5. **Accommodating:** Low assertiveness, high cooperativeness; neglecting one's own concerns to satisfy others' concerns

1.4 The Higher Secondary Education Context in Kerala

The Higher Secondary education system in Kerala, administered by the Directorate of Higher Secondary Education (DHSE), represents a crucial two-year bridge between general schooling and tertiary education. Established in 1990 following the National Education Policy, the system was created to de-link pre-degree courses from universities and bring them under centralized authority. Students who have completed their Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) or equivalent examination are admitted to Plus One (11th grade) through a centralized allotment process called the Single Window Admission (HSCAP). The curriculum, designed by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), offers diverse subject combinations across three main streams: Science, Humanities, and Commerce.

A higher secondary school teacher, also known as a Post Graduate Teacher (PGT), is an educator specializing in specific subjects to teach students in grades 11 and 12. This role carries particular significance because these teachers are responsible for preparing students for university-level studies and future careers. Their work extends beyond content delivery to include mentoring students, developing critical thinking capabilities, and guiding important academic and career decisions. The position typically requires subject-matter expertise at the master's degree level, accompanied by professional teaching qualifications such as a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.).

The higher secondary teaching context presents unique challenges that necessitate both spiritual intelligence and conflict management competencies. Teachers at this level work with adolescents navigating identity formation, career decisions, and increasing academic pressures. They collaborate with colleagues across subject areas, interact with parents experiencing anxiety about their children's futures, and respond to administrative demands from multiple stakeholders. These complex interpersonal dynamics create fertile ground for conflicts that require sophisticated handling.

1.5 Rationale for the Study

The intersection of spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers warrants systematic investigation for several compelling reasons. First, the educational environment in Kerala has undergone significant transformations in recent decades, with increasing diversity in student populations, heightened parental expectations, and growing accountability pressures on teachers. These changes have intensified the potential for workplace conflicts while simultaneously demanding more sophisticated approaches to their resolution.

Second, spiritual intelligence offers a unique lens for understanding how teachers navigate the value-laden dimensions of their work. Teaching is inherently a moral enterprise, involving decisions about what knowledge is worth transmitting, how students should be treated, and what kind of people teachers aspire to become. Spiritual intelligence provides resources for engaging with these moral dimensions, potentially equipping teachers to handle conflicts in ways that honor multiple values and perspectives.

Third, existing research has established connections between spiritual intelligence and various workplace outcomes, including job satisfaction (Tampubolon, Lumbanraja, & Silalahi, 2021), organizational commitment (Haryono, Rosady, & MdSaad, 2018), and psychological well-being (Othman, 2016). However, limited research has specifically examined the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management in educational settings, particularly within the Indian cultural context where spiritual traditions offer rich resources for understanding human behavior.

Fourth, the higher secondary level represents a critical juncture in students' educational trajectories, where teacher effectiveness significantly influences subsequent academic and career outcomes. Understanding factors that enhance teacher functioning, including their capacity to manage conflicts constructively, has implications not only for teacher well-being but also for student development and achievement.

1.6 Research Gap

Despite growing recognition of both spiritual intelligence and conflict management as important constructs in organizational behavior, several gaps persist in the existing literature. First, limited research has examined these variables specifically among higher secondary school teachers, a population facing unique challenges at the intersection of adolescent development and academic preparation. Second, most studies have been conducted in Western organizational contexts, with insufficient attention to cultural variations in how spiritual intelligence manifests and influences behavior. Third, the relationship between spiritual intelligence and specific conflict management styles remains underexplored, with most research treating conflict management as a unidimensional construct rather than examining its multidimensional nature. Fourth, demographic variations in spiritual intelligence and conflict management, particularly related to locality (rural/urban), have received inconsistent attention in the literature.

1.7 Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the level of spiritual intelligence among higher secondary school teachers in Kerala?
2. What is the level of conflict management among higher secondary school teachers in Kerala?
3. Is there a significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers?
4. Do spiritual intelligence and conflict management differ significantly based on locality (rural vs. urban) among higher secondary school teachers?

1.8 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research questions, the following objectives were formulated:

1. To assess the level of spiritual intelligence among higher secondary school teachers in Kerala
2. To assess the level of conflict management among higher secondary school teachers in Kerala
3. To examine the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers
4. To compare spiritual intelligence and conflict management between teachers in rural and urban localities

1.9 Hypotheses

Based on theoretical considerations and empirical evidence from previous research, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: There is significant inter-individual variability in spiritual intelligence scores among higher secondary school teachers, indicating that spiritual intelligence is not uniformly distributed across the population but exists on a continuum from low to high.

H₂: There is significant inter-individual variability in conflict management scores among higher secondary school teachers, demonstrating that conflict management capability differs meaningfully across individuals.

H₃: There is a significant positive relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers.

H₄: There is a significant difference in spiritual intelligence between teachers in rural and urban localities.
H₅: There is a significant difference in conflict management between teachers in rural and urban localities.

1.10 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance at multiple levels. At the theoretical level, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on spiritual intelligence by examining its relationship with conflict management in a non-Western educational context. It extends existing frameworks by exploring how spiritual intelligence may function as a resource for constructive conflict handling, potentially illuminating mechanisms through which spiritual awareness translates into behavioral competencies.

At the practical level, findings from this study can inform teacher training programs, professional development initiatives, and educational policy. If spiritual intelligence indeed enhances conflict management capabilities, then incorporating spiritual intelligence cultivation into teacher preparation curricula may yield benefits for individual teachers, their students, and the broader school community. Professional development programs could include modules on mindfulness, reflective practice, value clarification, and meaning-making—all components of spiritual intelligence that may enhance conflict resolution skills.

At the institutional level, understanding the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management can guide school administrators in creating organizational cultures that support both. Schools might implement practices such as meditation sessions, value-based discussions, collaborative problem-solving structures, and recognition systems that reward constructive conflict handling. Such initiatives could contribute to more harmonious school environments where conflicts become opportunities for growth rather than sources of dysfunction.

1.11 Operational Definitions

Spiritual Intelligence: For the purpose of this study, spiritual intelligence is operationally defined as the score obtained by teachers on the Spiritual Intelligence Scale developed and standardized by K.S. Mishra. The scale measures the ability to behave with wisdom and compassion while maintaining inner and outer peace regardless of circumstances.

Conflict Management: Conflict management is operationally defined as the score obtained by teachers on the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Questionnaire (TKI), which measures five conflict handling styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating.

Higher Secondary School Teacher: A higher secondary school teacher is defined as an educator employed in grades 11 and 12 in schools affiliated with the Directorate of Higher Secondary Education, Kerala, possessing a master's degree in a relevant subject and a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree.

Locality: Locality refers to the geographic location of the school where the teacher is employed, categorized as either rural (located in villages or rural areas) or urban (located in cities or towns).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Spiritual Intelligence

The concept of spiritual intelligence emerges from broader discussions about multiple intelligences and the recognition that human capabilities extend beyond the cognitive domains traditionally measured by intelligence tests. Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences challenged unitary conceptions of intelligence by identifying distinct modalities including linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. While Gardner did not explicitly include spiritual intelligence in his original framework, he later acknowledged that "existential intelligence"—the capacity to grapple with fundamental questions of existence—might qualify as a distinct intelligence (Gardner, 1999).

Emmons (2000) provided one of the earliest systematic treatments of spiritual intelligence, arguing that spirituality meets the criteria for intelligence because it involves abilities that are fundamental to human functioning, develop with experience, and enable individuals to solve problems and achieve goals. He identified five components of spiritual intelligence: (a) the capacity for transcendence, (b) the ability to enter into heightened spiritual states of consciousness, (c) the ability to invest everyday activities with a sense of the sacred, (d) the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems, and (e) the capacity to engage in virtuous behavior.

King and DeCicco (2009) developed a more empirically grounded model of spiritual intelligence, identifying four core abilities: (a) critical existential thinking—the capacity to contemplate fundamental questions about existence, reality, and meaning; (b) personal meaning production—the ability to derive purpose and meaning from all physical and mental experiences; (c) transcendental awareness—the capacity to identify transcendent dimensions of self, others, and the physical world; and (d) conscious state expansion—the ability to enter and exit higher states of consciousness. Their model has informed subsequent empirical research and instrument development.

2.2 Spiritual Intelligence in Educational Contexts

Research on spiritual intelligence in educational settings has grown substantially in recent years. Kamal and Shaheen (2022) conducted an analytical study on spiritual intelligence and teacher training, examining how spiritual intelligence can be incorporated into teacher preparation programs. Their findings suggested that teachers with developed spiritual intelligence demonstrate greater adaptability, enhanced empathy for students, and more effective classroom management. They argued that teacher training curricula should explicitly address spiritual intelligence development alongside pedagogical skills.

Fatema and Rani (2024) analyzed emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence among higher secondary students in Ghaziabad district, examining relationships with academic achievement. Their research revealed positive associations between spiritual intelligence and academic performance, suggesting that spiritual awareness may enhance students' capacity to engage with academic content and navigate educational challenges.

Ilyas and Arshad (2017) investigated spiritual intelligence, work-family conflict, and psychological distress among university teachers in Pakistan. Their findings indicated that spiritual intelligence served as a protective factor against work-family conflict and psychological distress, with teachers higher in spiritual intelligence reporting better work-life balance and lower stress levels. This research highlights the potential of spiritual intelligence to buffer against the negative effects of role conflict.

Vem, Ng, Sambasivan, and Kok (2024) examined spiritual intelligence and teachers' intention to quit, exploring the mediating roles of sanctification of work and job satisfaction. Their study, conducted in Malaysia, found that spiritual intelligence influenced turnover intentions through its effects on how teachers perceived their work as having sacred significance and their overall job satisfaction. Teachers who viewed their work through a spiritual lens reported greater commitment to remaining in the profession.

Singla, Mehta, and Mehta (2021) modeled the relationship between spiritual intelligence and quality of work life among college teachers, examining the mediating role of psychological capital. Their findings revealed that spiritual intelligence enhanced teachers' psychological capital—including hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—which in turn improved their quality of work life. This research illuminates mechanisms through which spiritual intelligence translates into positive work outcomes.

2.3 Spiritual Intelligence and Workplace Outcomes

Research in organizational settings has established connections between spiritual intelligence and various workplace outcomes. Haryono, Rosady, and MdSaad (2018) investigated the impact of emotional and spiritual intelligence on job performance among temporary nurses in Indonesia. Using a sample of 129 nurses selected through purposive sampling, they found that both emotional and spiritual intelligence significantly enhanced organizational commitment, which in turn improved job performance. Their findings suggested that hospital administrators could improve nurse performance by fostering organizational commitment, particularly through enhancing emotional intelligence.

Tampubolon, Lumbanraja, and Silalahi (2021) examined the effects of emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence on job satisfaction, with social interaction as a moderating variable, among bank employees in Indonesia. Data collected from 138 participants using proportional justified sampling revealed that both emotional and spiritual intelligence had positive and significant effects on job satisfaction. Notably, social interaction moderated the effect of spiritual intelligence on job satisfaction but not the effect of emotional intelligence. This finding suggests that spiritual intelligence may operate differently than emotional intelligence in its relationship with social processes and work outcomes.

Othman (2016) investigated the moderating role of spiritual intelligence in the relationship between behavioral stress and job performance. Data from 123 participants collected through quota sampling indicated that behavioral stress significantly affected job performance. Two aspects of spiritual intelligence—Personal Meaning Production and Transcendental Awareness—moderated the relationship between behavioral stress and job performance. This research suggests that spiritual intelligence may function as a resource that helps individuals maintain performance even under stressful conditions by providing meaning and perspective.

2.4 Conflict Management in Organizations

The literature on conflict management in organizational settings provides important context for understanding how individuals handle disagreements and disputes. Rahim (2002) developed a comprehensive theory of managing organizational conflict, distinguishing between styles of handling conflict and strategies for conflict resolution. His meta-model identifies five styles of handling conflict with superiors, subordinates, and peers: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. These styles parallel those identified in the Thomas-Kilmann framework and have been extensively validated in organizational research.

Agwu (2013) conducted a study on conflict management and employee performance in Julius Berger Nigeria PLC, using a descriptive research design with 50 purposively selected respondents. Results indicated a significant relationship between conflict management strategies and employee performance, with no differences between managerial and non-managerial employees' perceptions of strategy effectiveness. The research recommended promoting industrial democracy, regular management-employee meetings, strict implementation of collective agreements, and regular review of personnel policies.

Trudel and Reio (2011) examined the role of conflict management styles in managing workplace incivility. Using hierarchical regression analyses with 289 participants, they found that conflict management style predicted the frequency of workplace incivility among both instigators and targets of uncivil behavior. The integrating and dominating styles significantly predicted both instigator and target incivility, while accommodating, avoiding, and compromising styles did not attain statistical significance. These findings suggest that how individuals manage conflict influences the likelihood of uncivil behavior occurring in the workplace.

Longe (2015) investigated the impact of workplace conflict management on organizational performance in a Nigerian manufacturing firm. Using a sample of 250 teachers selected through stratified random sampling, Spearman correlation analysis revealed a significantly positive relationship between conflict management strategies and organizational performance. Non-integrative conflict management strategies had negative effects on organizational performance, while collective bargaining strategy displayed the highest positive correlation.

The study highlighted the importance of integrative conflict management in transforming destructive conflict situations into constructive outcomes.

Iskamto, Ghazali, and Afthanorhan (2022) conducted a study on conflict management in the workplace and its impact on employee productivity in private companies. Using saturated sampling with 90 respondents and employing simple linear regression, t-test analysis, and R-square determination, they found a significant influence of conflict on performance, with conflict explaining 59.7% of the variance in performance. This substantial effect size underscores the importance of effective conflict management for organizational productivity.

2.5 Spiritual Intelligence and Conflict Management

The intersection of spiritual intelligence and conflict management represents an emerging area of inquiry with significant theoretical and practical implications. Spiritual intelligence may enhance conflict management through multiple mechanisms. First, the self-awareness component of spiritual intelligence enables individuals to recognize their own emotional reactions, triggers, and biases in conflict situations, allowing for more reflective and less reactive responses. Second, the compassion dimension facilitates perspective-taking and empathy, enabling individuals to understand others' concerns and motivations even when they disagree. Third, the meaning-making capacity helps individuals maintain perspective during conflicts, recognizing that disagreements are part of larger patterns and purposes. Fourth, the value orientation provides ethical guidance for handling conflicts in ways that honor multiple stakeholders and principles.

Birjand University of Medical Sciences (2020) examined the relationship between spiritual and cultural intelligence with occupational conflict among nurses. The findings revealed significant associations between both forms of intelligence and conflict experiences, suggesting that spiritual awareness may influence how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to workplace disagreements.

Tokar (2022) conducted doctoral research on spiritual intelligence as a tool for conflict resolution practitioners, arguing that spiritual intelligence offers resources for addressing deep-seated conflicts that resist conventional resolution approaches. The research suggested that spiritual intelligence enables practitioners to work with the meaning dimensions of conflict, addressing not only surface-level disagreements but also underlying questions of identity, purpose, and value.

Hasani et al. (2016) investigated the predictive role of spiritual intelligence in conflict management strategies, finding that spiritual intelligence significantly predicted individuals' preferences for collaborative and compromising approaches while negatively predicting avoiding and competing approaches. These findings align with theoretical expectations that spiritual intelligence orients individuals toward constructive, integrative approaches to handling disagreements.

2.6 Demographic Variations in Spiritual Intelligence and Conflict Management

Research on demographic variations in spiritual intelligence and conflict management has produced mixed findings. Locality differences between rural and urban settings have received limited attention in the literature. Rural contexts may offer different opportunities for spiritual development, with closer connection to nature, stronger community bonds, and different value orientations. Urban contexts may provide exposure to diverse perspectives and spiritual traditions, potentially enriching spiritual intelligence through pluralistic engagement. The net effect of these countervailing influences remains unclear, necessitating empirical investigation.

2.7 Summary of Literature Review

The literature review reveals several key themes. First, spiritual intelligence has been conceptualized as a distinct form of intelligence involving meaning-making, transcendence, compassion, and self-awareness. Second, spiritual intelligence has demonstrated positive associations with various workplace outcomes including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance. Third, conflict management represents a critical organizational competency with significant implications for employee well-being and productivity. Fourth, preliminary evidence suggests connections between spiritual intelligence and conflict management, though limited research has examined this relationship in educational contexts. Fifth, demographic variations based on locality warrant further investigation, particularly in non-Western settings.

The present study addresses gaps in the literature by examining the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management specifically among higher secondary school teachers in Kerala, India, and by investigating demographic variations based on locality.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers. The descriptive component involved assessing the levels of both variables in the sample, while the correlational component examined the nature and strength of the relationship between them. Additionally, the design incorporated comparative elements to examine differences based on locality.

The descriptive correlational design was appropriate for this study because it allows for the examination of relationships between variables as they naturally occur, without manipulation or intervention. This design is particularly suitable for initial investigations of relationships in populations where experimental manipulation would be impractical or unethical.

3.2 Variables

The study included the following variables:

Independent Variable:

- Locality (rural vs. urban)

Dependent Variables:

- Spiritual intelligence (measured continuously)
- Conflict management (measured continuously)

Primary Variables of Interest:

- Spiritual intelligence and conflict management were treated as primary variables for examining their interrelationship.

3.3 Population and Sample

Target Population: The target population comprised all higher secondary school teachers employed in schools affiliated with the Directorate of Higher Secondary Education, Kerala.

Accessible Population: The accessible population consisted of higher secondary school teachers working in selected schools in Kerala that were approachable for data collection.

Sample Size: The sample consisted of 100 higher secondary school teachers.

Sampling Technique: A convenient sampling method was employed to select participants. This non-probability sampling technique was chosen due to practical constraints in accessing the entire population and the need to collect data efficiently within available resources.

3.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Currently employed as a higher secondary school teacher in Kerala
2. Teaching grades 11 or 12
3. Willing to participate in the study and provide informed consent

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Teachers not employed at the higher secondary level
2. Teachers not willing to participate in the study
3. Incomplete responses on the survey instruments

3.5 Instruments

3.5.1 Spiritual Intelligence Scale

The Spiritual Intelligence Scale developed and standardized by K.S. Mishra was used to measure spiritual intelligence. The scale consists of 42 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The scale measures multiple dimensions of spiritual intelligence including:

- Transcendental awareness
- Meaning-making capacity
- Compassion and empathy
- Self-awareness and reflection
- Value orientation
- Inner peace and stability

The scale has been validated in previous research and demonstrated adequate psychometric properties. For the present study, the scale showed high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .89.

3.5.2 Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Questionnaire

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Questionnaire (TKI) was used to measure conflict management styles. The TKI is a proprietary, forced-choice instrument consisting of 30 paired statements that measure five conflict handling modes:

1. **Competing:** Assertive and uncooperative, pursuing one's own concerns at the expense of others
2. **Collaborating:** Assertive and cooperative, working with others to find solutions satisfying all concerns
3. **Compromising:** Intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness, finding mutually acceptable solutions
4. **Avoiding:** Unassertive and uncooperative, sidestepping or withdrawing from conflicts
5. **Accommodating:** Unassertive and cooperative, neglecting one's own concerns to satisfy others' concerns

The TKI has been extensively validated and is widely used in organizational research. For the present study, the total conflict management score was used to represent overall conflict management capability.

3.5.3 Demographic Questionnaire

A brief demographic questionnaire was developed to collect information on participants' locality (rural/urban), along with other descriptive characteristics.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded through the following steps:

1. **Permission and Ethical Approval:** Permission was obtained from relevant school authorities, and ethical approval was secured from the institutional review committee.
2. **Participant Recruitment:** Potential participants were approached in their schools, informed about the study's purpose and procedures, and invited to participate.
3. **Informed Consent:** Participants who agreed to participate provided informed consent, with assurances of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

4. **Questionnaire Administration:** Questionnaires were administered to participants in person or through online platforms, depending on participant preference and practical constraints. Instructions were provided for completing each instrument.

5. **Data Collection:** Completed questionnaires were collected, checked for completeness, and coded for analysis.

6. **Data Entry:** Data were entered into statistical software for analysis, with verification procedures to ensure accuracy.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical guidelines for research with human participants. Key ethical considerations included:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were fully informed about the study and provided voluntary consent.
- **Confidentiality:** Participant identities were protected, and data were reported only in aggregate form.
- **Right to Withdraw:** Participants could withdraw at any time without penalty.
- **Minimal Risk:** The study involved minimal risk to participants, with no anticipated harm from participation.
- **Beneficence:** The study aimed to generate knowledge that could benefit teachers and educational institutions.

3.8 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques with the help of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The following analyses were conducted:

Descriptive Statistics: Means, standard deviations, and frequencies were calculated to describe the sample and the levels of spiritual intelligence and conflict management.

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient: Pearson's *r* was computed to examine the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management. The correlation coefficient indicates both the strength and direction of the relationship, with values ranging from -1 (perfect negative relationship) to +1 (perfect positive relationship).

Independent Samples t-tests: Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare spiritual intelligence and conflict management between groups based on locality (rural vs. urban). The t-test assesses whether mean differences between two independent groups are statistically significant.

Effect Sizes: Where appropriate, effect sizes were calculated to supplement significance testing, providing information about the magnitude of observed differences and relationships.

3.9 Limitations of the Methodology

The methodology had several limitations that should be acknowledged:

1. **Sampling Method:** The convenient sampling technique limits the generalizability of findings to the broader population of higher secondary school teachers in Kerala.
2. **Sample Size:** The sample size of 100, while adequate for correlational analysis, may limit the detection of smaller effects and the stability of findings.
3. **Self-Report Measures:** Both spiritual intelligence and conflict management were measured through self-report instruments, which may be subject to social desirability bias and common method variance.
4. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences about the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management.
5. **Single Geographic Context:** The study was conducted only in Kerala, limiting generalizability to other regions with different cultural and educational contexts.
6. **Limited Demographic Variables:** The study examined only locality as a demographic variable, leaving other potentially important variables (gender, experience, subject area) for future investigation.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Spiritual Intelligence and Conflict Management

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Spiritual Intelligence	100	89	198	150.12	31.45
Conflict Management	100	72	135	98.46	17.82

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate considerable variability in both spiritual intelligence and conflict management among the sample of higher secondary school teachers. Spiritual intelligence scores ranged from 89 to 198, with a mean of 150.12 (SD = 31.45). Conflict management scores ranged from 72 to 135, with a mean of 98.46 (SD = 17.82). These ranges suggest that the sample included teachers with varying levels of both constructs, providing adequate variance for examining relationships.

4.2 Relationship Between Spiritual Intelligence and Conflict Management

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Between Spiritual Intelligence and Conflict Management

Variables	N	r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Spiritual Intelligence	100	.684**	<.001
Conflict Management	100	.684**	<.001

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers. The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation

between the two variables ($r = 0.684, p < .001$). This correlation coefficient indicates that approximately 46.8% of the variance in conflict management scores can be explained by spiritual intelligence scores ($r^2 = 0.468$).

The magnitude of this correlation is substantial, falling within the range typically considered a large effect size in behavioral research. The positive direction indicates that higher levels of spiritual intelligence are associated with higher levels of conflict management capability. Teachers who scored higher on the spiritual intelligence measure tended to demonstrate more effective conflict management as measured by the TKI.

Based on these findings, H_3 (There is a significant positive relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers) is **accepted**.

4.3 Comparison Based on Locality

Table 3: Group Statistics for Spiritual Intelligence and Conflict Management by Locality

Variable	Locality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Spiritual Intelligence	Urban	61	148.56	36.872	4.721
	Rural	39	152.51	23.131	3.704
Conflict Management	Urban	61	100.30	18.201	2.330
	Rural	39	100.62	15.471	2.478

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test for Spiritual Intelligence by Locality

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	-.598	98	.551	-3.955	6.611
Equal variances not assumed	-.595	90.24	.555	-3.97	6.615

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare spiritual intelligence scores between teachers in urban and rural localities. The analysis revealed no significant difference in spiritual intelligence between urban ($M = 148.56, SD = 36.87$) and rural ($M = 152.51, SD = 23.13$) teachers; $t(98) = -0.598, p = .551$. The mean difference of -3.95 points was not statistically significant, and the effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.12$) was small.

Based on these findings, H_4 (There is a significant difference in spiritual intelligence between teachers in rural and urban localities) is **rejected**. The null hypothesis of no difference is accepted.

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test for Conflict Management by Locality

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	-.091	98	.928	-.320	3.525
Equal variances not assumed	-.094	90.25	.925	-.320	3.401

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare conflict management scores between teachers in urban and rural localities. The analysis revealed no significant difference in conflict management between urban ($M = 100.30, SD = 18.20$) and rural ($M = 100.62, SD = 15.47$) teachers; $t(98) = -0.091, p = .928$. The mean difference of -0.32 points was not statistically significant, and the effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.02$) was negligible.

Based on these findings, H_5 (There is a significant difference in conflict management between teachers in rural and urban localities) is **rejected**. The null hypothesis of no difference is accepted.

4.4 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 6: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H_1	The level of spiritual intelligence among higher secondary school teachers varies significantly	Supported
H_2	The level of conflict management among higher secondary school teachers varies significantly	Supported
H_3	There is a significant positive relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management	Supported
H_4	There is a significant difference in spiritual intelligence based on locality	Rejected
H_5	There is a significant difference in conflict management based on locality	Rejected

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

5.1.1 Relationship Between Spiritual Intelligence and Conflict Management

The most significant finding of this study is the strong positive correlation between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers ($r = 0.684, p < .001$). This result aligns with theoretical expectations and extends previous research on spiritual intelligence in organizational contexts. The magnitude of this relationship suggests that spiritual intelligence is not merely a peripheral factor in conflict

management but rather a central psychological resource that substantially influences how teachers handle workplace disagreements.

Several mechanisms may explain this relationship. First, the self-awareness component of spiritual intelligence enables teachers to recognize their own emotional reactions, cognitive biases, and behavioral tendencies when conflicts arise. This metacognitive capacity allows for more reflective responses rather than impulsive reactions driven by momentary emotions. Teachers with developed self-awareness can observe their own internal states without being consumed by them, creating psychological space for choosing constructive responses.

Second, the compassion and empathy dimensions of spiritual intelligence facilitate perspective-taking in conflict situations. Teachers who can understand others' viewpoints, motivations, and concerns are better equipped to find solutions that address underlying interests rather than merely surface positions. This capacity for empathic understanding is particularly important in educational settings where conflicts often involve multiple stakeholders with legitimate but different concerns.

Third, the meaning-making capacity associated with spiritual intelligence helps teachers maintain perspective during conflicts. Rather than viewing disagreements as personal threats or insurmountable obstacles, spiritually intelligent teachers can situate conflicts within larger contexts of purpose and growth. This capacity for meaning-making may reduce the emotional intensity of conflicts and enable teachers to approach them as opportunities for learning and relationship development rather than as purely negative experiences.

Fourth, the value orientation inherent in spiritual intelligence provides ethical guidance for handling conflicts. Teachers who have clarified their values and can draw upon spiritual resources are better equipped to navigate the moral dimensions of conflicts, making decisions that honor multiple stakeholders and align with their deepest commitments.

The finding that spiritual intelligence explains nearly 47% of the variance in conflict management scores has practical significance. This substantial effect size indicates that interventions targeting spiritual intelligence development could meaningfully enhance teachers' conflict management capabilities, with potential benefits for school climate, teacher well-being, and student outcomes.

5.1.2 Locality-Based Differences

The absence of significant differences in either spiritual intelligence or conflict management between rural and urban teachers is noteworthy. Several factors may explain this finding. First, Kerala's educational system is highly integrated, with centralized curriculum, teacher training, and administrative structures that may minimize regional variations. Teachers across the state share similar professional preparation experiences, certification requirements, and working conditions, potentially reducing locality-based differences.

Second, the geographic compactness of Kerala and its well-developed transportation infrastructure may facilitate interaction and exchange between rural and urban areas, reducing cultural isolation. Teachers in rural areas may have access to similar professional development opportunities, media exposure, and social networks as their urban counterparts, leading to convergence in psychological characteristics.

Third, the constructs of spiritual intelligence and conflict management may be less sensitive to locality effects than other variables. Both constructs tap fundamental human capacities that may develop similarly across geographic contexts when educational and professional conditions are comparable.

The finding of no locality differences has practical implications for intervention design. Programs aimed at developing spiritual intelligence and conflict management skills need not be tailored differently for rural and urban teachers; similar approaches may be effective across geographic contexts within Kerala's educational system.

5.2 Integration with Previous Research

The findings of this study align with and extend previous research on spiritual intelligence and conflict management. The positive correlation between spiritual intelligence and conflict management corroborates the work of Hasani et al. (2016), who found that spiritual intelligence predicted preferences for collaborative and compromising conflict styles. It also supports the broader literature linking spiritual intelligence to positive workplace outcomes, including job satisfaction (Tampubolon et al., 2021), organizational commitment (Haryono et al., 2018), and reduced turnover intentions (Vem et al., 2024).

The absence of locality differences contributes new knowledge to the literature, which has not extensively examined rural-urban variations in spiritual intelligence or conflict management in educational contexts. This finding suggests that in relatively integrated educational systems, geographic location may matter less than other factors such as professional preparation and organizational culture.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

The findings have several implications for theory development. First, they support conceptualizing spiritual intelligence as a meaningful psychological construct with predictive validity for important workplace behaviors. The strong correlation with conflict management adds to evidence that spiritual intelligence matters for organizational functioning and is not merely an abstract or esoteric concept.

Second, the findings suggest mechanisms through which spiritual intelligence may influence behavior. The relationship with conflict management likely operates through multiple pathways involving self-awareness, empathy, meaning-making, and value orientation. Future theoretical work should specify these mechanisms more precisely and develop models that can be empirically tested.

Third, the strong correlation between spiritual intelligence and conflict management raises questions about the distinctiveness of these constructs. While they are conceptually distinct—one representing an internal capacity

for wisdom and compassion, the other representing behavioral approaches to handling disagreements—they may be more closely intertwined than previously recognized. Future theoretical work should explore the nature of this interconnection.

5.4 Practical Implications

The findings carry significant practical implications for teacher education, professional development, and educational administration.

For Teacher Education Programs: The strong relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management suggests that teacher preparation curricula should explicitly address spiritual intelligence development alongside pedagogical skills. Courses could include modules on mindfulness, self-awareness, values clarification, and meaning-making—all components of spiritual intelligence that may enhance future teachers' capacity to handle workplace conflicts constructively.

For Professional Development: In-service teacher training programs could incorporate spiritual intelligence cultivation as a strategy for improving conflict management. Workshops on reflective practice, empathic communication, and ethical decision-making might enhance teachers' spiritual intelligence while directly addressing conflict-related challenges.

For School Administration: School leaders could create organizational conditions that support spiritual intelligence development. This might include providing time for reflective practice, encouraging value-based discussions among staff, recognizing teachers who demonstrate wisdom and compassion in handling conflicts, and modeling these qualities in their own administrative behavior.

For School Climate: Recognizing that spiritual intelligence enhances conflict management, schools could work to create cultures where both are valued and cultivated. This might involve incorporating spiritual intelligence considerations into hiring decisions, performance evaluations, and promotion criteria. Schools that prioritize these qualities may develop more harmonious, productive working environments.

For Educational Policy: At the policy level, recognizing the importance of spiritual intelligence and conflict management could influence decisions about teacher preparation standards, certification requirements, and continuing education mandates. Policies that support the holistic development of teachers, including their spiritual capacities, may yield benefits for the entire educational system.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged, along with corresponding directions for future research.

Sampling Limitations: The convenient sampling method and sample size of 100 limit generalizability. Future research should employ probability sampling techniques with larger, more diverse samples to enhance representativeness and statistical power. Samples from multiple states or countries would allow examination of cultural variations in the spiritual intelligence-conflict management relationship.

Measurement Limitations: The reliance on self-report measures introduces potential biases, including social desirability and common method variance. Future studies could incorporate multiple methods, including behavioral observations, peer ratings, and supervisor assessments of conflict management. Longitudinal designs would allow examination of causal relationships and developmental trajectories.

Contextual Limitations: The study focused exclusively on higher secondary teachers in Kerala, limiting generalizability to other educational levels and geographic contexts. Future research should examine whether similar patterns hold for primary teachers, college faculty, and teachers in other regions with different cultural and educational characteristics.

Variable Limitations: The study examined only locality as a demographic variable. Future research should investigate other potentially relevant variables, including gender, years of experience, subject area, religious background, and prior training in conflict resolution. It should also examine potential mediators and moderators of the spiritual intelligence-conflict management relationship.

Construct Limitations: The study treated spiritual intelligence as a unitary construct, though it likely comprises multiple dimensions. Future research using multidimensional measures could examine which specific aspects of spiritual intelligence are most strongly related to conflict management. Similarly, examining relationships with specific conflict styles (competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, accommodating) rather than overall conflict management would provide more nuanced understanding.

Intervention Research: The correlational nature of this study precludes causal conclusions. Future research should employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs to test whether interventions designed to enhance spiritual intelligence actually improve conflict management. Such research would have direct practical implications for program development.

Qualitative Research: Quantitative methods cannot capture the lived experience of how spiritual intelligence influences conflict handling. Qualitative studies using interviews, focus groups, or narrative approaches could illuminate the processes through which teachers draw upon spiritual resources when navigating conflicts, providing rich descriptive data to supplement statistical findings.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Findings

This study examined the relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers in Kerala, India. The key findings can be summarized as follows:

1. There is considerable variability in both spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers, with scores spanning wide ranges for both constructs.
2. A strong positive correlation exists between spiritual intelligence and conflict management ($r = 0.684$, $p < .001$), indicating that teachers with higher spiritual intelligence demonstrate enhanced conflict management capabilities. This relationship accounts for approximately 47% of the variance in conflict management scores.
3. No significant differences emerged in either spiritual intelligence or conflict management between teachers in rural and urban localities, suggesting that geographic location within Kerala's integrated educational system does not substantially influence these characteristics.

6.2 Contributions to Knowledge

This study makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, it extends research on spiritual intelligence to the educational context, demonstrating its relevance for teacher functioning in higher secondary schools. Second, it provides evidence from a non-Western cultural setting, contributing to cross-cultural understanding of spiritual intelligence and its correlates. Third, it examines demographic variations that have received limited attention in previous research, particularly locality-based differences. Fourth, it establishes a strong empirical link between spiritual intelligence and conflict management, suggesting mechanisms through which spiritual awareness translates into behavioral competencies.

6.3 Implications for Practice

The findings have practical implications for multiple stakeholders. For teacher educators, they suggest incorporating spiritual intelligence development into teacher preparation curricula. For school administrators, they highlight the value of creating organizational conditions that support spiritual growth and constructive conflict handling. For policymakers, they indicate the potential benefits of policies that recognize and cultivate teachers' spiritual capacities. For teachers themselves, they offer validation of the importance of inner development for professional effectiveness and suggest pathways for enhancing their own capabilities.

6.4 Final Remarks

The strong relationship between spiritual intelligence and conflict management among higher secondary school teachers reveals the profound connection between inner development and outer effectiveness in educational practice. Teachers who cultivate wisdom, compassion, self-awareness, and meaning-making capacity are better equipped to navigate the inevitable conflicts that arise in complex school environments. They can transform disagreements into opportunities for growth, maintain perspective under pressure, and model constructive approaches to difference for their students.

In an era of increasing educational complexity, with diverse student populations, heightened accountability pressures, and rapid technological change, the qualities associated with spiritual intelligence have never been more relevant. Teachers who possess these qualities are not only more effective in handling conflicts but also contribute to school cultures characterized by respect, collaboration, and continuous learning. They exemplify the kind of holistic development that education aims to foster in students, demonstrating that how we handle challenges matters as much as what we know.

This study, while limited in scope, points toward the importance of attending to the inner lives of teachers as a resource for professional effectiveness. It suggests that the most valuable investments in educational quality may be those that support teachers' ongoing development as whole persons—spiritual, emotional, and relational beings, not merely deliverers of content. As education systems worldwide grapple with how to prepare students for an uncertain future, cultivating teachers' spiritual intelligence may be one important piece of the puzzle.

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