



The Effect of Emotional Intelligence on Conflict Resolution Skills Mediated by Empathic Concern in Youth

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills among youth, with empathic concern as a potential mediator, in order to better understand the mechanisms through which emotional competencies influence constructive conflict management.

Methods and Materials: A descriptive correlational research design was employed with a sample of 415 youth from Iraq, selected according to the Morgan and Krejcie table. Data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998), the Empathic Concern subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980), and the Conflict Resolution Skills Scale (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to assess bivariate associations between variables, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed in AMOS 21 to test the hypothesized mediation model. Model fit was evaluated using χ^2/df , GFI, AGFI, CFI, RMSEA, and TLI indices.

Findings: Correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations between emotional intelligence and empathic concern ($r = .56, p < .001$), emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills ($r = .62, p < .001$), and empathic concern and conflict resolution skills ($r = .58, p < .001$). The SEM demonstrated excellent model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.38$, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.031, TLI = 0.97). Emotional intelligence significantly predicted conflict resolution skills both directly ($\beta = 0.44, p < .001$) and indirectly through empathic concern ($\beta = 0.21, p < .001$), with the total effect being substantial ($\beta = 0.65, p < .001$).

Conclusion: The results highlight emotional intelligence as a key determinant of effective conflict resolution among youth, with empathic concern serving as a significant mediator. These findings underscore the importance of integrating emotional and empathy training into educational and youth development programs to enhance interpersonal competencies and reduce destructive conflict behaviors.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; empathic concern; conflict resolution skills; youth.

1. Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood, when individuals are forming their identities, expanding their social networks, and navigating complex interpersonal dynamics. How individuals manage and resolve conflict during this period has profound implications for their personal, academic, and professional development. Conflict resolution skills are not only essential for maintaining healthy relationships but also for promoting psychological well-being, social harmony, and effective teamwork (Aalsubhien et al., 2019). In recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in shaping conflict resolution behaviors, as EI encompasses the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions effectively in interpersonal contexts (Sharma et al., 2023; Shkëmbi & Treska, 2024). Emotional intelligence is considered a key predictor of constructive conflict resolution, as it enables individuals to regulate emotional responses, empathize with others, and engage in problem-solving strategies rather than avoidance or aggression (Malik et al., 2023; Santiago, 2024).

Adolescents and young adults often face conflicts in educational institutions, peer groups, family settings, and work environments. Inadequate conflict management can lead to strained relationships, academic difficulties, reduced self-esteem, and heightened psychological distress (Theodoratou & Papadopoulos, 2024; Wu, 2025). Conversely, effective conflict resolution fosters mutual understanding, collaboration, and social cohesion (G. & P., 2024; Norin, 2024). Within this framework, empathic concern—a component of empathy referring to feelings of compassion and concern for others—has been identified as a potential mediator between EI and conflict resolution. Empathic concern encourages prosocial responses and facilitates cooperative solutions, thus acting as a bridge between emotional understanding and behavioral execution (Adamu et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2025).

The theoretical and empirical link between EI and conflict resolution has been examined across various contexts, including education, healthcare, organizational settings, and cross-cultural environments. For instance, studies in university populations have consistently found that students with higher EI are more likely to adopt integrating and compromising strategies, rather than dominating or avoiding approaches (Amedome et al., 2024; Dissanayake et al., 2024). This finding aligns with evidence

from healthcare systems, where professionals with high EI report more collaborative conflict management styles, leading to improved team performance and patient outcomes (Abdelrahman et al., 2023; Ranjbar & Bahariniya, 2021). Similarly, research in nursing education and practice suggests that EI training can enhance communication, reduce workplace tension, and promote resolution strategies that respect diverse perspectives (Assi & Eshah, 2023; Pohan et al., 2023).

The mediating role of empathy, and specifically empathic concern, has been highlighted in multiple studies. Empathic concern facilitates perspective-taking and reduces the likelihood of hostile attribution bias during conflict, which in turn supports cooperative negotiation and problem-solving (Mohd Khairul Bazli Mohd et al., 2024; Mutongi et al., 2024). In adolescent populations, the capacity to feel concern for others can counterbalance impulsive or defensive reactions, steering interactions toward constructive outcomes (Singh, 2025; Tahir & Qurat-ul-ain, 2024). Moreover, research in cross-cultural contexts underscores that empathic concern may be influenced by sociocultural norms, values, and communication patterns, thereby shaping its interaction with EI in predicting conflict resolution (Sinelnikova, 2021; Zenawi, 2024).

Several models have been proposed to explain the EI–conflict resolution link, many of which place emotion regulation and empathy at the center. One perspective suggests that EI allows individuals to accurately interpret emotional cues, anticipate the emotional consequences of different conflict strategies, and select responses that align with long-term relational goals (Cuevas et al., 2024; Hazem et al., 2020). Another approach emphasizes the role of interpersonal communication, where EI contributes to active listening, assertive expression, and nonverbal sensitivity—all critical skills for de-escalating tension and fostering mutual agreement (Sathyamurthy et al., 2024; Shkëmbi & Treska, 2024). These mechanisms are particularly relevant for youth, who are still refining their emotional and social competencies.

Empirical evidence from diverse cultural and professional contexts supports the robustness of these associations. For example, research among Ghanaian high school students found that cultural perceptions influenced both EI levels and preferred conflict resolution strategies, illustrating the interplay between emotional competencies and sociocultural expectations (Amedome et al., 2024). In Ethiopia, EI was linked to more constructive interpersonal conflict management, suggesting that emotion-related skills

transcend cultural boundaries while still being shaped by local norms (Zenawi, 2024). Studies in Sri Lanka demonstrated that need for affiliation and integrating conflict resolution styles were positively associated with EI, providing further insight into how social motives interact with emotional competencies (Dissanayake & Kodagoda, 2021).

The relationship between EI and conflict resolution has also been explored in high-stakes and high-stress environments, such as emergency services and law enforcement. Rescue workers with high EI were found to manage conflict more effectively, which in turn contributed to resilience and performance under pressure (Malik et al., 2023). Similarly, police personnel with elevated EI demonstrated greater adaptability in applying different conflict management strategies depending on situational demands (Cuevas et al., 2024). These findings underline the practical importance of EI in professions where interpersonal interactions are frequent and potentially volatile.

Youth-specific research highlights that the school and university environment is a particularly fertile ground for EI and conflict resolution skill development. Peer conflicts, group projects, and interactions with authority figures all require effective emotional regulation and communication skills (Aalsubhien et al., 2019; Singh, 2025). Interventions targeting EI in educational contexts have shown promise in reducing aggressive behaviors, improving problem-solving, and fostering more collaborative climates (Adamu et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2023). This suggests that integrating EI training into educational curricula could have long-term benefits for personal and professional relationships.

However, despite the growing body of research, gaps remain in understanding the mechanisms through which EI influences conflict resolution, especially in youth populations. While empathic concern has been proposed as a key mediator, empirical tests of this pathway remain limited, particularly in Middle Eastern contexts where cultural norms and interpersonal dynamics may differ significantly from Western samples (G. & P., 2024; Norin, 2024). Furthermore, the majority of existing studies rely on cross-sectional designs, which limit causal inference and obscure developmental trajectories (Wu, 2025). Longitudinal and experimental research could help clarify whether increases in EI directly lead to enhanced empathic concern and, consequently, better conflict resolution skills (Santiago, 2024; Tahir & Qurat-ul-ain, 2024).

This study addresses these gaps by examining the relationship between EI, empathic concern, and conflict resolution skills in a youth population.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, empathic concern, and conflict resolution skills among youth. The target population consisted of young individuals residing in Iraq. Using the Morgan and Krejcie table for sample size determination, a minimum of 384 participants was required; however, 415 participants were recruited to enhance statistical power and account for potential data loss. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across gender, age groups, and educational levels. Inclusion criteria included being between 18 and 30 years old, fluency in Arabic, and willingness to provide informed consent. Exclusion criteria were self-reported severe psychiatric disorders or inability to complete the questionnaires.

2.2. Measures

Conflict resolution skills were measured using the Conflict Resolution Skills Scale developed by Johnson and Johnson (1996). This instrument assesses individuals' abilities to manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively. The scale consists of 20 items divided into four subscales: perspective-taking, generating alternative solutions, emotional regulation during conflict, and collaborative problem-solving. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater conflict resolution competence. The CRSS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties in prior research, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically exceeding 0.85 across subscales, and its validity has been supported through significant correlations with measures of social competence and relationship satisfaction in youth samples.

Emotional intelligence was assessed using the Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Schutte et al. (1998), based on the Salovey and Mayer model of emotional intelligence. The EIS contains 33 items encompassing four subscales: emotion perception, emotion regulation, emotion utilization, and emotion management in self and others. Responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly

disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting greater emotional intelligence. The scale has been extensively validated in diverse populations, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically ranging from 0.87 to 0.90. Its construct validity has been confirmed through strong associations with related constructs such as empathy, well-being, and prosocial behavior, making it suitable for youth research contexts.

Empathic concern was measured using the Empathic Concern subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) developed by Davis (1980). The Empathic Concern subscale includes 7 items that assess the tendency to experience feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for others. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (does not describe me well) to 4 (describes me very well). Higher scores indicate greater empathic concern. The IRI-EC has been widely used and validated in both adolescent and adult populations, with Cronbach's alpha values commonly exceeding 0.80. Its convergent validity has been supported through significant correlations with prosocial tendencies, altruistic behavior, and measures of emotional sensitivity.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27 and AMOS version 21. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for all

demographic and study variables. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the bivariate relationships between the dependent variable (conflict resolution skills) and each independent variable (emotional intelligence and empathic concern). Subsequently, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted in AMOS to test the hypothesized mediation model, where empathic concern was posited as a mediator between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills. The maximum likelihood estimation method was used, and model fit was assessed using χ^2/df , Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

3. Findings and Results

Of the 415 participants, 202 (48.67%) were male and 213 (51.33%) were female. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 30 years, with a mean age of 23.47 years ($SD = 3.14$). Regarding educational status, 148 participants (35.66%) were enrolled in undergraduate programs, 187 (45.06%) had completed undergraduate degrees, and 80 (19.28%) had obtained postgraduate qualifications. In terms of marital status, 289 participants (69.64%) were single, 112 (26.99%) were married, and 14 (3.37%) were divorced.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 415)

Variable	M	SD
Emotional Intelligence	123.47	14.26
Empathic Concern	21.83	4.37
Conflict Resolution Skills	78.52	9.41

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicate that participants reported moderately high emotional intelligence ($M = 123.47$, $SD = 14.26$) relative to the possible range of the scale. Empathic concern scores ($M = 21.83$, $SD = 4.37$) suggest that, on average, youth in this sample often experienced feelings of compassion and concern toward others. Conflict resolution skills were also at a relatively high level ($M = 78.52$, $SD = 9.41$), reflecting a generally constructive approach to interpersonal conflict situations. The variation within each variable indicates sufficient dispersion for subsequent correlation and structural analyses.

Prior to conducting the analyses, assumptions for Pearson correlation and SEM were examined and confirmed.

Normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, which ranged between -0.84 and 0.91 for all study variables, falling within the acceptable range of -2 to $+2$. Linearity was evaluated through scatterplots, which indicated linear relationships among variables. Homoscedasticity was confirmed as residual plots showed a random distribution with no discernible patterns. Multicollinearity diagnostics revealed variance inflation factor (VIF) values between 1.12 and 1.37 and tolerance values between 0.73 and 0.89, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Outlier analysis using Mahalanobis distance identified three extreme cases, which were removed prior to the final analysis.

Table 2*Pearson Correlation Coefficients and p-values Among Study Variables*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Emotional Intelligence	—	.56** (p < .001)	.62** (p < .001)
2. Empathic Concern	.56** (p < .001)	—	.58** (p < .001)
3. Conflict Resolution Skills	.62** (p < .001)	.58** (p < .001)	—

As shown in Table 2, emotional intelligence was strongly and positively correlated with empathic concern ($r = .56$, $p < .001$) and conflict resolution skills ($r = .62$, $p < .001$). Empathic concern was also positively correlated with conflict resolution skills ($r = .58$, $p < .001$). These results

indicate that higher EI is associated with greater empathic concern, and both variables are significantly related to better conflict resolution skills. The strength of these associations justifies further investigation through mediation analysis in the structural equation model.

Table 3*Model Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model*

Fit Index	Value
χ^2	116.37
df	84
χ^2/df	1.38
GFI	0.96
AGFI	0.94
CFI	0.98
RMSEA	0.031
TLI	0.97

Table 3 shows that the structural equation model demonstrated an excellent fit to the data. The χ^2/df ratio was well below the recommended threshold of 3.0 ($\chi^2/df = 1.38$), and all incremental fit indices (GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.94, CFI

= 0.98, TLI = 0.97) exceeded the conventional criterion of 0.90, indicating strong model performance. The RMSEA value of 0.031 further confirmed the model's adequacy, suggesting minimal approximation error.

Table 4*Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects Between Study Variables*

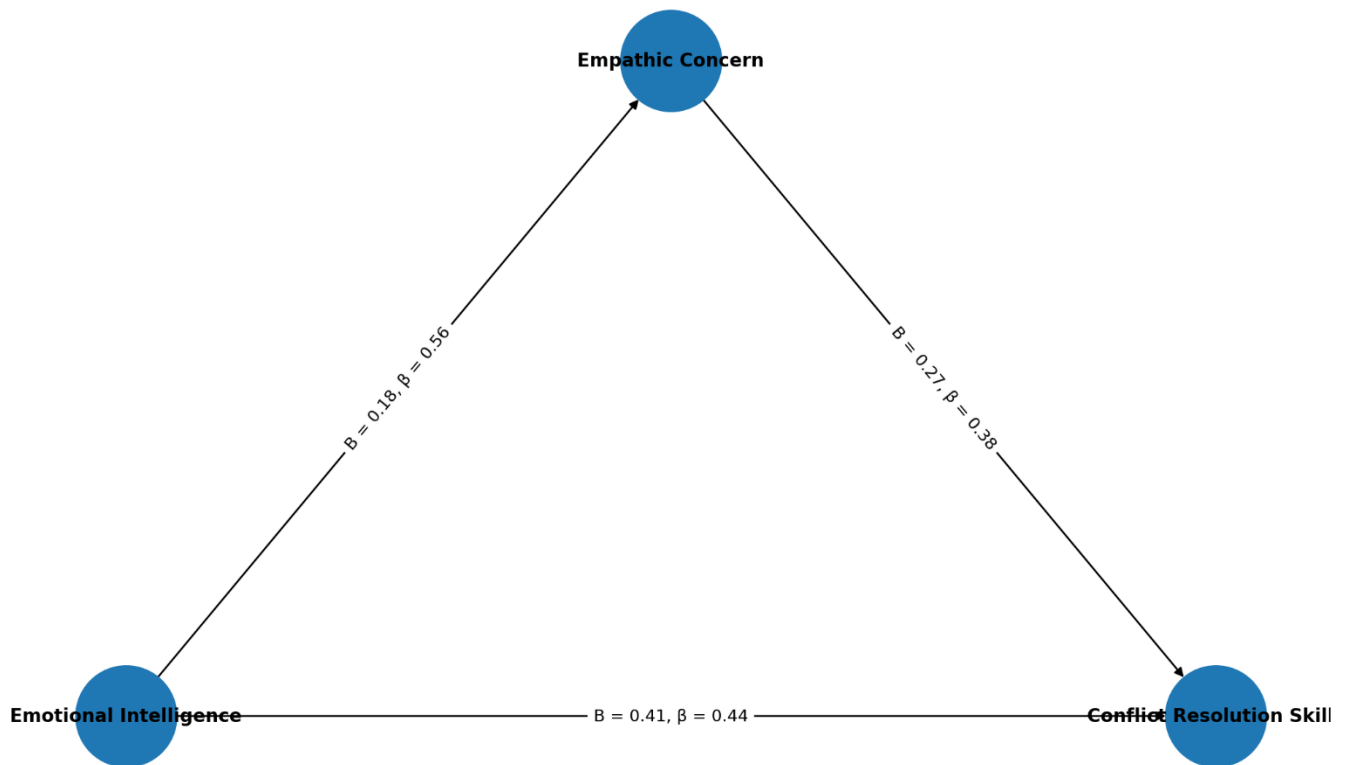
Path	b	S.E.	β	p
Emotional Intelligence → Empathic Concern	0.18	0.03	0.56	<.001
Empathic Concern → Conflict Resolution Skills	0.27	0.05	0.38	<.001
Emotional Intelligence → Conflict Resolution Skills (Direct)	0.41	0.06	0.44	<.001
Emotional Intelligence → Conflict Resolution Skills (Indirect via Empathic Concern)	0.05	0.01	0.21	<.001
Emotional Intelligence → Conflict Resolution Skills (Total)	0.46	0.07	0.65	<.001

Table 4 shows that emotional intelligence had a significant direct effect on conflict resolution skills ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < .001$) and a significant indirect effect via empathic concern ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < .001$). The total effect ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < .001$) indicates that empathic concern accounts for a meaningful proportion of the association between EI and conflict resolution skills. Additionally, emotional

intelligence significantly predicted empathic concern ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < .001$), and empathic concern significantly predicted conflict resolution skills ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .001$). These findings confirm the hypothesized mediation model and highlight the central role of empathic concern in explaining how EI translates into effective conflict resolution behavior.

Figure 1*Structural Model of The Study*

Structural Model: EI, Empathic Concern, and Conflict Resolution Skills



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrated that emotional intelligence (EI) was significantly and positively associated with conflict resolution skills among youth. Additionally, empathic concern emerged as a significant mediator in the relationship between EI and conflict resolution skills, indicating that higher levels of EI contribute to greater empathic concern, which in turn facilitates more constructive conflict resolution. Pearson correlation analyses revealed strong bivariate associations between EI, empathic concern, and conflict resolution skills, while the structural equation modeling confirmed the hypothesized mediation model with satisfactory fit indices. These results support the premise that emotional competencies, particularly the ability to recognize, regulate, and utilize emotions, play a crucial role in how young individuals approach and manage interpersonal disputes.

The positive relationship between EI and conflict resolution skills is consistent with numerous previous studies conducted in diverse cultural and professional contexts. For instance, research among university students has consistently found that individuals with higher EI are more likely to adopt integrating and compromising strategies rather than avoiding or dominating styles (Aalsubhien et al.,

2019; Dissanayake et al., 2024). Similarly, in academic nursing populations, higher EI has been linked with more collaborative conflict resolution approaches and improved interpersonal interactions (Abdelrahman et al., 2023; Assi & Eshah, 2023). The current findings align with these results, reinforcing the view that EI enhances social problem-solving capabilities by enabling individuals to regulate their own emotional responses while considering the perspectives of others (Sharma et al., 2023; Shkēmbi & Treska, 2024). This suggests that emotional self-awareness and control are foundational for engaging in constructive negotiation and consensus-building.

The mediating role of empathic concern in this study underscores the importance of empathy as a mechanism linking emotional intelligence to conflict resolution. Empathic concern involves feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for others, which can motivate prosocial behaviors in conflict situations (Khan et al., 2025; Mohd Khairul Bazli Mohd et al., 2024). This finding is consistent with prior evidence showing that empathy reduces the likelihood of hostile attribution bias and facilitates cooperative problem-solving (Adamu et al., 2024; Mutongi et al., 2024). In adolescent and youth contexts, empathic concern can serve as a protective factor against impulsive or aggressive conflict responses, channeling interactions

toward solutions that benefit all parties involved (Singh, 2025; Tahir & Qurat-ul-ain, 2024). The present results strengthen the case for integrating empathy training into EI development programs as a means of enhancing conflict resolution skills.

Cross-cultural perspectives from the literature offer further context for interpreting these findings. For example, studies in Ghana and Ethiopia have shown that cultural values influence both the expression of EI and the preferred conflict management strategies (Amedome et al., 2024; Zenawi, 2024). In such settings, empathy may be shaped by communal norms emphasizing harmony and interdependence, which could explain the strong mediating effect observed in the present sample. Likewise, research in Sri Lanka has found that the need for affiliation interacts with EI to predict integrating conflict resolution styles, highlighting the interplay between emotional competencies and social motives (Dissanayake & Kodagoda, 2021). These cultural dimensions suggest that the mediation model observed here may be particularly relevant in collectivist societies, where empathic concern is deeply embedded in social interaction norms.

The significant predictive role of EI on conflict resolution skills observed in this study is also consistent with organizational and professional studies. For example, in the IT industry, EI has been linked with adaptive conflict resolution approaches that foster collaboration and reduce workplace tension (G. & P., 2024). Similarly, police personnel with high EI have been found to apply flexible strategies depending on the conflict context, which aligns with the present results showing that EI enables adaptive and situation-sensitive responses (Cuevas et al., 2024). Findings from high-stress professions such as rescue work further underscore this point, with EI predicting resilience and effective conflict handling under pressure (Malik et al., 2023). Together, these results indicate that the EI–conflict resolution link is robust across settings, and that enhancing EI could benefit youth not only in academic and social domains but also in future professional environments.

The role of empathic concern as a mediator also resonates with research in healthcare and education, where empathy is a critical component of effective communication and conflict management (Pohan et al., 2023; Ranjbar & Bahariniya, 2021). Studies have shown that interventions aimed at boosting empathy can lead to more constructive conflict management styles, particularly in situations involving sensitive interpersonal issues (Hazem et al., 2020; Sathiyamurthy et al., 2024). The present findings contribute

to this evidence by providing a statistical test of mediation in a youth sample, thereby bridging a gap in the literature that has often focused on direct EI–conflict resolution associations without examining underlying mechanisms.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results support models that place emotion regulation and empathy at the core of effective conflict management (Sharma et al., 2023; Shkëmbi & Treska, 2024). The ability to regulate emotions can prevent escalation, while empathic concern can shift the focus from self-interest to mutual benefit. This dual process may be particularly important in youth populations, where emotional reactivity is high and interpersonal relationships are central to identity formation. Furthermore, by confirming empathic concern as a mediator, the study adds empirical weight to integrative models that incorporate both intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional competencies (Norin, 2024; Santiago, 2024).

It is also worth noting that the results are congruent with findings from cross-national comparative studies. For instance, research comparing emotional intelligence and conflict interaction styles in Russia and the Netherlands found that cultural context shapes both the perception and enactment of conflict resolution strategies (Sinelnikova, 2021). While the present study did not compare across cultures, its findings align with the notion that empathy-driven conflict management may be particularly effective in cultural settings that value relationship preservation. This cultural resonance may explain why empathic concern exerted a strong mediating effect in the Iraqi youth sample, where interpersonal solidarity is a valued social norm.

The integration of EI and empathy into conflict resolution training has been recommended across multiple fields, from healthcare (Abdelrahman et al., 2023) to education (Aalsubhien et al., 2019) and organizational management (Hazem et al., 2020). The current study's findings support these recommendations by demonstrating that both constructs not only predict conflict resolution skills but also interact in ways that enhance their combined effect. By fostering empathic concern, EI development programs may yield more sustainable improvements in conflict resolution competencies.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

While this study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences about the relationships among EI, empathic concern, and conflict

resolution skills. Although the mediation model is theoretically grounded and statistically supported, longitudinal or experimental designs would be needed to confirm causal pathways. Second, the reliance on self-report measures may have introduced social desirability bias, particularly given the socially valued nature of empathy and conflict resolution abilities. Third, the sample was limited to youth in Iraq, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other cultural contexts. Fourth, while the study controlled for certain demographic factors, other potential confounders such as personality traits, prior conflict management training, or family background were not examined. Finally, the study focused solely on empathic concern as a mediator, whereas other aspects of empathy or social cognition could also play important roles.

Future studies should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine causal relationships and track changes in EI, empathic concern, and conflict resolution skills over time. Expanding the research to include diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts would enhance generalizability and allow for cross-cultural comparisons. Additionally, incorporating multi-informant assessments, such as peer or teacher ratings, could reduce self-report bias and provide a more comprehensive understanding of these constructs. Further research could also explore other potential mediators and moderators, including cognitive empathy, perspective-taking, emotional regulation strategies, and personality dimensions. Finally, intervention-based research examining the effectiveness of integrated EI and empathy training programs in improving conflict resolution skills would have significant practical value.

The results of this study have several practical implications. Educational institutions should consider incorporating EI and empathy training into their curricula to equip students with essential interpersonal competencies. Youth development programs can use these findings to design targeted workshops that simultaneously foster emotional regulation and empathic concern, thereby enhancing conflict resolution skills. In organizational and community settings, training initiatives that integrate EI development with empathy-based communication strategies may improve cooperation, reduce tension, and strengthen group cohesion. Policymakers and practitioners working with youth populations should also recognize the role of cultural norms in shaping these skills and tailor interventions accordingly.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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