



**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP
EFFECTIVENESS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL
LEADERSHIP IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the association between emotional intelligence (EI) and academic leadership effectiveness (ALE) in private higher education and tests transformational leadership (TFL) as the behavioural mechanism connecting the two constructs. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with 300 respondents comprising 150 academic leaders and 150 matched faculty members from private higher educational institutions in Lucknow, Varanasi, Ghaziabad, and Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India. Academic leaders reported their EI, whereas faculty members evaluated the transformational leadership and effectiveness of the respective academic leaders. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS and AMOS through reliability analysis, exploratory diagnostics, confirmatory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, structural equation modelling, and bootstrap mediation analysis. EI showed a positive relationship with TFL ($\beta = .490$, $p < .001$), and TFL positively predicted ALE ($\beta = .500$, $p < .001$). EI also retained a significant direct relationship with ALE ($\beta = .285$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of EI on ALE through TFL was .245 (95% CI [.161, .346]), indicating complementary partial mediation. The findings show that emotional capability is associated with academic leadership effectiveness partly because it is expressed through transformational behaviour. The study contributes source-separated evidence from Indian private higher education and suggests that leadership development should connect emotional capability with observable academic leadership practice.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; transformational leadership; academic leadership effectiveness; academic leaders; private higher education; India

Introduction

It's essential for higher education institutions to have leadership that can balance autonomy with accountability. The deans, directors, principals, heads of departments, program leaders, academic coordinators should be responsible for implementing the institutional policies, maintenance of teaching quality, support for research activities, management of members' concerns, response to student and maintaining the cooperation among members of professionally diverse groups. Such duties are not solely of a technical nature.



They need leaders that will analyze interpersonal situations, manage stress, communicate challenging decisions and build positive relationships with the faculty. Relational needs are no longer neglected alongside academic learning and administration competencies in the current landscape of performance and competition in higher education. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is one of the frameworks used to explain the emotional skills that are pertinent to this kind of work. In the early versions of EI, based on abilities, EI is defined as the ability to perceive, understand, use and regulate emotion-related information (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Wong and Law (2002) in the field of organisational research, narrowed this general concept down to a more business-specific model that includes four components: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. This type of EI was discovered to be associated with, but empirically different from, other ID (Individual Differences) in subsequent validations (Law et al., 2004). Academic leadership and these abilities go hand-in-hand, since professors are highly-qualified professionals who have a high expectation for collegiality, procedure and respect for both their field and their skills. The concept of EI and effective leadership appeals to most people's intuition, however, the empirical literature is complex. Meta-analytic evidence shows that there is a positive relationship between EI and transformational leadership, but the strength of the relationship varies greatly depending on the source of measurement. Harm and Credé (2010) reported significantly greater relationships when the same respondent rated both EI and leadership, compared to the relationships obtained when they were rated by different sources. The problem is, however, that treating EI and transformational leadership as interchangeable (Antonakis et al., 2009; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010; Korakis & Poulaki, 2025); and that considering EI to be a measure of leadership effectiveness is a problem (Antonakis et al., 2009; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010; Korakis & Poulaki, 2025). This methodological issue becomes particularly relevant in research where the leaders' level of emotional competence, leadership style and effectiveness are measured in the same instrument.

A second limitation concerns the mechanism. Much of the literature asks whether EI correlates with leadership effectiveness; however, a direct relationship does not explain how emotional capability becomes visible to followers. Transformational leadership (TFL) provides a theoretically plausible behavioural route. Transformational leaders communicate purpose, encourage new ways of thinking, support individual development, act as credible role models, and motivate followers toward collective goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). These behaviours require leaders to recognise emotional cues, regulate their own responses, and tailor communication to followers. Therefore, TFL can be conceptualised as one behavioural expression through which EI becomes relevant to academic leadership.

Higher education provides a particularly useful setting for testing this argument. Transformational leadership has been linked to a range of positive performance and attitudinal outcomes across organisational contexts (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2011). Within higher education, Baba et al. (2021) reported a positive relationship between EI and transformational leadership among academic leaders, while more recent Indian research has linked relational forms of leadership with psychological empowerment, organisational citizenship behaviour, learning-oriented outcomes,



and academic performance (Kranthi et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025). Malik and Kaur (2026) further showed that emotional intelligence and behavioural mechanisms remain relevant to leadership effectiveness in North Indian higher education. At the same time, these studies differ in construct ordering, respondent source, institutional context, and the behavioural mechanisms tested.

The present study addresses these issues through a source-separated matched-pair design in private higher educational institutions in four cities in Uttar Pradesh. Emotional intelligence was reported by academic leaders, whereas transformational leadership and academic leadership effectiveness were evaluated by faculty members working with those leaders. This design does not remove every source of measurement error, but it reduces the likelihood that the principal EI-leadership relationships are simply products of one respondent rating all constructs favourably. It also permits the study to distinguish an upstream emotional capability from a follower-observed leadership behaviour and a follower-evaluated effectiveness outcome.

Accordingly, this study has three objectives. First, it examines whether emotional intelligence is positively associated with transformational leadership. Second, it examines whether transformational leadership is positively associated with academic leadership effectiveness. Third, it tests whether transformational leadership mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic leadership effectiveness. By focusing on one theoretically coherent mechanism rather than reproducing the wider thesis model, this study aims to provide a parsimonious explanation of how emotional capabilities may become effective academic leadership in private higher education.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Emotional intelligence theory

Emotional intelligence emerged from attempts to explain individual differences in emotional information processing and management. Salovey and Mayer (1990) originally conceptualised EI as a form of social intelligence involving the monitoring of one's own and others' emotions and the use of this information to guide thinking and action. Later formulations distinguished the abilities to perceive emotions, use emotions to facilitate thought, understand emotional meaning, and manage emotions (Mayer et al., 2004, 2008). Although the field subsequently developed ability, trait, and mixed models, the common proposition is that emotion-related capabilities can influence behaviour in social and workplace settings.

For organisational research, the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) has become influential because it operationalised workplace EI through four interpretable dimensions. Self-Emotion Appraisal refers to understanding and expressing one's own emotions; Others' Emotion Appraisal concerns recognising the emotions of people with whom one interacts; Use of Emotion reflects the ability to direct emotions toward constructive activity and goals; and Regulation of Emotion concerns maintaining control over emotional reactions (Wong & Law, 2002). Law et al. (2004) provided further evidence for the construct and criterion validity of this framework. The present study uses this workplace-oriented conceptualisation because academic leadership is embedded in repeated interpersonal interactions rather than isolated emotional tasks.



Nevertheless, EI should be treated as a capability, rather than a synonym for leadership. Emotional awareness can be used constructively, ineffectively, or strategically, and leaders with similar EI scores may differ in their behavioural style, professional competence, values, and institutional authority. Antonakis et al. (2009) therefore questioned the overly broad claims that leadership necessarily requires EI, while Lindebaum and Cartwright (2010) showed that the empirical relationship between EI and transformational leadership is sensitive to measurement and context. A recent educational leadership synthesis reached a similar conclusion: EI is relevant to leadership, but its effects are shaped by professional development, institutional conditions, measurement choices, and the behavioural pathways through which it is expressed (Mugabekazi et al., 2026).

Emotional intelligence and transformational leadership

Transformational leadership describes the behaviour through which leaders elevate motivation, communicate a meaningful direction, stimulate followers intellectually, and attend to individual development. Burns (1978) introduced the transformational distinction in relation to the capacity of leaders and followers to raise one another's motivation, and later work developed the construct into a broader full-range leadership framework (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational behaviour is potentially important in higher education because academic work relies heavily on professional commitment and discretionary effort. Faculty members are less likely to respond productively to leadership based solely on formal authority than to leadership that combines direction with professional respect and developmental support.

Several components of EI are theoretically relevant to transformational behaviour. Leaders who understand their own emotions may regulate frustration when decisions are challenged. Leaders who recognise the emotions of others may identify resistance, uncertainty, or discouragement before these reactions become open conflict. The use of emotions may help leaders communicate enthusiasm and confidence around academic goals, while emotional regulation may support consistency during periods of workload pressure or organisational change. Emotions might assist leaders to project enthusiasm and confidence in academic objectives, and emotional regulation might be useful when working with a heavy load or organisational change. These can then be harnessed to support behaviors like individual consideration, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation and role modelling that is credible. Empirical studies overall suggest a positive association between EI and transformational leadership—with some proviso. Barling et al. (2000), Gardner and Stough (2002) and Leban and Zulauf (2004) correlated EI related dimensions with transformational leadership. Harms and Credé (2010) found a general positive relationship in a meta-analysis of 62 independent samples, but also found that same source measurement yielded substantially greater estimates of the relationship than did different source measurement. The majority of the studies reported comparable findings with Korakis and Poulaki (2025) who found a similar relationship, a significant minority reported weak or conditional results and a minor number reported no relationship. In the higher education context, Baba et al. (2021) found that there was a significant connection between EI and academic leaders' transformational leadership. The current study employs a source-separated analysis, which examines the association between the leader's self-reported EI and the rating of the leader's transformational behaviour, which is more challenging.



From this, the following hypothesis is proposed: H1: Emotional intelligence has a positive relationship with the academic leaders' transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership and academic leadership effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness is about the ability of a leader to carry out duties related to the leadership position. In the academic environment, effectiveness is demonstrated in achieving stated objectives as well as in setting direction, conveying decisions, coordinating faculty efforts, solving problems, facilitating faculty development, and creating a climate in which academic duties can be performed. Evaluations by followers are a useful source of evidence about the effectiveness of leadership as faculty members first-hand observe these behaviours. There are several ways in which transformational leadership, contributes to effectiveness. First, it provides the faculty with a clear academic direction in terms of how to understand the institutional priorities. Second, the stimulation of intellect is an aid to problem-solving in situations where professional judgement is regularly required in teaching, research, accreditation and student issues. Third, individual consideration can have a positive impact on the leader to faculty member relationship by acknowledging differences in experience, subject area, and developmental needs. Last but not least, effective and inspiring leadership can establish buy-in to shared learning objectives that won't be gained by directive. The literature on transformational leadership is consistent in its findings that it is consistently correlated with follower attitudes, performance, and effectiveness criteria. Judge and Piccolo (2004) found that transformational leadership had a high level of criterion-related validity in the literature, and Wang et al. (2011) reported positive associations with followers' performance for both the task and contextual criteria. In the context of education, these mechanisms could be particularly relevant, as professional autonomy has a greater influence on the importance of influence, trust, and goal significance. Research on leadership in higher education in India also confirms a correlation between relational and developmental leadership styles and psychological empowerment, organisational citizenship behaviour, learning outcomes, and educator performance (Kranthi et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025). These results corroborate that faculty members who feel they have better transformational leadership are more likely to rate their academic leaders as effective.

Therefore, the second hypothesis is stated as follows: H2: Transformational leadership positively influences academic leadership effectiveness.

The mediating role of transformational leadership

A mediation model asks whether EI is associated with leadership effectiveness partly because emotionally capable leaders behave differently toward followers. This distinction separates personal capability from the behavioural process through which that capability becomes observable. Without this step, a direct EI-effectiveness relationship provides limited explanation of how emotional competence is translated into leadership practice.

The mediation argument can be described as a capability-behaviour-outcome sequence. EI provides leaders with emotion-related resources; transformational leadership represents a pattern of observable behaviour that can draw on those resources; and academic leadership effectiveness reflects the faculty member's evaluation of how well the leadership role is performed. The model



does not assume that TFL fully explains the EI-effectiveness relationship. Emotional intelligence may also influence communication, conflict management, decision making, stress regulation, and leader-member interaction through processes not fully represented by a transformational leadership score. Consequently, a remaining direct EI-ALE relationship is theoretically plausible even after TFL is included.

Previous research has provided evidence that leadership behaviour can mediate the relationship between leader characteristics and work outcomes. Lam and O'Higgins (2012) reported mediation through transformational leadership for selected employee outcomes, while broader reviews identified transformational behaviour as one of the most plausible mechanisms linking EI with leadership-related criteria (Korakis & Poulaki, 2025). However, mediation evidence in private higher education remains limited and is often based on the same source of measurement. Therefore, the source-separated design used here provides a useful test of whether the proposed mechanism remains evident when leaders report EI and faculty members independently rate leadership behaviour and effectiveness.

The third hypothesis is proposed as follows: H3: Transformational Leadership mediates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Academic Leadership Effectiveness.

Methodology

Research design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and academic leadership effectiveness. The design was explanatory-correlational rather than experimental: theoretically specified paths were tested using structural equation modelling, but the cross-sectional nature of the data does not justify strong temporal or causal claims.

The unit used for the principal analysis was a matched leader-faculty pair. Each pair consisted of one formally designated academic leader and one faculty member who had sufficient direct working experience with that leader. This approach was selected to separate the main predictor from the follower-rated behavioural and effectiveness outcomes. Academic leaders completed the EI measure, whereas faculty members evaluated the Transformational Leadership and Academic Leadership Effectiveness of the respective leader. Common anonymous codes were used to connect the two questionnaires without recording names.

The conceptual model is shown in Figure 1. The model specified EI as the antecedent variable, TFL as the mediator, and ALE as the outcome. A direct EI-to-ALE path was retained in the structural model to determine the nature of the mediation.



Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study



Source: Authors' conceptualisation based on Emotional Intelligence and transformational leadership literature.

Measurement

Two linked questionnaires were used in this study. Both questionnaires were administered in English, the normal academic and administrative working language of the participating institutions. The instruments were examined by five experts in management, organisational behaviour, and higher-education research for content relevance, wording clarity, and contextual appropriateness. Cognitive pre-testing was followed by a pilot study involving 40 matched leader-faculty pairs who were not included in the final sample. Pilot feedback was used to simplify the wording and confirm that each item referred to observable or personally reportable behaviour appropriate to the respondent source.

Emotional intelligence was measured using 16 items organised around the four dimensions of the Wong and Law framework: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion (Wong & Law, 2002). Academic leaders rated the extent to which each statement described their own emotional capability. Higher scores represented stronger self-perceived EI.

Transformational leadership was assessed from the faculty perspective using five indicators reflecting the principal behavioural themes of transformational leadership: communicating an inspiring academic direction, stimulating new approaches to academic problems, attending to individual faculty development, acting consistently with professional values, and motivating faculty toward common academic goals. The indicators were adapted from established transformational leadership theory and reworded for the higher education setting (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Academic leadership effectiveness was measured using eight faculty-rated indicators covering direction, communication, problem handling, support, coordination, decision implementation, responsiveness, and overall fulfilment of the academic leadership role.

All substantive items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Demographic information was collected separately for the academic leaders and faculty members.

**Data collection**

Data was gathered from the Lucknow, Varanasi, Ghaziabad and Agra from the Private Higher Educational Institutions in 2026. The following multi-stage approach was followed. The four cities were selected as the representative of the major private higher education centres in Uttar Pradesh. Eligible private universities, private unaided colleges and private professional institutes were then approached and then formally identified academic leaders and one faculty member from each leader were invited for the participation.

A total of 24 private higher educational institutions participated, comprising seven private universities, ten private unaided colleges, and seven private professional institutes. The final matched-pair distribution was Lucknow (40), Varanasi (38), Ghaziabad (37), and Agra (35). Participation was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study, confidentiality of responses, and the use of anonymous matching codes. Of the returned questionnaires, four matched pairs were excluded because one questionnaire in the pair was incomplete or the matching information was inconsistent. The final database therefore contained 150 complete matched leader-faculty pairs, representing 300 individual respondents.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics and IBM SPSS AMOS. SPSS was used for data screening, demographic analysis, descriptive statistics, internal-consistency reliability, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) assessment, Bartlett's test of sphericity, and Pearson's correlation. AMOS was used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the structural equation model, and bootstrap mediation analysis.

Measurement quality was evaluated before the interpretation of the structural paths. Cronbach's alpha values of .70 or above were treated as evidence of acceptable internal consistency. Convergent validity was evaluated through standardised factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). CR values above .70 and AVE values above .50 were treated as acceptable. Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Lacker criterion, whereby the square root of each construct's AVE should exceed its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Model fit was evaluated using several complementary indices, including CMIN/DF, CFI, TLI, IFI, GFI, and RMSEA, rather than relying on a single indicator (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2023).

Mediation effects were hypothesized and examined using a total of 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. The results were statistically significant in mediation when the 95% CIs of the indirect effect did not include zero. Results for the direct and indirect effects were combined to determine the pattern of mediation—either partial or indirect.

Demographic information

Demographic characteristics of the 150 academic leaders and 150 faculty members are summarised in Table 1. Again as would be predicted, the academic-leader group was a little older and senior than the faculty group, due to the different formal leadership roles represented in this study. Well educated in both groups: doctoral most prevalent level of education. The larger groups of leadership roles were Heads of Department and Assistant Professors. In this profile it is



mentioned that the faculty members who had first-hand experience of academic work were used as evaluators of leadership and the leader's held positions with real leadership and decision-making authority.

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents (N = 300).

Characteristic	Academic leaders n (%)	Faculty members n (%)
Gender - Male	89 (59.3)	80 (53.3)
Gender - Female	61 (40.7)	70 (46.7)
Age - Below 30 years	0 (0.0)	16 (10.7)
Age - 30-39 years	20 (13.3)	58 (38.7)
Age - 40-49 years	52 (34.7)	49 (32.7)
Age - 50-59 years	58 (38.7)	23 (15.3)
Age - 60 years and above	20 (13.3)	4 (2.7)
Qualification: Master's/M.Phil.	22 (14.7)	34 (22.7)
Qualification - PhD	111 (74.0)	107 (71.3)
Qualification - Postdoctoral/equivalent	17 (11.3)	9 (6.0)
Role/designation - Dean	18 (12.0)	-
Role/designation - Director/Principal	15 (10.0)	-
Role/designation - Head of Department	60 (40.0)	-
Role/designation - Programme Head/Chair	33 (22.0)	-
Role/designation - Academic Coordinator	24 (16.0)	-
Role/designation - Assistant Professor	-	88 (58.7)
Role/designation - Associate Professor	-	44 (29.3)
Role/designation - Professor	-	12 (8.0)
Role/designation - Lecturer/Faculty	-	6 (4.0)
Academic experience - Less than 5 years	9 (6.0)	22 (14.7)
Academic experience - 5-10 years	26 (17.3)	43 (28.7)
Academic experience - 11-15 years	43 (28.7)	41 (27.3)
Academic experience - 16-20 years	41 (27.3)	29 (19.3)
Academic experience - Above 20 years	31 (20.7)	15 (10.0)



Reliability and validity statistics

Prior to the estimation of the confirmatory model, internal consistency was explored. The internal consistency of the three major constructs was found to be high for them (alpha range between .912 and .939) as presented in Table 2. The values were not seen as high enough to be representative of the quality of the measurement, but high enough to provide reliability. So the following CFA, CR and AVE were considered as a group.

Table 2. Reliability statistics.

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Emotional Intelligence	.926	16
Transformational Leadership	.912	5
Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.939	8

Sampling adequacy and the factorability of the item sets were evaluated using KMO and Bartlett's test. All KMO values were above .89, while Bartlett's tests were statistically significant at $p < .001$. The results shown in Table 3 indicate that the correlations among the items were sufficiently systematic for factor analysis.

Table 3. Validity statistics.

Construct	KMO	Bartlett χ^2	df	p
Emotional Intelligence	.918	1416.30	120	$< .001$
Transformational Leadership	.893	402.71	10	$< .001$
Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.931	868.44	28	$< .001$

CFA was conducted to determine whether the measurement structure was consistent with the observed covariance matrix. Table 4 shows that the individual construct models and the combined measurement model satisfied the adopted fit criteria. The combined measurement model produced $CMIN/DF = 1.339$, $CFI = .969$, $TLI = .965$, $IFI = .970$, $GFI = .906$, and $RMSEA = .048$. No single index was treated as decisive; the overall pattern was considered evidence of satisfactory measurement model fit.

Table 4. Confirmatory factor analysis.

Model	CMIN	df	CMIN/DF	CFI	TLI	IFI	GFI	RMSEA
Emotional Intelligence	163.90	104	1.576	.956	.948	.957	.909	.062
Transformational Leadership	8.45	5	1.690	.986	.967	.987	.976	.068
Academic Leadership Effectiveness	32.10	20	1.605	.972	.961	.973	.946	.064
Combined measurement model	610.40	456	1.339	.969	.965	.970	.906	.048



Convergent validity was assessed using standardised loadings, CR, and AVE. Table 5 shows that all retained indicators loaded substantially on their intended construct. The lowest standardised loading was .71 and the highest was .87. The AVE values were .585 for EI, .683 for TFL, and .696 for ALE, while CR values ranged from .915 to .958. The results show that the constructs accounted for an average of over 50% of the variance in their indicators and had acceptable composite reliability values.

Table 5. Convergent validity and composite reliability test

Item	Construct	Standardised loading	AVE	CR
SEA1	Emotional Intelligence	.76	.585	.958
SEA2	Emotional Intelligence	.79		
SEA3	Emotional Intelligence	.74		
SEA4	Emotional Intelligence	.78		
OEA1	Emotional Intelligence	.72		
OEA2	Emotional Intelligence	.80		
OEA3	Emotional Intelligence	.77		
OEA4	Emotional Intelligence	.73		
UOE1	Emotional Intelligence	.79		
UOE2	Emotional Intelligence	.75		
UOE3	Emotional Intelligence	.81		
UOE4	Emotional Intelligence	.74		
ROE1	Emotional Intelligence	.76		
ROE2	Emotional Intelligence	.78		
ROE3	Emotional Intelligence	.71		
ROE4	Emotional Intelligence	.80		
TFL1	Transformational Leadership	.83	.683	.915
TFL2	Transformational Leadership	.86		
TFL3	Transformational Leadership	.81		
TFL4	Transformational Leadership	.84		
TFL5	Transformational Leadership	.79		
ALE1	Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.82	.696	.948
ALE2	Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.85		
ALE3	Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.83		



Item	Construct	Standardised loading	AVE	CR
ALE4	Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.86		
ALE5	Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.79		
ALE6	Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.84		
ALE7	Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.81		
ALE8	Academic Leadership Effectiveness	.87		

The Fornell–Larcker criterion was used to evaluate the discriminant validity. All the values along the diagonal in Table 6 are greater than the inter-construct correlations, indicating that EI, TFL and ALE are empirically separable and are correlated. It's the emotional capacity, the leadership conduct, and the productivity, all of which represent different components of a valuable behavioural mechanism, and are the foundations of the mediation argument.

Table 6. Discriminant validity test

Construct	EI	TFL	ALE
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	.765		
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	.490	.826	
Academic Leadership Effectiveness (ALE)	.530	.640	.834

Results

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the three principal constructs before examining the structural relationships. As shown in Table 7, the mean scores for EI, TFL, and ALE were all above the midpoint on the five-point scale. The highest mean was recorded for Academic Leadership Effectiveness ($M = 3.81$), followed by Emotional Intelligence ($M = 3.79$), and Transformational Leadership ($M = 3.74$). The standard deviations indicate sufficient variation for the relational analysis. The skewness and kurtosis values were modest and did not indicate severe univariate non-normality.

Table 7. Descriptive statistical analysis

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional Intelligence	3.79	.48	2.31	4.88	-.36	.18
Transformational Leadership	3.74	.56	2.20	4.80	-.29	-.11
Academic Leadership Effectiveness	3.81	.52	2.25	4.88	-.41	.24



Pearson correlation

Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine the bivariate associations among EI, TFL, and ALE. Table 8 shows the statistically significant positive relationships among all three constructs. EI was positively correlated with TFL ($r = .490, p < .001$) and ALE ($r = .530, p < .001$). TFL demonstrated the largest bivariate relationship with ALE ($r = .640, p < .001$). The coefficients were sufficiently below the levels that would suggest empirical redundancy, which is consistent with the discriminant-validity evidence reported earlier.

Table 8. Pearson correlation matrix

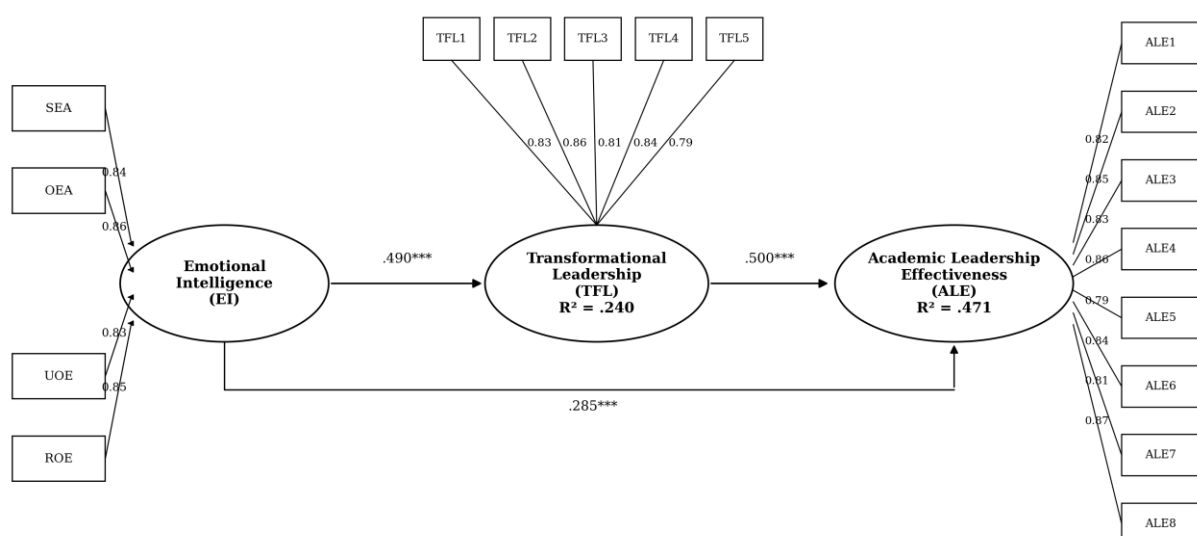
Variable	EI	TFL	ALE
EI	1.000		
TFL	.490***	1.000	
ALE	.530***	.640***	1.000

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Structural equation model

The hypothesised structural model was estimated using AMOS. The structural model retained the validated measurement structure and included the direct EI-to-TFL and TFL-to-ALE paths, as well as a direct EI-to-ALE path required for mediation assessment. Figure 2 presents the standardised estimates. EI explained 24.0% of the variance in TFL, while EI and TFL jointly explained 47.1% of the variance in ALE. The explained variance indicates that the proposed emotional capability and behavioural mechanism account for a substantial proportion of differences in faculty-rated leadership effectiveness, while also leaving room for other individual and institutional influences.

Figure 2. Structural equation model with standardised estimates



Note. *** $p < .001$. EI components: Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA), Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA), Use of Emotion (UOE), and Regulation of Emotion (ROE).



The overall fit of the structural model was satisfactory. Table 9 reports CMIN/DF = 1.355, CFI = .967, TLI = .963, IFI = .968, GFI = .902, and RMSEA = .049. These indices collectively indicate that the hypothesised structure provided an acceptable representation of the observed covariance matrix.

Table 9. Model fit for the structural equation model

Model	CMIN	df	CMIN/DF	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
Default model	624.80	461	1.355	.912	.903	.968	.963	.967	.902	.049
Saturated model	0.000	0	-	1.000	-	1.000	-	1.000	1.000	-
Independence model	4236.54	528	8.024	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.274	.217

The effect between Emotional Intelligence, Transformational Leadership, and Academic Leadership Effectiveness

The structural path estimates are presented in Table 10. EI had a positive and statistically significant effect on TFL ($\beta = .490$, C.R. = 7.117, $p < .001$), supporting H1. TFL, in turn, had a positive and statistically significant effect on ALE ($\beta = .500$, C.R. = 7.045, $p < .001$), supporting H2. The direct EI-to-ALE path remained statistically significant after TFL was included ($\beta = .285$, C.R. = 4.239, $p < .001$). The persistence of this direct path indicates that transformational behaviour does not fully account for the relationship between emotional capability and leadership effectiveness.

Table 10. Direct effects of emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and academic leadership effectiveness

Path	Standardised regression weight	Regression weight	S.E.	C.R.	p
TFL $\leftarrow$ EI	.490	.548	.077	7.117	< .001
ALE $\leftarrow$ TFL	.500	.472	.067	7.045	< .001
ALE $\leftarrow$ EI	.285	.301	.071	4.239	< .001

The mediating effect of Transformational Leadership

The mediator Transformational Leadership. The bias-corrected CI was used to assess the mediation effect, with 5,000 bootstrap samples. The indirect effect of EI on ALE via TFL was .245 with a 95% CI of [.161, .346] which did not contain zero (see Table 11). The direct effect was found to be .285 while the total effect was .530. Results support H3 and indicate a direct and partial mediation: Transformational behaviour is related to ALE directly and indirectly by ALE.



Table 11. Mediation effect of transformational leadership

Parameter	Estimate	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	p
Direct effect: EI → ALE	.285	.147	.410	.001
Indirect effect: EI → TFL → ALE	.245	.161	.346	.001
Total effect: EI → ALE	.530	.421	.623	.001

Discussion

This study examined a small stream of research relating emotional intelligence (EI) and academic leadership in private higher education. There are three major findings. In the first case, there was a positive correlation between EI and faculty rated TFL. Second, the academic leadership effectiveness was positively associated with TFL, and TFL had the largest structural influence. In third, TFL, partly mediated the relationship between EI-ALE, suggesting that there is an association between emotional capability and leadership effectiveness, which is achieved through the way that emotional capability manifests into observable leadership behaviour. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence cannot be equated with leadership effectiveness but rather is a factor that helps determine the effectiveness of a person. Positive EI-to-TFL is in line with the theoretical expectation that emotional awareness and emotional regulation is a precursor to transformational behaviour. Academic leaders typically operate under multiple expectations, differences, scarcity of resources and change in institutions. In these cases, self-emotion appraisal can enhance awareness of self-emotions, others' emotion appraisal can aid identification of faculty concerns, emotion can be utilized to motivate communication, and emotion regulation can minimize impulsive or defensive reactions. They are not indicators of transformational leadership but can heighten the chances of repeatedly enacting the behaviours of transformational leadership. The magnitude of the EI-TFL relationship is noteworthy because EI and TFL were assessed by different respondents. Harms and Credé (2010) demonstrated that associations between EI and transformational leadership are much larger when the same source evaluates both constructs. Therefore, the present finding provides more conservative evidence than a leader self-report design. It also aligns with Baba et al. (2021), who found that EI is related to transformational leadership among academic leaders, and with Korakis and Poulaki's (2025) critical review, which concluded that the relationship is generally positive but sensitive to measurement and study design. Rather than resolving all debates around EI and transformational leadership, the present result strengthens the argument that the relationship can remain observable under source separation in a private higher-education context.

The second finding concerns the strong positive relationship between TFL and ALE. Faculty members who perceived their academic leaders as communicating direction, encouraging alternative thinking, attending to faculty development, modelling professional values, and motivating collective academic effort rated those leaders as more effective. This is in line with the overall literature on transformational leadership. The case of transformational leadership construct, Judge and Piccolo (2004) found evidence of high criterion-related validity and Wang et al. (2011)



found evidence of positive relationships with criterion and criterion levels for several criterion. The present study extends the study by examining academic leadership effectiveness specifically from followers' point of view in the field of private higher education institutions. This can also be a logical outcome for the context. Academic writing is knowledge based and professional writing. Faculty tend not to have the generalist skill sets, and are generally not likely to be comfortable with positional authority. Transformational behaviour is particularly significant as it seeks to change others' actions and thoughts with purpose, professional respect, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration. Leaders in private higher education can find it challenging to meet accreditation requirements and teaching targets, as well as student expectations, research pressures, and institutional competition while juggling all these demands. The following behaviors can be used to fill the gap between administration and faculty commitment. The evidence from India has been recent and indicates to the importance of relational and developmental leadership processes. Kranthi et al. (2024) found that the resonant leadership was positively correlated with the psychological empowerment and learning organisation outcomes of faculty in higher education in India. As regards the leadership role, Ludwikowska et al. (2025) reported that job performance will be correlated with academic leadership, which was found to be mediated by organizational citizenship behaviour, while Malik and Kaur (2026) indicated emotional intelligence and emotional behaviour as relevant to the academic leadership in the North Indian domain of higher education. Although these various studies employed varying constructs and causal ordering, the common thread of all these studies was that leadership in higher education in India is not synonymous with formal power or an age demographic. Explanation in the mediation result is the main point of explanation. This indirect EI-to-ALE effect was found to be more important than was the direct EI-to-ALE path. This partial mediation (complementary) implies that transformational behaviour is a part of the explanation of the relationship between EI and effectiveness. This is an extreme of a discovery, out of two extremes. It does not assert that being emotionally competent is related to effectiveness regardless of behaviour and it does not suggest that emotional capability only has a direct effect via the transformational process. The other direct effect is, theoretically speaking, justified. There are dimensions of emotional intelligence that are not captured in the model which can be used to help academic leadership to deal with conflict, sensitivity to others, stress management, communication, negotiation and leader-member exchange. Academic leadership effectiveness, on the other hand, is not solely dependent on EI, but also on other factors, including discipline expertise, decision-making power, institutional resources, governance structures, credibility and leadership experiences, and more. So the model is not a full-fledged theory of academic leadership, but rather a mechanism. The source separated design is also very important for the interpretation of mediation. Faculty member reported the following TFL, ALE was reported by the leader. So, the initial step of the mediation path is over the respondent sources. The second stage is in the faculty source and must therefore be interpreted with caution but is still superior to a one questionnaire design that relies on one person's judgement of all the constructs. Podsakoff et al. (2003) found that procedural separation could reduce the amount of common-method problems, while the current matched-pair design is implemented at the design level, rather than at the level of statistical tests after the data was collected. The results indicate that EI is not so much a label one wishes to have as an understanding of the behaviours



that it supports and enhances. It seems emotional capability is relevant to academic leaders when manifested in how leadership sets direction, encourages thinking, provides support to faculty, exemplifies professional value and orchestrates collective action. If it is not merely a positive relationship between EI and effectiveness, then this is seen as an organizational meaning of EI.

Conclusions

This study examined the variables of emotional intelligence, transformational leadership and academic leadership effectiveness in focused source separated private higher education system of Uttar Pradesh. EI was shown to be a positive predictor of transformational leadership, while the academic effectiveness of leadership was shown to be positively predicted by transformational leadership from 150 matched leader-faculty pairs. The mediation analysis also revealed that the direct effect of EI remained when it was mediated by TFL. The pattern that emerged was a complementary partial mediation pattern. What is clear is that, emotionally intelligent academic leaders are more effective. What is more accurate, however, is that emotional capability is correlated with effectiveness in part because it is evidenced in faculty members' behaviour as transformational leadership. This capability-behaviour-effectiveness progression offers a more informative description of EI in academic leadership, and forestalls the amalgamation of related but different constructs. This study also demonstrates the benefits of source separation of respondents. Reduced general positivity (or self-perception) of one respondent when leaders do the same in terms of EI and faculty members are self-evaluating leaders' behaviour and their effectiveness. The results in limited context of PHEIs (Private Higher Educational Institutions) in Lucknow, Varanasi, Ghaziabad and Agra, provide support to the study and development of academic leadership is a need to incorporate the emotional and behavioural competencies.

Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, this study brings forth the link between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership with an explicit mediation model. EI is in the "upstream" side of emotional capability, TFL on the "downstream" side of emotional capability is a behaviour that can be observed, and ALE is a leadership capability that can be followed and evaluated. It is significant to note that the ordering is relevant in that it helps to differentiate emotional intelligence and transformational leadership from being two synonyms. The huge indirect effect shows that one way that the emotional capability can be organisationally relevant is through the pathway of behavioural leadership.

The findings also contribute to Full-Range Leadership Theory by identifying an individual capability that is associated with transformational behaviour in an academic context. Transformational leadership research has often concentrated on its consequences; the present model gives attention to one possible antecedent. At the same time, the partial rather than complete mediation cautions against treating transformational leadership as the sole behavioural expression of EI. Future theory can incorporate additional relational mechanisms, such as conflict management, trust, leader-member exchange, and communication quality.

Methodologically, the matched leader-faculty design contributes to the continuing debate about source effects in EI-leadership research. Harms and Credé (2010) showed that same-source designs



can yield much stronger EI-leadership relationships than different-source designs. By obtaining EI from academic leaders and TFL/ALE from faculty members, this study reduces direct same-source inflation in the EI-to-leadership paths and demonstrates the usefulness of source separation in higher education leadership research.

In academically private institutions, academic leadership should not be determined by the seniority or research quality/discipline. The findings show that emotional skills and leadership behaviours of transformation are also applicable to the experience of leadership with faculty members but they are still applicable. Leadership-development programmes can therefore incorporate the three domains of emotional awareness and regulation and the application of behavioural skills, including: providing academic direction, giving constructive feedback, managing conflict, encouraging faculty development, stimulating team-buoyancy. The mediation result is especially valuable for leadership development as it is able to highlight behaviourally actionable pathways. EI does not have to be an abstract classification of a personality. Emotional capabilities can be the focus of development programmes related to their manifestation in everyday leadership behaviours. For instance, being aware of frustration in faculty members can be linked to better communication, emotional awareness can help to handle conflict in a calm manner, and understanding people's needs can help with individual consideration. This type of training brings EI to a level of observable behaviours instead of relying on self-perceptions. Evaluation of leadership can be beneficial from diverse angles. Self-assessment can be helpful in reflection, but it can also be a way to get direct information about the experience of leadership behaviour which is provided through faculty ratings. Consequently, on an ongoing basis, teachers can offer feedback to the administration in a confidential manner, in addition to administrative actions. In private higher education, academic leaders frequently have multiple roles of teaching, administration and people management, and a balanced evaluation system can prove to be helpful to identify technical and relational development needs.

Limitations and future developments

There are only a few limitations of this study. First, there is no temporal cause and effect in the cross sectional design. The mediation model is theoretically and empirically justified and the model does not show that EI precedes transformational behaviour and that the latter in turn leads to greater effectiveness. Longitudinal research designs could take measures at different points in time to specifically test for the temporal mediation of EI. Secondly, geographically and institutionally this study is confined to the private higher education institutions of four cities of Uttar Pradesh. The findings are not to be considered as being representative of all Indian HEIs. These would have to be replicated in other States and compared with other public and private institutions to see whether there is consistency of the model in governance and cultural context.

Third, EI was self-reported by academic leaders. Source separation reduces common-method overlap between EI and faculty-rated outcomes, but self-reported EI remains vulnerable to self-perception and social-desirability effects. Future studies could combine self-report EI with ability-based assessment, peer ratings, or 360-degree evaluations. Fourth, TFL and ALE were rated by the same faculty member within each pair. Studies using multiple faculty raters per leader would



permit aggregation and multilevel analysis and would reduce dependence on one follower's evaluation.

Finally, the model intentionally focuses on one behavioural mechanism. Academic leadership effectiveness is also likely to depend on leader–member exchange, trust, institutional climate, resources, role authority, professional credibility, and conflict management. Future research should compare alternative mediators and test whether transformational leadership remains a central mechanism after these factors are considered. Intervention studies would be especially valuable for determining whether deliberate development of EI-related competencies produces measurable changes in faculty-observed leadership behaviour and effectiveness.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest associated with this manuscript.

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

During the preparation of the manuscript, an AI-assisted language and document-preparation tool was used to support drafting, language refinement, and formatting. The authors have reviewed and edited the resulting text and take full responsibility for the scholarly content, interpretation, and final manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The dataset supporting the findings of this study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to participant confidentiality and applicable institutional requirements.

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