

Cultural Intelligence and Spiritual Leadership: Pathways to Psychological Empowerment

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Abstract

Taking into account the key role of teachers, the present survey research investigates the relationship between cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership style with the empowerment of 210 Secondary School Language teachers in Gorgan. Grounded in cultural intelligence theory (Earley & Ang, 2003) and spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003), the research explores how these factors contribute to teacher empowerment, a critical component of effective teaching and school improvement. Results revealed significant positive relationships between cultural intelligence and teacher empowerment and between spiritual leadership and teacher empowerment. Regression analysis confirmed that both cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership style are significant predictors of teacher empowerment. The structural equation model demonstrated strong fit indices, confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments. These findings highlight the importance of cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership in enhancing teacher empowerment. The findings suggest that educational decision-makers should promote teacher empowerment by fostering cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership in the workplace.

Keywords: cultural intelligence, empowerment of teachers, spiritual leadership style

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1. Introduction

Education seems to be one of the most complex and influential social institutions in any society, serving as a cornerstone for social, economic, and cultural development. Its role extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge; it shapes the values, skills, and capabilities of individuals, thereby influencing the trajectory of national progress. Within this context, teachers emerge as the most critical agents of change, as their work directly influences the quality of education and, by extension, the future of society (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Teachers are the linchpins of the educational system, entrusted with the dual responsibility of imparting knowledge and nurturing the holistic development of students. Their role extends beyond the classroom, as they often serve as role models and representatives of the broader adult world. Children, in particular, tend to emulate the behaviors, attitudes, and values demonstrated by their teachers, making it imperative for educators to embody positive traits and guide students toward meaningful goals (Lunenberget al., 2007). Teachers' beliefs and behaviors profoundly influence student engagement (Shakki, 2022), attitudes, and achievement, making them central to school improvement efforts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Given the profound impact of teachers on students' academic and personal growth, understanding the factors that enhance their effectiveness and job satisfaction is crucial. Recent research has highlighted that this effectiveness is closely tied to teachers' professional identity, which itself is shaped by contextual workplace factors; for instance, Wang and Derakhshan (2024) found that a supportive school climate and constructive administrator leadership behavior are significant determinants of professional identity among Chinese English as a foreign language teachers. Successful educational outcomes are a multidimensional process shaped by a confluence of factors, with educator psychology constituting a critical determinant (Fathi & Soleimani, 2025). Among these factors, teacher empowerment has gained significant attention in recent years (Davis & Wilson, 2000; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Prasetya, 2024). Empowerment refers to the process of enabling individuals to take control of their work, make decisions, and feel a sense of ownership and competence in their roles. Empowered teachers are better equipped to address challenges, innovate in their teaching practices, and contribute to the overall improvement of the educational system.

In addition to empowerment, two other constructs have emerged as critical to understanding teacher effectiveness: cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership. Cultural intelligence, defined as an individual's ability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings, has become increasingly relevant in today's globalized world (Basman & Bayram, 2024; Earley & Ang, 2003; Sharma & Makhija, 2024; Tesfaye et al., 2025). For teachers, cultural intelligence enables them to navigate the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, foster inclusive classrooms, and promote mutual respect and understanding (Rajaram, 2023). Similarly, spiritual leadership has been recognized as a powerful driver of motivation and engagement in the workplace (Meng, 2016). In the context of education, spiritual leadership can create a positive school climate, enhance teacher morale, and foster a sense of community and shared purpose (Asbari, 2024; Holden, 2017; Terzi et al., 2020).

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership, there is limited research on how these factors interact with teacher empowerment, particularly in non-Western contexts. Most studies have focused on Western educational settings, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics play out in diverse cultural and institutional environments. In addition, there have scarcely been any studies to muster the three concepts of cultural intelligence, spiritual leadership, and psychological empowerment in the field of teaching. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the relationship between the three aforementioned concepts among Secondary School Language teachers in Gorgan, Iran. By doing so, it aims to contribute to the broader literature on teacher development and provide actionable insights for educational policymakers and school leaders.

Based on the stated objectives, the present research is guided by the following questions:

- 1.1. Is there a significant relationship between cultural intelligence and the psychological empowerment of secondary school language teachers in Gorgan?
- 1.2. Is there a significant relationship between spiritual leadership style and the psychological empowerment of secondary school language teachers in Gorgan?
- 1.3. To what extent do cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership collectively predict teacher empowerment?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a multidimensional construct that extends beyond mere cultural competence, encompassing cognitive, motivational, and behavioral abilities to adapt effectively to diverse cultural settings (Ang & Inkpen, 2008; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Ashraf et al., 2025; Haikuo, 2025; Naidoo, 2024; Peterson, 2004). Earley and Ang (2003) introduced the Cultural Intelligence Model, which comprises four interrelated dimensions: metacognitive CQ (the ability to consciously regulate cultural understanding through planning, monitoring, and revising mental models of cultural norms), cognitive CQ (knowledge of cultural norms, practices, and systems), motivational CQ (intrinsic interest and confidence in engaging with diverse cultures), and behavioral CQ (the ability to adapt verbal and nonverbal behaviors to suit different cultural contexts). This framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how individuals navigate and thrive in culturally diverse environments (Ang et al., 2006; Ang et al., 2007; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015; Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley et al., 2006; Van Dyne et al., 2010).

Recent studies have expanded on Earley and Ang's model, highlighting its relevance in various organizational and educational contexts. For instance, Van Dyne et al. (2010) emphasize that metacognitive and behavioral CQ are particularly critical for leaders in multicultural teams, as they enable effective communication and conflict resolution. CQ aligns with and extends the concepts of emotional and social intelligence (Albert, 2005). While emotional intelligence focuses on understanding and managing one's own emotions and those of others within familiar cultural contexts, cultural intelligence becomes essential when individuals interact in unfamiliar or multicultural environments (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). For example, in educational settings, teachers with high CQ are better equipped to manage classrooms with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering inclusivity and enhancing learning outcomes (Van Dyne et al., 2010). In organizational contexts, cultural intelligence has been linked to improved job performance and leadership effectiveness. Moreover, cultural intelligence enhances an individual's ability to create shared cognitive frameworks, even in the absence of complete understanding of local norms, thereby facilitating

effective communication and relationship-building (Earley et al., 2006).

Though still an emerging field of study, CQ has garnered increasing attention across disciplines and its potential applications in education have also been recognized, with scholars emphasizing the need for further research in this area (Rajaram, 2023; Sousa, 2023). Scholarly evidence confirms that while CQ functions as a complementary construct for other intelligences (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Van Dyne et al., 2012), it remains an independent and distinct cognitive one (Rajaram, 2023). Education itself enjoys a wide stretch of subcategories among which language education (more precisely, English language) has had its share of investigation with regard to CQ, given the close relationship between language and culture (Gao & Hua, 2021). Motivation can be a product of the coupling between CQ and cooperative learning in English as a foreign language (EFL) field (Bećirović, 2023). The concept of CQ is not limited to a mere recognition of diversity in education, but a kind of skill that can be auspicious for learners when they face a global world (Watkins & Noble, 2016). This type of intelligence has not received adequate attention in Iranian EFL and ESP curriculum which accentuates the need for the involvement of CQ (Karami & Izadpanah, 2022).

To effectively foster psychological empowerment in teachers, it is essential to recognize how cultural intelligence not only enhances individual adaptability but also intersects with broader organizational and leadership dynamics present in educational settings. This interconnection becomes particularly evident when considering how leadership approaches, such as spiritual leadership, can cultivate and reinforce the development of cultural intelligence within schools.

2.2. Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership has emerged as a significant area of study in organizational and leadership research, particularly in the context of fostering employee motivation, commitment, and performance. Fry's Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT), introduced in 2003, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how leaders can create a sense of meaning, purpose, and interconnectedness within organizations. Fry's theory posits that spiritual leadership is characterized by values, attitudes, and behaviors that intrinsically motivate both leaders and followers to achieve a shared vision, while

fostering a culture of altruistic love and organizational commitment (Fry, 2003; Meng, 2016). This theory has been widely validated and expanded in recent studies, (Fry et al., 2017; Li et al., 2023; Qudus et al., 2022; Reave, 2005; Song, 2022; Syihabuddin, 2017), which highlight its relevance in diverse organizational contexts.

Fry's SLT is grounded in the idea that spiritual leadership involves creating a vision that inspires hope and faith, while cultivating an environment of altruistic love. According to Fry, spiritual leadership comprises three core components: vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love. These components work synergistically to foster a sense of meaningfulness and membership among employees, ultimately enhancing their motivation, commitment, and performance (Fry, 2003). A compelling vision provides employees with a sense of purpose and direction, aligning individual and organizational values to create unity and shared purpose. Hope and faith are essential for sustaining motivation and resilience, particularly in challenging times, as they inspire employees to persevere and remain committed to the organization's mission (Fry, 2003). Altruistic love, the cornerstone of spiritual leadership, involves genuine care, concern, and appreciation for oneself and others, fostering a culture of trust, respect, and collaboration (Benefiel et al., 2014; Fry, 2023; Karakas, 2010).

The integration of spirituality and leadership has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly as organizations seek to create more meaningful and fulfilling work environments. Fry's SLT provides a framework for understanding how spiritual leadership can enhance organizational effectiveness by addressing employees' intrinsic needs for meaning, purpose, and connection (Fry, 2023). Spiritual leaders are characterized by their ability to inspire and empower others, helping them discover their inner potential and align their personal values with organizational goals. This alignment fosters a sense of meaningfulness and membership, which are critical for employee engagement and performance (Benefiel et al., 2014). Recent studies have further validated the impact of spiritual leadership on organizational outcomes. For instance, Benefiel and Fry (2014) demonstrated that spiritual leadership fosters a positive organizational culture, characterized by trust, collaboration, and innovation. Other studies have linked spiritual leadership to reduced turnover intentions (Yang et al., 2019) and enhanced employee well-being (Rego & Pina e Cunha, 2008).

In the field of EFL teaching, the closest concepts to spiritual leadership are teacher leadership. Among its numerous definitions, teacher leadership entails teachers being facilitators and inspiring figures for learners and peers along with the teachers themselves retaining their enthusiasm (Crowther et al., 2009; Killion & Harrison, 2006). Whitehead and Greenier's (2019) study suggested that even the learners believe that teachers' leadership capacities should not be restricted to sheer instruction but to cover other facets in unison for bringing about more positive attitudes in learners toward learning a language. This layer of teacher leadership is somehow in line with the theoretical background of spiritual leadership. Findings of a more recent study pinpointed the positive relationship between effective leadership and effective teaching as the former includes strong interpersonal relationship with the learners in addition to content knowledge (Reinders et al., 2025). Though different in terminology, both spiritual leadership and EFL teacher leadership propound overlapping qualities.

While spiritual leadership provides a framework for meaningful engagement and motivation among teachers, its true impact on teacher empowerment is best understood when examined alongside individual competencies like cultural intelligence. Together, these constructs lay the groundwork for understanding the multifaceted dimensions of empowerment within educational organizations.

2.3. Psychological Empowerment

Empowerment is a critical concept in organizational studies, referring to the process of enabling individuals to gain control over their work, develop their skills, and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals (Maynard et al., 2012). According to Spreitzer (1995), empowerment is achieved through both internal and external organizational challenges, such as increasing competition, rapid changes, and the need for employee growth and development.

Psychological empowerment (PE) in education is a multidimensional construct, reflecting its complex nature (Singh & Kaur, 2019). Short and Rinehart (1992) identified six dimensions of PE: professional development, status, impact, autonomy, decision-making, and self-efficacy. Similarly, Spreitzer (1995) proposed three additional dimensions: competence, meaning, and self-determination. Impact refers to

teachers' perceived ability to influence school decisions and practices, while meaning relates to the alignment of their values with their work, fostering a sense of fulfillment. Competence reflects teachers' confidence in their ability to perform tasks effectively, and self-determination involves their control over instructional decisions and activities (Çelik & Servet, 2020). These dimensions collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of PE, emphasizing its role in enhancing teachers' professional experiences and effectiveness in educational settings.

Zimmerman's (1995) widely cited model of PE comprises three components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral empowerment. The intrapersonal component focuses on self-perception, including control, self-efficacy, and perceived competence, which reflect an individual's belief in their ability to influence their environment, complete tasks, and perform efficiently (Hur, 2006; Leung, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000). The interactional component emphasizes understanding the social context, available resources, and decision-making skills to achieve goals (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). The behavioral component involves actions that lead to empowerment, such as participation in community organizations or political groups (Zimmerman et al., 1992). Recent research has further validated the importance of empowerment in organizational contexts. For example, Zhang et al. (2021) demonstrated that empowerment fosters resilience and adaptability, particularly in dynamic and uncertain environments. These studies highlight the critical role of empowerment in driving organizational success and employee well-being, particularly in today's rapidly changing workplace.

Building on this, Lee and Nie (2014) integrated social-structural and psychological perspectives into a framework for teacher PE in Singapore, linking these dimensions to work-related outcomes. The majority of studies associate EFL teachers' psychological empowerment with job satisfaction and job commitment (Ghasemi, 2021; Khany & Tazik, 2015; Xiong, 2022). In the same vein, through different empowering procedures namely, cognitive restructuring, teachers are able to cope with burnout, including physical and psychological exhaustion (Ghasemi, 2021). Moreover, psychological empowerment can promote the aforementioned good leadership skills in teachers (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Tsemach, 2014; Wang, 2024). Teachers' psychological empowerment resulted in self-efficacy which led to more efficient classroom leadership

in Wang's (2024) study. The concept of psychological empowerment is so vital in EFL that Lei and Xu (2022) composed a scale for measuring it.

Given that psychological empowerment encapsulates teachers' sense of competence, autonomy, and purpose, it is important to explore how both cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership contribute to, and are reinforced by, these empowerment dimensions. Integrating these perspectives enables a comprehensive understanding of the factors that collectively enhance teacher effectiveness and well-being

2.4. Empirical Studies

The integration of Fry's (2003) Spiritual Leadership Theory, Earley and Ang's (2003) Cultural Intelligence Model, and Spreitzer's (1995) Psychological Empowerment Model creates a synergistic framework that enhances teacher empowerment in diverse educational settings. Spiritual leadership provides the motivational foundation by emphasizing vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, which align with the dimensions of psychological empowerment, particularly meaning and self-determination. When school leaders articulate a compelling vision that resonates with teachers' values, it fosters a sense of meaningfulness and purpose in their work (Spreitzer, 1995). This alignment inspires teachers to feel their contributions are impactful, enhancing their autonomy and willingness to innovate in their teaching practices .

Cultural intelligence complements this by equipping teachers with metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral skills to navigate culturally diverse environments. Teachers with high cultural intelligence are better able to adapt to the needs of diverse students and communities, which strengthens their sense of competence and self-efficacy (Zhang et al., 2021). Moreover, cultural intelligence fosters self-determination by enabling teachers to make informed decisions in culturally complex situations, thereby increasing their autonomy and control over their work (Earley & Ang, 2003).

The interplay between spiritual leadership and cultural intelligence further enhances teacher empowerment. Spiritual leaders who model inclusive behaviors and promote a

shared vision of cultural diversity encourage teachers to develop their cultural intelligence (Van Dyne et al., 2010). For example, leaders who emphasize respect for diverse perspectives inspire teachers to engage in continuous learning and self-reflection, which enhances their cultural intelligence and ability to create inclusive learning environments. This, in turn, reinforces their sense of meaningfulness and impact.

There also exists evidence of the interplay between spiritual leadership and psychological empowerment. In a study conducted by Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach (2014), different facets of psychological empowerment mediated authentic leadership. In their study, empowerment not only influenced leadership but also the perception of teachers regarding an authentic or spiritual leadership. Similarly, Wang (2024) examined the same factors but the focus was more on the psychological empowerment of the self in promoting efficient classroom leadership. Spiritual leadership is not limited to teachers whereas educational authorities who oversee the teachers can foster psychological empowerment through good support as it was probed in some studies (Lee & Nie, 2015; Zhang et al., 2022).

By examining the empirical intersections between cultural intelligence, spiritual leadership, and psychological empowerment, the literature suggests that these elements are not isolated but synergistically contribute to teacher development and organizational success. This integrated perspective frames the rationale for the present study's investigation of their combined impact within the context of secondary school language teachers in Gorgan.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in Gorgan, the capital city of Golestan Province in northern Iran, known for its cultural diversity and significant educational emphasis. The research focused specifically on secondary school language teachers employed at public schools across the city. Gorgan, as a regional education hub, features schools that are administered both at the provincial and district levels, with oversight provided by the local Department of Education. The institutions involved in the research are public secondary schools, which typically serve students aged 12 to 18 and are characterized

by relatively large class sizes, variable teaching resources, and a diverse student demographic in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and language experience.

3.1. Participants

The statistical population in this study consists of all secondary school language teachers working in public schools in Gorgan. Given that the population size is 836 Secondary School Language teachers, a sample size of 260 was determined based on the Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. Stratified random sampling was used to select the sample from the research population. To ensure a representative sample, the researchers employed stratified random sampling based on key demographic variables; gender, age group, academic degree, and teaching experience. A proportional allocation method was used, ensuring the sample composition reflected the population distribution across these demographic characteristics. To collect the required sample size, 260 questionnaires were distributed among the study population, of which 210 were collected. Table 1 summarizes the Demographic features of the teachers.

Table 1
Demographic Features of the Participants

Feature	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	137	65.2
Male	73	34.8
Age		
20-30	14	6.7
31-40	74	35.3
41-50	103	49
51-60	19	9
Academic Degree		
Associate of Arts		
Bachelor of Arts	28	13.3
Master of Arts	151	71.9
Ph.D.	30	14.3

Feature	Frequency	Percent
Teaching Experience	1	0.5
1-10	64	30.5
11-20	54	25.7
21-30	92	43.8
Total	210	100.0

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

This research employed three standard questionnaires for data collection, which had been previously used by several researchers. Due to the relative nature of the scales in the questionnaires, a 5-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used.

3.2.1. Cultural intelligence questionnaire

In this study, cultural intelligence is defined by the score that respondents give to the 20 items of the Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire developed by Ang et al. (2004). This questionnaire consists of 20 items and four factors (Table 2). Items 1 to 4 relate to the strategic or metacognitive factor of cultural intelligence (4 questions). Items 5 to 10 relate to the knowledge or cognitive factor of cultural intelligence (6 questions). Items 11 to 15 relate to the motivational factor of cultural intelligence (5 questions). Items 16 to 20 relate to the behavioral factor of cultural intelligence (5 questions).

Table 2

Item-Type Distribution of Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire

Row	Scale	Items
1	Strategic Factor	1-4
2	Knowledge Factor	5-10
3	Motivational Factor	11-15
4	Behavioral Factor	16-20

3.2.2. Spiritual leadership questionnaire

The Spiritual Leadership Questionnaire (Fry, 2003), as shown in Table 3, consists of 16 questions and five components, which are shown below. Items 1 to 3 relate to Vision, 4 to 7 to Altruistic Love, 8 to 10 to Membership, 11 to 13 to Organizational Commitment, and 14 to 16 to Performance Feedback.

Table 3

Item-Type Distribution of Spiritual Leadership Questionnaire

Row	Scale	Items
1	Vision	1-3
2	Altruistic Love	4-7
3	Membership	8-10
4	Organizational Commitment	11-13
5	Performance Feedback	14-16

3.2.3. Empowerment questionnaire

The Spreitzer (1995) standard questionnaire was used to measure this variable. This questionnaire has 15 questions and aims to measure the psychological empowerment of employees in the organization and its dimensions (Competence, Self-Determination, Impact, Meaning, and Trust). The response scale is Likert-type.

3.2.4. Validity and reliability of questionnaires

In the present study, to assess content validity, first, the Persian translation and the English text of the questionnaires were given to a TEFL professor to assess the questionnaire in terms of correct translation. Then, to resolve ambiguities in the questionnaire questions and their relevance to the subject and target population, the questionnaires were provided to experienced TEFL professors, and based on their proposed comments, some items were corrected or removed. In this research, Cronbach's alpha method was used to estimate the reliability of the questionnaires. As

revealed in Table 4, the alpha coefficient for all three questionnaires is above 0.9, which indicates the high reliability of the three questionnaires.

Table 4

Reliability Coefficients of the Questionnaires

Variable	Number of Questions	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Cultural Intelligence	20	0.92
Spiritual Leadership	16	0.94
Empowerment	15	0.91

3.3. Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in the field using standardized questionnaires. Prior to distributing the research instruments, the study's objectives were explained to secondary school language teachers in Gorgan city, and the confidentiality of responses and voluntary nature of participation were emphasized. The questionnaires were distributed in person at schools and collected after completion to maximize the response rate. After data cleaning and removing incomplete questionnaires, data analysis was performed using SmartPLS software and the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. This method was chosen due to its effectiveness in analyzing medium-sized samples, its ability to examine complex relationships among variables, and its robustness to non-normal data distributions. The analysis followed a two-stage approach: first, evaluation of the measurement model in terms of reliability and validity, and then testing the structural model to examine causal relationships and hypothesized pathways of the research.

4. Results

As stated, the purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership with employee empowerment among Secondary School Language teachers in Gorgan. The collected data from 210 completed questionnaires were analyzed using the SmartPLS software package. Both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to explore the relationships and predictive models among cultural intelligence, spiritual leadership, and teacher

empowerment within the sample of secondary school language teachers in Gorgan.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Table 5 presents the mean, standard deviation, variance, minimum, and maximum values for each research variable, based on individual questions and overall variables.

Table 5
Variable Coding and Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance
Cultural Intelligence	1	5	3.296	0.749	0.562
Strategic Factor (of CI)	1.2	5	3.364	0.633	0.401
Knowledge Factor (of CI)	1.2	5	3.483	0.697	0.486
Motivational Factor (of CI)	1.2	5	3.320	0.699	0.488
Behavioral Factor (of CI)	1.2	5	3.494	0.804	0.647
Spiritual Leadership Style	1	5	3.617	0.745	0.555
Vision (of SP)	1	5	3.249	0.779	0.607
Altruism (of SP)	1	5	3.342	0.763	0.583
Membership (of SP)	1	5	3.364	0.672	0.452
Organizational Commitment	1.2	5	3.483	0.708	0.501
Performance Feedback	1	5	3.262	0.685	0.469
Teacher Empowerment	1.2	5	3.494	0.814	0.662

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	Standard (SD)	Deviation	Variance
Competency (of EMP)	1	5	3.617	0.753		0.567
Autonomy (of EMP)	1	5	3.429	0.726		0.527
Influence (of EMP)	1	5	3.405	0.783		0.614
Meaningfulness (of EMP)	1	5	3.271	0.633		0.401
Trust (of EMP)	1	5	3.581	0.685		0.470

4.2. Inferential Statistics of Research Variables

Following the descriptive statistics, inferential statistics were employed. This involved assessing the questionnaire's validity and reliability, followed by examining variable correlations and, finally, testing the research hypotheses.

4.2.1. Model fit assessment and model specification

In structural equation modeling (SEM), model fit is assessed through outer and inner model evaluations, with precise specification of relationships among variables as a prerequisite. The model incorporates factor loadings and structural equations, representing the links between observed and latent variables and among latent variables, respectively. These coefficients are tested using the t-statistic, determining the magnitude and direction of each variable's contribution to its construct (see Figure 1 & 2).

Figure 1
Research Model with Estimated Path Coefficients

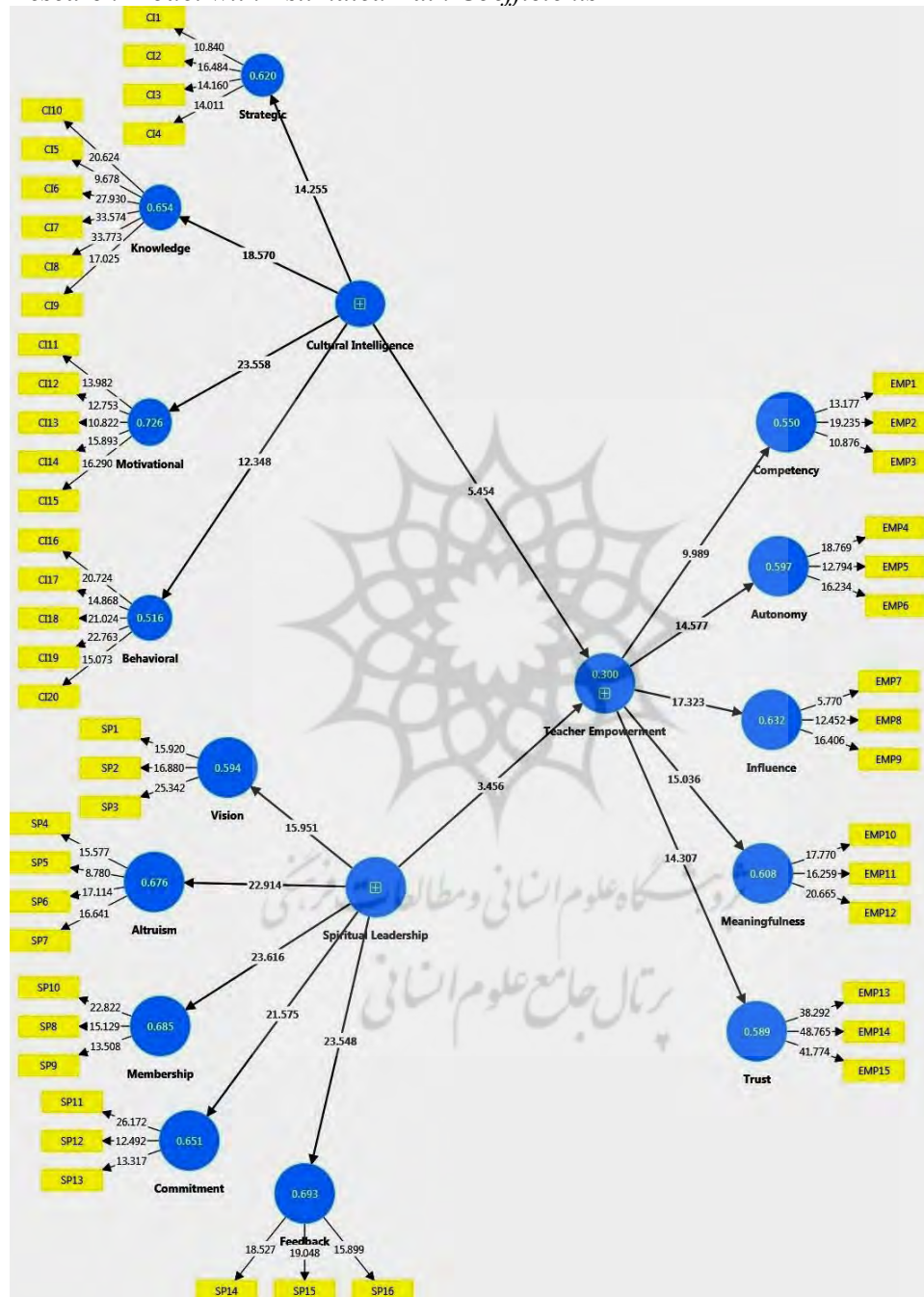
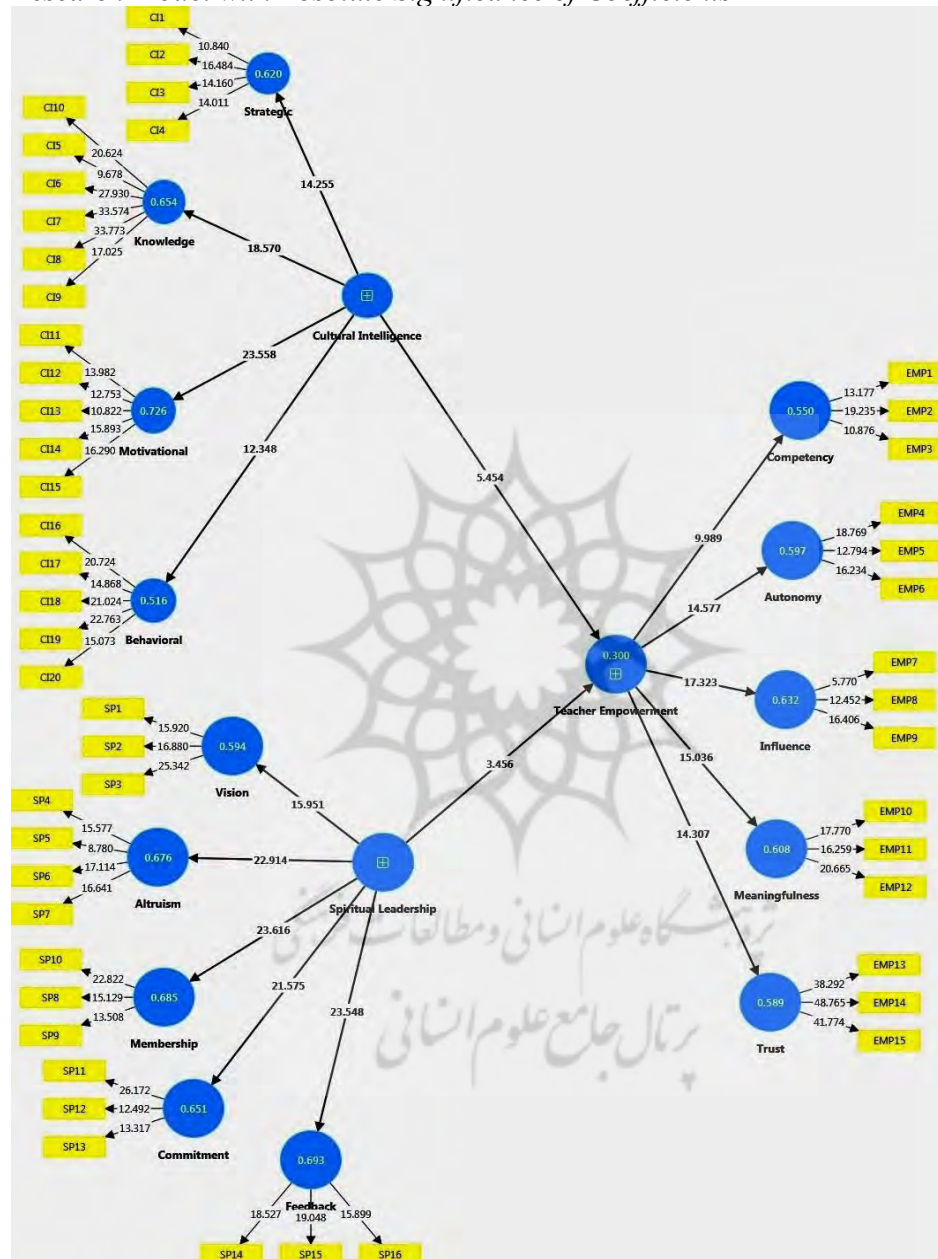


Figure 2*Research Model with Absolute Significance of Coefficients*

4.2.2. Outer model assessment (Measurement model)

The outer model assessment examines the reliability and validity of the constructs and research instruments. Construct reliability was assessed using composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and factor loadings (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

4.2.2.2. Reliability assessment

Reliability assessment begins with examining factor loadings (Table 6). The relationship between a factor (latent variable) and an observed variable is represented by the factor loading, which ranges between zero and one. A factor loading below 0.3 is considered weak and disregarded. Factor loadings between 0.3 and 0.6 are acceptable, and those greater than 0.6 are highly desirable (Kline, 2014).

Table 6
Factor Loadings of Indicators for Each Variable

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Variable	Item	Factor Loading
Strategic Factor (CI)	CI1	0.650	Membership (SP)	SP8	0.885
	CI2	0.769		SP9	0.683
	CI3	0.798		SP10	0.839
	CI4	0.772	Organizational Commitment (SP)	SP11	0.877
Knowledge Factor (CI)	CI5	0.689		SP12	0.806
	CI6	0.852		SP13	0.790
	CI7	0.883	Performance Feedback (SP)	SP14	0.829
	CI8	0.877		SP15	0.828
Motivational Factor (CI)	CI9	0.767	Competence (EMP)	SP16	0.847
	CI10	0.794		EMP1	0.819
	CI11	0.746		EMP2	0.865
	CI12	0.764	Self-Determination (EMP)	EMP3	0.651
Behavioral Factor (CI)	CI13	0.694		EMP4	0.795
	CI14	0.761		EMP5	0.770
	CI15	0.741	Impact (EMP)	EMP6	0.731
	CI16	0.805		EMP7	0.704
Vision (SP)	CI17	0.762		EMP8	0.759
	CI18	0.836	Meaning (EMP)	EMP9	0.832
	CI19	0.823		EMP10	0.810
	CI20	0.688		EMP11	0.796
Trust (EMP)	SP1	0.789	Trust (EMP)	EMP12	0.826
	SP2	0.876		EMP13	0.902

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Variable	Item	Factor Loading
Altruistic Love (SP)	SP3	0.860	EMP14	EMP14	0.930
	SP4	0.727		EMP15	0.940
	SP5	0.723			
	SP6	0.750			
	SP7	0.798			

As shown in Table 6, the factor loadings for all variables are above 0.5. Therefore, the items have sufficient validity, and the model meets the first reliability criterion. The third reliability criterion is examining the composite reliability of each construct. As mentioned, composite reliability, AVE, and factor loadings are used (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The criteria for construct reliability are a composite reliability (CR) greater than 0.7 and an AVE greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 7
Reliability and Validity Measures

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Cultural Intelligence	0.912	0.919	0.373
Spiritual Leadership	0.887	0.893	0.391
Teacher Empowerment	0.910	0.917	0.428

Reliability of the instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The obtained alpha coefficients for the research variables, after assessing validity, are presented in the table above. Since all values are above 0.7, and as shown, the AVE for all variables is greater than 0.5 and the CR is greater than 0.7, the instrument is considered to have appropriate reliability.

4.2.2.3. Validity assessment: Convergent and discriminant validity

Convergent validity, evaluated through AVE, examines how well indicators measure their intended construct, with values above 0.5 indicating adequacy; as shown in Table 7, all constructs met this criterion. Discriminant validity, assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, requires each construct to share greater variance with its own

indicators than with other constructs. As presented in Table 8, this condition was satisfied, confirming the model's discriminant validity.

Table 8
Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Cultural Intelligence	Empowerment	Spiritual Leadership
Cultural Intelligence	0.611		
Empowerment	0.520	0.625	
Spiritual Leadership	0.322	0.402	0.654

4.2.3. Inner model assessment (Structural model)

In assessing the structural model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates the explanatory power of dependent latent variables, with values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 considered weak, moderate, and substantial, respectively. Unlike covariance-based methods, PLS lacks chi-square fit indices due to its predictive orientation, relying instead on the Q^2 index for predictive relevance. The positive Q^2 values obtained confirm adequate predictive validity and overall structural model quality.

Table 9
Indices of Latent Variables

Variable	R^2	Q^2
Cultural Intelligence	0.708	0.621
Spiritual Leadership Style	0.662	0.540
Empowerment	0.683	0.603

The Global Fit Index (GOF), proposed by Tenenhaus et al. (2005), provides an overall measure of model fit in PLS by combining average communality and R^2 .

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{communality} \times \overline{R^2}}$$

The average communality for the overall model is 0.635, and the average R^2 is 0.667. Based on the above formula, the overall model fit is 0.651, indicating a strong model fit.

4.2.4. Research questions

The first research question asked if there is a significant relationship between cultural intelligence and the empowerment of secondary school language teachers. The analysis revealed a t-value of 5.454, which is greater than 1.96, indicating a significant relationship between these two variables. The standardized path coefficient for this relationship is 0.412. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between cultural intelligence and the empowerment of secondary school language teachers.

As for the second research question, the results indicated a t-value of 3.456, which is greater than 1.96, indicating a significant relationship between these two variables. The standardized path coefficient for this relationship is 0.259. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between spiritual leadership style and the empowerment of secondary school language teachers. The results of the direct relationships and significance of the research model's hypotheses are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Results of Direct Relationships and Significance of Research Model Hypotheses

Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	Significance Value (t-value)
Cultural Intelligence $\rightarrow$ Empowerment	0.412	5.454
Spiritual Leadership Style $\rightarrow$ Empowerment	0.259	3.456

The predictive capacity of the model was assessed using SmartPLS, with an R^2 value of 0.768 indicating that 76.8% of the variance in teacher empowerment was explained by cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership, reflecting substantial explanatory power (Chin, 1998). The Q^2 value of 0.723, well above the 0.25 threshold (Hair et al., 2017), confirmed the model's excellent predictive relevance. Additionally, PLS-Predict analysis showed lower RMSE values for the PLS model compared to the linear model, further validating its superior predictive performance. Collectively, the R^2 , Q^2 , and PLS-Predict results confirm the conceptual model's strong predictive capability and theoretical robustness.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the relationships among cultural intelligence, spiritual leadership, and psychological empowerment among secondary school language teachers in Gorgan, Iran. The results revealed robust statistical associations: both cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership style are significant positive predictors of teacher empowerment, with cultural intelligence having a stronger path coefficient than spiritual leadership. Notably, the structural model demonstrated high explanatory power, indicating that these predictors collectively account for a substantial proportion of the variance in teacher empowerment.

The study revealed a strong positive relationship between cultural intelligence and teacher empowerment, corroborating the findings of Ang et al. (2004) and Van Dyne et al. (2010). Teachers with higher CQ demonstrated greater adaptability in culturally diverse classrooms, which enhanced their sense of competence and autonomy, key dimensions of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). This adaptability is critical in multicultural educational environments, where teachers must navigate varying cultural norms and student backgrounds (Rajaram, 2023). The metacognitive and behavioral dimensions of CQ, as highlighted by Earley and Ang (2003), were particularly influential, enabling teachers to plan, monitor, and adjust their interactions effectively. These results resonate with Basman and Bayram's (2024) assertion that CQ fosters inclusive teaching practices, ultimately contributing to a more empowering work environment.

Theoretically, this relationship can be explained through the four dimensions of Earley and Ang's (2003) Cultural Intelligence Model. Metacognitive CQ, the conscious regulation of cultural understanding through planning, monitoring, and revising mental models, enables teachers to strategically navigate cross-cultural interactions by anticipating differences and adjusting cognitive strategies accordingly, directly enhancing Spreitzer's (1995) dimensions of competence and self-determination. Cognitive CQ, knowledge of cultural norms and conventions, provides the informational foundation for confident decision-making in diverse classrooms, reducing uncertainty (Earley & Ang, 2003) and enabling teachers to make more informed pedagogical choices that enhance their sense of impact and meaningfulness.

(Rajaram, 2023). Motivational CQ, intrinsic interest and confidence in engaging with diverse cultures, drives the effort required to function effectively in cross-cultural situations (Ang et al., 2006), translating into greater persistence in overcoming cultural barriers and reinforcing teachers' self-efficacy beliefs through mastery experiences (Bećirović, 2023; Spreitzer, 1995). Finally, behavioral CQ, the ability to exhibit appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions in culturally diverse settings, enables teachers to translate cultural understanding into effective practice, with behavioral flexibility representing the most visible manifestation of CQ (Earley & Ang, 2003). Teachers who adapt their behaviors to diverse student populations experience greater autonomy and impact as they observe positive outcomes, supporting Zhang et al.'s (2021) finding that CQ fosters resilience and adaptability. The stronger predictive power of cultural intelligence ($\beta = 0.412$) compared to spiritual leadership ($\beta = 0.259$) may be explained by Gorgan's significant ethnic and cultural diversity, where the practical demands of navigating cultural differences exert a more immediate influence on teachers' empowerment than leadership factors (Karami & Izadpanah, 2022; Watkins & Noble, 2016).

Spiritual leadership also emerged as a significant predictor of teacher empowerment. This finding is supported by studies such as Li et al. (2023), who found that spiritual leadership enhances teacher well-being and reduces burnout by fostering a sense of purpose and community. Similarly, Asbari (2024) emphasized that spiritual leadership in education cultivates a culture of altruism and shared vision, which empowers teachers to innovate and take ownership of their roles.

Theoretically, this is consistent with Fry's (2003) Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT). The components of SLT -vision, altruistic love, and organizational commitment, were instrumental in creating a supportive school climate. Teachers under spiritual leadership reported higher levels of meaningfulness and trust, aligning with Spreitzer's (1995) dimensions of psychological empowerment. The vision component, a compelling picture of the future that inspires commitment, directly aligns with Spreitzer's meaning dimension, as school leaders who articulate visions resonating with teachers' values enable educators to experience their work as purposeful and significant (Fry et al., 2017). The hope/faith component, the belief that the vision will be achieved, sustains teacher motivation during challenging periods by providing

emotional energy for perseverance (Fry, 2003), enabling teachers to maintain competence and self-determination despite obstacles (Benefiel et al., 2014). The altruistic love component, genuine care and concern for others, fosters a culture of trust and psychological safety, enhancing teachers' sense of impact and trust (Fry, 2023; Spreitzer, 1995), consistent with research linking spiritual leadership to reduced turnover intentions (Yang et al., 2019), enhanced well-being (Rego & Pina e Cunha, 2008), and increased willingness to innovate (Terzi et al., 2020). The organizational commitment component, loyalty and attachment to the organization, emerges as both an outcome of spiritual leadership and a contributor to empowerment, as committed teachers perceive alignment between personal goals and organizational objectives (Fry, 2003; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Tsemach, 2014). The comparatively smaller path coefficient for spiritual leadership ($\beta = 0.259$) may reflect the distributed nature of leadership in educational settings, where multiple influence sources, department heads, lead teachers, and informal leaders, attenuate the measured impact of any single leadership source (Whitehead & Greenier, 2019). Furthermore, the bidirectional relationship between leadership and empowerment (Wang, 2024) suggests that empowered teachers themselves become leaders, creating a dynamic interplay that complicates simple unidirectional measurement.

The interplay between cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership further amplified teacher empowerment. Spiritual leaders who modeled inclusive behaviors and promoted a shared vision of diversity encouraged teachers to develop their CQ (Van Dyne et al., 2010). For instance, leaders who emphasized respect for diverse perspectives inspired teachers to engage in continuous learning and self-reflection, enhancing their ability to create inclusive classrooms. This synergy is critical in globalized educational contexts, where cultural competence and inspirational leadership are equally vital (Watkins & Noble, 2016). The study's structural equation model confirmed the robust predictive power of these constructs, suggesting that their combined influence accounts for a substantial portion of variance in teacher empowerment.

From a theoretical perspective, spiritual leadership provides the motivational foundation that enables the development and deployment of cultural intelligence, while cultural intelligence simultaneously enables teachers to fully benefit from spiritual

leadership, creating a synergistic relationship between these two constructs. Fry's (2003) emphasis on vision and altruistic love creates organizational conditions that encourage teachers to invest in developing their cultural capabilities; when leaders articulate a vision that values diversity and demonstrate altruistic love toward all members of the school community regardless of cultural background, they signal that cultural competence is both valued and expected. This organizational support likely enhances teachers' motivational CQ, the intrinsic interest in engaging with diverse cultures, by creating psychological safety for cross-cultural exploration (Earley & Ang, 2003). Conversely, teachers with high CQ are better equipped to understand and internalize the leader's vision, particularly when that vision emphasizes inclusivity and diversity. The metacognitive dimension of CQ enables teachers to reflect on how the leader's vision applies to their specific cultural context, while the behavioral dimension enables them to enact that vision in culturally appropriate ways, an interpretation that aligns with Van Dyne et al. (2010), who argued that spiritual leaders who model inclusive behaviors encourage teachers to develop their cultural intelligence.

The mediation pathways implied by this theoretical integration merit consideration; it is possible that cultural intelligence partially mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and empowerment, or conversely, that spiritual leadership creates conditions that facilitate the CQ-empowerment relationship. Future research should test these mediation models explicitly. As Lee and Nie (2014) demonstrated, integrating social-structural and psychological perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for understanding teacher empowerment, and the present study's findings suggest that both cultural intelligence (an individual capability) and spiritual leadership (an organizational phenomenon) contribute uniquely and interactively to empowerment.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant roles of cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership in enhancing teacher empowerment among secondary school language teachers in Gorgan. The findings reveal that cultural intelligence, with its emphasis on adaptability and cross-cultural competence, positively influences teachers' sense of empowerment, enabling them to navigate diverse educational settings effectively.

Similarly, spiritual leadership, characterized by vision, altruistic love, and organizational commitment, fosters a supportive and meaningful work environment that enhances teachers' autonomy, competence, and sense of purpose. These results underscore the importance of developing cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership skills among educators and school leaders to create empowering and inclusive educational environments.

The findings have practical implications for educational policymakers and school leaders. First, professional development programs should integrate CQ training to equip teachers with the skills needed for culturally responsive teaching (Rajaram, 2023). Workshops on metacognitive strategies and behavioral adaptability could enhance teachers' ability to manage diverse classrooms effectively. Second, fostering spiritual leadership among school administrators is essential. Leaders should articulate a compelling vision, demonstrate altruistic love, and create opportunities for teacher collaboration and feedback (Fry et al., 2017). Such practices align with the recommendations of Zhang et al. (2022), who highlighted the role of authentic leadership in teacher empowerment. Finally, schools should cultivate an organizational culture that values both cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership, as their combined effects can significantly enhance teacher motivation and job satisfaction (Xiong, 2022).

This study acknowledges several important methodological and contextual limitations that may affect the generalizability and interpretation of findings. The cross-sectional design prevents the establishment of causal relationships between cultural intelligence, spiritual leadership, and teacher empowerment, limiting our understanding of temporal dynamics and directional influences among these constructs. The exclusive reliance on self-report questionnaires introduces potential social desirability bias and common method variance, which may have artificially inflated correlations between variables. Additionally, the study's focus on secondary school language teachers in Gorgan, Iran, presents geographic and demographic constraints that limit generalizability to other educational contexts, grade levels, subject areas, and cultural settings. Furthermore, the study did not control for important organizational variables such as school climate, administrative support, resource availability, or the specific sources of spiritual leadership (principals, department heads, or self-leadership), which could moderate the observed relationships.

Future research should address these limitations through methodological enhancements and expanded research scope to advance understanding of these critical educational constructs. Longitudinal studies tracking teachers over multiple years are essential for establishing causal relationships and examining how changes in cultural intelligence and exposure to spiritual leadership influence empowerment trajectories over time. Mixed-methods approaches incorporating qualitative interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations would provide deeper insights into how teachers experience and operationalize these constructs in their daily practice, while multi-source data collection from principals, colleagues, and students could reduce single-source bias. Research should expand beyond the Iranian context through cross-cultural replication studies in diverse educational systems to test the universality of findings and identify culture-specific patterns. Additionally, future studies should investigate mediating mechanisms such as job satisfaction and self-efficacy, examine moderating factors including teaching experience and school-level variables, and explore the relationships across different educational levels and subject areas. Intervention research designing and testing professional development programs aimed at enhancing cultural intelligence and spiritual leadership competencies would provide valuable practical applications, while studies connecting these teacher-level factors to student outcomes such as academic achievement and intercultural competence would demonstrate broader educational impact.

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