SCHOOL LEADERSHIP VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN FOSTERING TEACHER WELL-BEING IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

by

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DECLARATION

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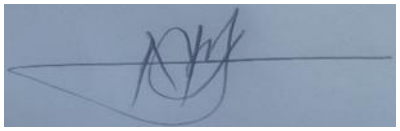
Title: School leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools

I declare that the above thesis is my work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

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ABSTRACT

School leadership are the foundation of our education system in South Africa. Research suggests that school leaders and teachers face challenges that highlight their emotional intelligence. Drawing on transformational leadership theory, which underpins leadership, and three models of emotional intelligence – the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Ability Model, the Goleman's Competency Model, and the Bar-On's Mixed Model – this qualitative case study explored school leaders' views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. Ten schools, a mix of primary and secondary schools, in the province of Mpumalanga were purposefully chosen. An initial sample of twenty School Management Team (SMT) members was selected to respond to the questionnaire. Eventually, ten SMT members, based on their expressed interests, were selected to participate in the interview process. Data sources include a questionnaire, transcribed semi-structured individual interviews, document analysis, and a research journal. Thematic analysis was used with the understanding that both the researcher and the participants co-establish knowledge and meaning. The findings suggest that school leaders' attitudes may influence their responses to issues related to their emotional intelligence and to teacher well-being. The research findings may contribute to existing knowledge bases in education, school leadership's emotional intelligence, teacher well-being, and psychology. Effective school leadership development and support programmes that improve emotional intelligence and promote teacher well-being may result from greater awareness among school leaders of emotional intelligence and its effect on teachers' well-being

Keywords: emotional intelligence, rural school environment, school leadership, teacher well-being

OPSOMMING

Skoolleierskap is die grondslag van ons onderwysstelsel in Suid-Afrika. Navorsing dui daarop dat skoolleiers en onderwysers uitdagings ervaar wat hulle emosionele intelligensie beklemtoon. Deur middel van transformasionele leierskapsteorie wat leierskap onderlê en drie modelle van emosionele intelligensie – die Mayer-Salovey-Caruso-vermoëmodel, die Goleman-bevoegdheidsmodel en die Bar-On-gemengde-model – het hierdie kwalitatiewe gevallestudie skoolleiers se sienings oor die rol van emosionele intelligensie in die bevordering van onderwyserwelstand in landelike Suid-Afrikaanse skole ondersoek. Tien skole, 'n mengsel van primêre en sekondêre skole, in die Mpumalanga-provinsie is doelbewus gekies. 'n Aanvanklike steekproef van twintig skoolbestuurspan- (SBS-) lede is gekies om op die vraelys te reageer. Uiteindelik is tien SBS-lede, op grond van hulle uitgesproke belangstellings, gekies om aan die onderhoudsproses deel te neem. Databronne sluit in 'n vraelys, getranskribeerde semi-gestruktureerde individuele onderhoude, dokumentanalise en 'n navorsingsjoernaal. Tematiese analise is gebruik met die verstandhouding dat beide die navorser en die deelnemers saam kennis en betekenis vestig. Die bevindinge dui daarop dat skoolleiers se houdings hulle reaksies op kwessies wat verband hou met hulle emosionele intelligensie en onderwyserwelstand kan beïnvloed. Die navorsingsbevindinge kan bydra tot bestaande kennisbasisse in onderwys, die emosionele intelligensie van skoolleierskap, onderwyserwelstand en sielkunde. Doeltreffende skoolleierskapsontwikkeling- en ondersteuningsprogramme wat emosionele intelligensie verbeter en onderwyserwelstand bevorder, kan groter bewustheid onder skoolleiers van emosionele intelligensie en die uitwerking daarvan op onderwysers se welstand vestig.

Sleutelwoorde: emosionele intelligensie, landelike skoolomgewing, skoolleierskap, onderwyserwelstand

ISIFINGQO

Ubuholi bezikole buyisisekelo sohlelo lwemfundo eNingizimu Afrika. Ucwaningo lukhomba ukuba abaholi bezikole kanye nothisha babhekana nezingqinamba eziveza ubuhlakani bemizwa yabo. Kubhekiswe kwithiyori yobuholi obuguquguqukayo, egcizelela ubuholi, kanye namamodeli amathathu obuhlakani bemizwa – i-Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Ability Model, i-Goleman's Competency Model, kanye ne-Bar-On's Mixed Model – lolu cwaningo lwe-qualitative luhlolisise imibono yabaholi bezikole mayelana nendima yobuhlakani bemizwa ekukhuthazeni inhlalakahle yothisha ezikoleni zasemaphandleni eNingizimu Afrika. Izikole eziyishumi, ezixubile phakathi kwezokuqala nezesekhondari, esifundazweni saseMpumalanga zakhethwa ngenhloso ethile. Isampula yokuqala yamalungu angamashumi eQembu Lokuphatha Isikole (SMT) yakhethwa ukuthi iphendule imibuzo. Ekugcineni, amalungu ayishumi e-SMT, ngokusekelwe ezintweni abazikhombisile ezinentshisekelo, akhethwa ukuthi ahlanganyele kwinqubo ye-interview. Imithombo yedatha ifaka phakathi imibuzo, izingxoxo ezithile ezihleleke ngezifundo eziqoshwe, ukuhlaziya imibhalo, kanye nenhlaka yocwaningo. Ukuhlaziya izihloko kwasetshenziswa ngokwazi ukuthi umcwaningi kanye nabahlanganyeli bobabili basungula ulwazi nencazelo ndawonye. Okutholakele kuveza ukuba indlela yokucabanga yabaholi bezikole ingaba nomthelela kwizimpendulo zabo mayelana nezinkinga eziyamene nobuhlakani bemizwa yabo kanye nenhlala kahle yothisha. Okutholakele kulolu cwaningo kungafaka isandla phezu kolwazi oselukhona lwangaphambilini oluyisisekelo semfundo, ubuhlakani bemizwa yobaholi bezemfundo, inhlala kahle yothisha, kanye nezengqondo. Izinhlelo ezisebenzayo zokuthuthukiswa kobuholi besikole nokusekelwa okuthuthukisa ubuqotho bezemizwa futhi kuthuthukise inhlalakahle yothisha zingavela ekuqapheliseni okukhulu phakathi kwabaholi besikole ngobuqotho bezemizwa nomthelela bayo enhlalakahleni yothisha.

Amagama asemqoka: ubuhlakani bezemizwa, izikole ezisemaphandleni, ubuholi besikole, inhlalakahle yothisha.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BELA	Basic Education Laws Amendment
CMT	Circuit Management Team
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DfE	Department for Education
EI	Emotional Intelligence
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
LTSM	Learner Teacher Support Material
MDE	Mpumalanga Department of Education
PAM	Personnel Administrative Measures
QMS	Quality Management Systems
SGB	School Governing Body
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMT	School Management Teams

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

School leadership should understand their own emotions and the feelings of the people they oversee as the educational landscape grows more complex and competitive, and teachers gain more education and power. Teachers and school managers should stay competitive and meet all the demands of their jobs in the modern educational environment. Currently, teaching is considered one of the most stressful professions. Teachers should be able to handle obstacles, setbacks, and limited resources; otherwise, they risk quitting or giving up easily (Sencio et al., 2020). School leadership should encourage and support teachers in all aspects of their work environment so that they can cope effectively.

Teachers' motivation has been a topic of discussion for several decades in countries all around the world. The majority of emerging countries are becoming more conscious of the importance of teacher motivation in delivering high-quality curricula and maintaining high standards in the educational system (Onjoro, 2015). Teachers and their motivational requirements should be taken seriously by countries seeking to maintain high standards and achieve quality in their education systems (Onjoro, 2015). Supporting teachers in overcoming everyday obstacles enables them to uphold high standards.

Each day, school leaders face a variety of challenges. Managing delicate requests from parents, teachers, learners, and department officials presents challenges. They put more pressure on school leaders to actively participate as instructional leaders (Fullan, 2015) and are psychologically demanding (Maxwell & Riley, 2017). Due to this heightened accountability, school leaders should manage their emotional expectations and encourage and support teachers in adjusting to and overcoming obstacles associated with curriculum delivery in the classroom.

Maseko and Chigeza (2024) focus on the relational well-being of primary school teachers in rural South Africa, while Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) examine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and school leadership. A gap remains in

understanding how school leaders in rural South African schools understand and apply EI to promote teacher well-being.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Teachers in rural South African schools face a variety of issues that affect teaching. Among the challenges they encounter are overcrowding in classrooms, discipline issues, a lack of resources (du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020), inadequate parental involvement in their children's education, insufficient departmental funding, and teaching multiple grades (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Teachers are faced with challenges from families as well as financial constraints, which may again lead to stress (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), which in some cases leads to depression and the possibility of hospitalisation. The above challenges directly affect the functionality of rural schools and pose a threat to school managers in their duty to manage schools effectively.

School principals are members of a Circuit Management Team (CMT). The CMT in the rural White Hazy 2 Circuit has a yearlong schedule of meetings. The team meets at least once a month to discuss issues related to curriculum, administration, and other problems that affect schools. The ever-increasing number of challenges that School Management Teams (SMTs) face is a key factor in the discussions. Increased absenteeism, early departure, stress, and chronic conditions (Lizana, Vega-Fernandez, & Lera, 2020) are among the issues that school managers discuss every month. This situation underscored the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) among SMTs in supporting the well-being of teachers in rural schools.

The study explores the extent to which SMTs utilise EI in supporting teacher well-being in rural South African schools. The study examines the awareness of SMTs regarding the importance of using EI to support and assist teachers in dealing with challenges that negatively impact their well-being.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As the leader of a rural secondary school, the researcher has observed over the years that school administrators struggle with teachers who face numerous obstacles that jeopardise their well-being. School principals who are members of the CMT meet once

a month to discuss challenges related to the school's curriculum, specifically teaching and learning, administrative concerns, and issues regarding the general well-being of teachers.

Through discussions held in CMT meetings, school principals and management team members have a common outcry on the challenges they face in schools concerning increased teacher absenteeism due to illness, an increase in the number of teachers who sign for early departure, and the general low morale among teachers, which is evident in poor class attendance and their unwillingness to go an extra mile on programmes beyond the Department of Education notional time. Several factors contribute to these difficulties, including those found outside schools, such as local communities and educational authorities, as well as inside school systems (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

School managers often lack the skills and expertise to assist teachers with various personal challenges. This situation harms teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are also adversely affected when teachers' well-being is challenged. SMTs are overstretched in terms of what intervention strategies can be implemented to better understand and assist teachers facing issues that threaten their well-being. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how school leadership in rural schools is aware of their EI and how they apply it in addressing the well-being challenges teachers face daily.

School principals in some South African rural schools feel they are not in a better position to support teachers, as they, in turn, receive less support from the department (Smit, 2017). They feel neglected and cannot support teachers concerning their well-being, as the department seldom visits schools for pedagogical support and capacity-building programmes (Smit, 2017).

Existing literature has largely focused on teacher well-being and leadership separately, with limited attention given to how school leaders in rural South African schools understand and apply emotional intelligence (EI) in supporting teacher well-being. This represents both a theoretical gap, regarding the application of EI within rural school leadership contexts, and a systemic gap, concerning the limited leadership support mechanisms available to address teacher well-being challenges in

rural schools. On the other hand, research done by Bese and Dali (2021) regarding EI indicated that while there was a disconnect between school leaders' perceived EI and their actual practice, they were aware and sensitive to the needs of teachers and gladly offered appropriate support and continuous assistance.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question and secondary research questions below guided the study.

1.4.1 Primary research question

The primary research question of this study is: *What are school leadership's views on the role of EI in promoting teacher well-being in rural South African schools?*

1.4.2 Secondary research questions

To address the primary research question, the following secondary research questions were developed:

- How does emotional intelligence influence school leaders' ability to practise supportive leadership through self-awareness, adaptability, and effective emotional regulation in high-stress contexts?
- In what ways does emotionally intelligent leadership foster teacher motivation, well-being, and professional growth through trust, acknowledgement, and empowerment?
- How do school leaders apply emotional intelligence to navigate the unique socio-cultural and resource-based challenges of rural schools?
- What is the relationship between emotionally intelligent leadership and teacher well-being outcomes, particularly regarding staff morale, psychological safety, and reduced burnout?
- How can emotionally intelligent leadership practices be leveraged to create resilient, supportive school environments that enhance both teacher performance and institutional sustainability?

1.5 PURPOSE, AIMS, AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary **aim** of this study is to examine school leaders' views on the application of EI to promote teacher well-being in rural South African schools.

The **purpose** of the study is to explore how school leadership can use EI to better understand and support teacher well-being.

The **objectives** of the study are to ascertain school leadership's understanding of EI in the workplace and their use of EI to promote teacher well-being in rural South African schools, as well as to explore what support networks and programmes they identify as relevant in enhancing teacher well-being in rural South African schools and the ways in which available programmes can be enhanced to offer relevant training and support to school leadership to develop their EI skills.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

This qualitative case study is based on the concept of EI, drawing on the views of school leadership regarding the fostering of teacher well-being in rural South African schools. To support the study's objectives, a variety of literature reviews by international, national and local scholars were examined.

1.6.1 Understanding emotional intelligence

An essential component of people’s biological composition, emotions accompany them to work every morning and impact their behaviour in every manner imaginable (Ramalingam, 2022). EI is a collection of traits and abilities that encompass a wide range of personal traits and abilities that fall outside the conventional categories of specialised knowledge, general intelligence, and technical or professional skills. These abilities and traits are typically referred to as soft skills or inter- and intra-personal skills (Ramalingam, 2022). There are five components to EI: 1) being aware of one's feelings; 2) controlling feelings; 3) inspiring oneself; 4) identifying feelings in others; and 5) managing relationships (Ramalingam, 2022).

Psychologist Daniel Goleman (2019) popularised EI by emphasising its importance for leadership roles. Goleman listed motivation, self-regulation, self-awareness, empathy,

and social skills as the five components of EI. EI can be used to achieve objectives and create a happier, healthier workplace.

According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), EI is the ability to regulate one's own emotions and those of others, recognise the difference between the two, and apply this understanding to guide one's actions and choices. Mayer and Salovey (1997) opine that there are four dimensions to EI: 1) effectively identifying emotions, 2) understanding emotions, 3) controlling emotions, and 4) using emotions to improve cognition. However, Mayer et al. (2003) claimed that the four dimensions are related and comprise a single generic EI component. For a deeper understanding of interpersonal dynamics, it helps to consider the capacity to integrate intelligence with other elements, such as empathy and emotion (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). EI's three primary models are the ability, trait, and mixed models.

According to the ability model, people differ in their capacity to relate emotional processing to broader cognitive processes and to process information pertaining to their emotional side. The trait model, on the other hand, suggests how a person views their own emotional capacity. The mixed model is the third. According to this paradigm, EI is a collection of abilities and competencies that improve a leader's performance (Goleman, 1998).

Ramalingan (2022) and Salovey and Meyer (1997) agree with Goleman's (1998) definition of EI in that the concept deals with self-awareness, self-motivation, and knowing how to recognise and manage one's own emotions. This definition is more relevant in a rural school environment, as many SMTs are unable to equip teachers with meaningful ways to acknowledge and address the challenges they encounter daily.

1.6.2 The relevance of emotional intelligence in schools

EI is essential for everyone, but it is imperative in the workplace. Like any other business, a school needs managers who are knowledgeable about and skilled at using EI. The importance of EI has also become more widely recognised, particularly among professionals. The idea of EI is not new; studies have examined its relationship with many outcomes, such as job satisfaction and employee performance (Ealias & George, 2012; Rezvani et al., 2019). EI's importance has increased, especially in the

workplace, since it is now thought to be the most fundamental indicator of job performance (Rezvani et al., 2019).

The school's culture, teachers' commitment to their work, job satisfaction, the progress of learners, and well-being are all directly impacted by the relationship between EI and school leadership (Russo-Netzer & Shoshani, 2019). The skills and competencies of EI are critical within the school context and necessary for its effective functioning (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

Thus, school leaders should design and implement policies and initiatives that enhance staff members' EI. This is possible if leaders, in this case, SMTs, understand the principle of EI, how to develop their EI, and how to help teachers develop their EI to perform better at work. Managers should provide teachers with the tools to handle their emotional well-being and the high stress levels they encounter at work, so that they can be equipped to deal with complex and demanding circumstances.

1.6.3 Relationship between emotional intelligence and employee well-being

Employee well-being can be defined as an employee's expectations and working ways that may affect their happiness or health (Abun et al., 2020). According to Rahmani, Gnoth and Mather (2018), the term 'well-being' is defined by two key aspects: eudaimonia and hedonia. Eudaimonia is linked to the outcomes that promote personal growth in humans. Positive aspects of well-being are linked to hedonia. Rahmani et al. (2018) state that the coexistence of the two fundamental concepts, eudaimonia and hedonia, improves employee well-being. The three categories of well-being are the degree of satisfaction with one's psychological well-being, physical well-being, and the amount and quality of social groups that contribute to one's social well-being (Sudibjo & Sutarji, 2020).

The majority of organisations have concluded that happy employees accomplish more. According to this research, the well-being of employees has a positive effect on how well they perform at work (Krishantha, 2018). Several studies have previously examined the relationship between workers' well-being and EI. According to Cejudo et al. (2018), EI and employee well-being are positively correlated. It has been discovered that having a high EI level improves employee well-being.

An important predictor of an employee's well-being was found to be their EI (Akanni, Kareem, & Oduaran, 2019). Employees with EI can better handle the demands of a high-stress work environment. It acts as a motivating element that supports the well-being of employees (Extremera & Rey, 2016). Research investigating the correlation between EI and worker well-being has revealed that EI enhances worker well-being by assisting workers in handling conflict and reducing negative feelings (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016).

1.6.4 The relevance of emotional intelligence in education

As a field, EI is generally acknowledged to have emerged only a few decades ago, with very little research and rare books on EI and leadership (Vera, 2019). According to Vera (2019), among other things, effective leaders possess EI. They also exhibit certain traits, qualities, and behaviours. Leadership is essential to every organisation since it directs employees to work towards specific targets. A leader persuades people to act in ways they would not have otherwise. Therefore, leaders should understand their own and their peers' emotions to inspire employees to achieve organisational goals (Vera, 2019).

EI is essential to leadership in schools since the school leader should constantly work with individuals and groups (teachers, learners, and parents) and make decisions that impact the social functioning of the entire school (Pellitteri, 2022). Effective interpersonal relationships and the development of an emotionally charged educational environment depend, amongst other factors, on the adaptive use of emotions (Pellitteri, 2022).

According to research by Yusniarti et al. (2022), teachers' performance is positively impacted by the leadership style of school principals. This indicates that the teachers' performance is positively influenced by the principal's capacity to provide guidance, inspire, arrange school activities, oversee, and serve as a role model (Yusniarti et al., 2022). Thus, well-developed EI can positively impact a teacher's performance, particularly regarding how well teachers work in classrooms (Yusniarti et al., 2022).

Segredo, Cistone and Reio (2017) investigated school culture, leadership philosophies, and EI in a sample of 850 teachers and 57 managers in a sizable urban school system in the United States. Evaluations of school culture showed a negative

relationship with passive-avoidant leadership styles but a favourable correlation with transformational and transactional leadership styles. The quality of school culture was correlated with the principals' EI level after controlling for leadership style. Chen and Guo (2020) discovered a relationship between teachers' instructional methodologies and the principals' EI and leadership behaviours in a sample of 534 teachers from 54 primary schools in China.

As school managers and teachers, particularly in rural South Africa, seem to be buckling under the pressure of handling learners from poverty-stricken communities, teachers and managers should be able to utilise EI in their daily lives, even in the face of particular difficulties. SMTs, in this case, can be agents of change concerning supporting teachers' mental health and equipping them with skills that enhance EI so they can be at their optimum best concerning their performance and that of learners.

1.6.5 Conceptual framework

The study's conceptual framework presents how school leadership in a rural South African school environment employs EI to promote teachers' well-being. The conceptual framework is based on Goleman's EI performance model (Goleman, 2002) and transformational leadership theory (Benmira & Agboola, 2021).

1.6.5.1 Goleman's EI performance model

Goleman's model of EI includes 18 competencies in four clusters. The competency framework for EI is depicted in Figure 1.1 below.

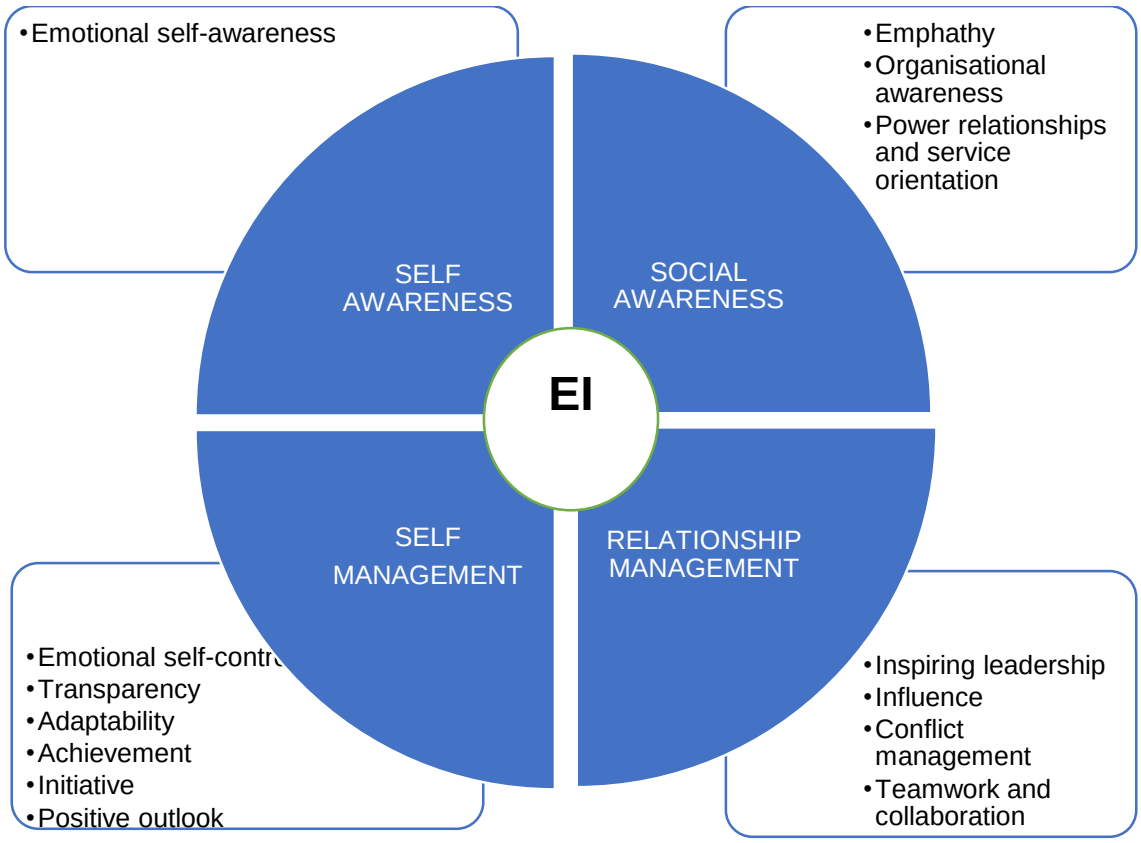


Figure 1.1: Competency framework (Goleman, 2002, p. 14)

The first cluster of self-awareness focuses on understanding one's own feelings, desires, abilities, and impulses. The second cluster describes self-management as controlling one's resources, urges, and internal feelings (Goleman, 2002). Six skills make up this cluster: 1) emotional self-control; 2) transparency; 3) adaptation; 4) achievement; 5) initiative; and 6) optimism (Goleman, 2002). Transparency is about upholding integrity and acting in accordance with one's ideals, whereas emotional self-control is about controlling disruptive emotions and urges. Conversely, adaptability describes a person's capacity for handling change. Initiative is about being prepared to take advantage of chances, whereas achievement is about trying to get better. According to Bipath (2008), optimism is the ability to persevere in pursuing objectives in the face of challenges and setbacks.

The third cluster, social awareness, focuses on how individuals manage relationships and their understanding of the needs, feelings, and concerns of others (Goleman, 2002). Three competencies are included in this cluster: 1) empathy, which is the ability to sense the thoughts and feelings of others and show interest in their concerns; 2)

organisational awareness, which is the ability to read the emotional currents of a group; and 3) power relationships and service orientation, which deals with anticipating, identifying, and satisfying clients' needs (Bipath, 2008). Finally, according to Goleman (2002), relationship management is a talent that aims to elicit positive reactions from others. This cluster consists of six competencies: 1) influence, which deals with using persuasive techniques; 2) conflict management, which deals with handling conflicts; 3) collaboration and teamwork, which entails working with others towards common goals and fostering collaborative effort in the pursuit of collective goals; 4) developing others by identifying individual developing needs and enhancing their abilities; 5) inspirational leadership, which deals with inspiring and guiding individuals and groups; and 6) change catalysts (Bipath, 2008).

Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management are the four general domains that most components of all EI models fall into (Goleman, 2002). The most effective leaders are distinguished by acquired workplace competencies based on each of these fundamental skills (Goleman, 2002). Cherry (2023) lists self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation as the five elements of EI in accordance with Goleman's paradigm. The capacity to be aware of one's emotions and how they affect other people is known as self-regulation (management). Active listening, empathy (the ability to understand the thoughts and feelings of others), motivation (the desire to fulfil one's own inner needs and goals), and verbal and nonverbal communication abilities are all examples of social skills (awareness). People with these abilities are considered self-aware (Cherry, 2023).

Goleman's EI performance model is more closely aligned with transformational theory, which deals with encouraging, inspiring, and motivating individuals. The next section focuses on transformational theory and how it can be utilised to understand and support employees.

1.6.5.2 Transformational theory

According to the theory of transformational leadership, leaders inspire, motivate, and support their followers (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). When an organisation needs to be rejuvenated, is going through major change, or needs a new direction, this approach is applied (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Because it involves followers (workers) in

processes or actions connected to personal aspects towards the organisation and a course that would return superior social rewards, transformational leadership aligns itself with the greater good (Khan, Nawaz, & Khan, 2016).

According to theories of transformational leadership, the most effective leadership approach is one that takes other people's opinions into account. Members of the group are encouraged to participate and contribute, and transformational leaders help them feel important and dedicated to the decision-making process. Transformational leadership advocates want to engage people in order to boost commitment and collaboration, which results in higher-quality decisions and more prosperous businesses (Lamb, 2013).

Transformational leaders have the power to inspire and elevate both their own and their team members' morals. They can communicate with staff members based on common aims, attitudes, and beliefs (Khan et al., 2016). By putting higher-order needs ahead of self-interests, transformational leaders can inspire followers to rearrange their needs (Khan et al., 2016). Leaders and staff who practise transformational leadership put the needs of the group ahead of their own. By giving their job and the difficulties they encounter meaning, these leaders consider each employee as an individual and try to enhance their consciousness, morals, and abilities (Khan et al., 2016).

In summary, the salient aspects of Goleman's theory of EI and transformational theory will be utilised to explore how school leaders, particularly in rural areas, understand and utilise elements of both theories to support teachers' functionality and well-being. As discussed earlier, regarding the challenges faced by school leadership and teachers in rural areas, it is essential to have leaders who understand and utilise EI skills to support teachers in addressing the challenges they face daily, promoting effective teaching and learning.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This section introduces the study's design and research methodology, which are covered in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.7.1 Research approach

This study uses a qualitative research approach to examine how SMTs in rural South African schools can support teachers' well-being by utilising EI. According to Creswell (2014), techniques are the tools that researchers employ to obtain information. These tools enable researchers to obtain data about social reality from individuals, groups, items, and texts in any format (Maree, 2013). A qualitative methodological paradigm has been selected for this study.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. Primarily, it highlights an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, placing emphasis on generating rather than proving theories. Qualitative research focuses on how individuals interpret their social world, thus viewing social reality as both constantly shifting and emergent, as interpreted by individuals (Creswell, 2014).

According to Creswell (2014), in this case, the researcher aims to determine the significance of a phenomenon based on participant perspectives. This entails locating a group that shares a culture and conducting an ethnographic study of how that group develops common behavioural patterns over time. Observing how people behave while participating in events is a crucial part of gathering data in this manner. Maree (2013) goes on to say that qualitative research seeks answers by analysing different social contexts and the people who live in them. Qualitative researchers are particularly interested in how people organise themselves and their environments, as well as how residents of these environments use social roles, rituals, symbols, and social structures to make sense of their circumstances.

Therefore, the qualitative approach is most suitable for this study's research objectives, which include understanding school leadership's perspectives on well-being within a rural South African school. This is accomplished by investigating the difficulties teachers encounter in the classroom regarding their well-being and the type of assistance provided by the Department of Education, and by examining how CMTs use EI to support teacher well-being in rural South African schools.

Qualitative research enabled the researcher to collect comprehensive descriptive data about the emotions, attitudes, perceptions, and values of participants (school

managers), since physical reality cannot be reduced to variables in the same way (Ary et al., 2002). Additionally, as a leader in charge of curriculum management in schools, the researcher's credentials, experiences, and training impact the choice of the qualitative technique (Creswell, 2014).

1.7.2 Research design

For this research, a case study design was selected (Symonds & Symonds, 2016). In order to provide a comprehensive and detailed account of a social phenomenon, case studies are an appropriate approach. The focus will be on how EI can be routinely used by rural school leaders to assist teachers with a range of difficulties, enabling the researcher to investigate rural South African school leadership's use of EI in understanding and supporting teachers through a case-study approach. From the different types of case studies, an instrumental case study is the most appropriate case study design for this research (Coombs, 2022).

1.7.3 Population and sampling

The population under study consists of teachers from a few selected rural secondary schools in the White Hazy 2 Circuit. This study employs a non-probability sampling technique using the purposive sampling strategy (Creswell, 2014). This tactic is appropriate because it enables the intentional selection of specific environments, individuals, and events to provide information unavailable from other options. In this instance, schools were deliberately selected to investigate how SMTs can use EI to assist teachers' well-being in the classroom.

1.7.4 Data collection techniques

Several interconnected tasks were used in the qualitative research data collection process to obtain information for the research questions (Olivier, 2017). An outline of the data collection procedure is shown in Figure 1.2, as described by Creswell (2014). The discussion of each procedure is based on Figure 1.2.

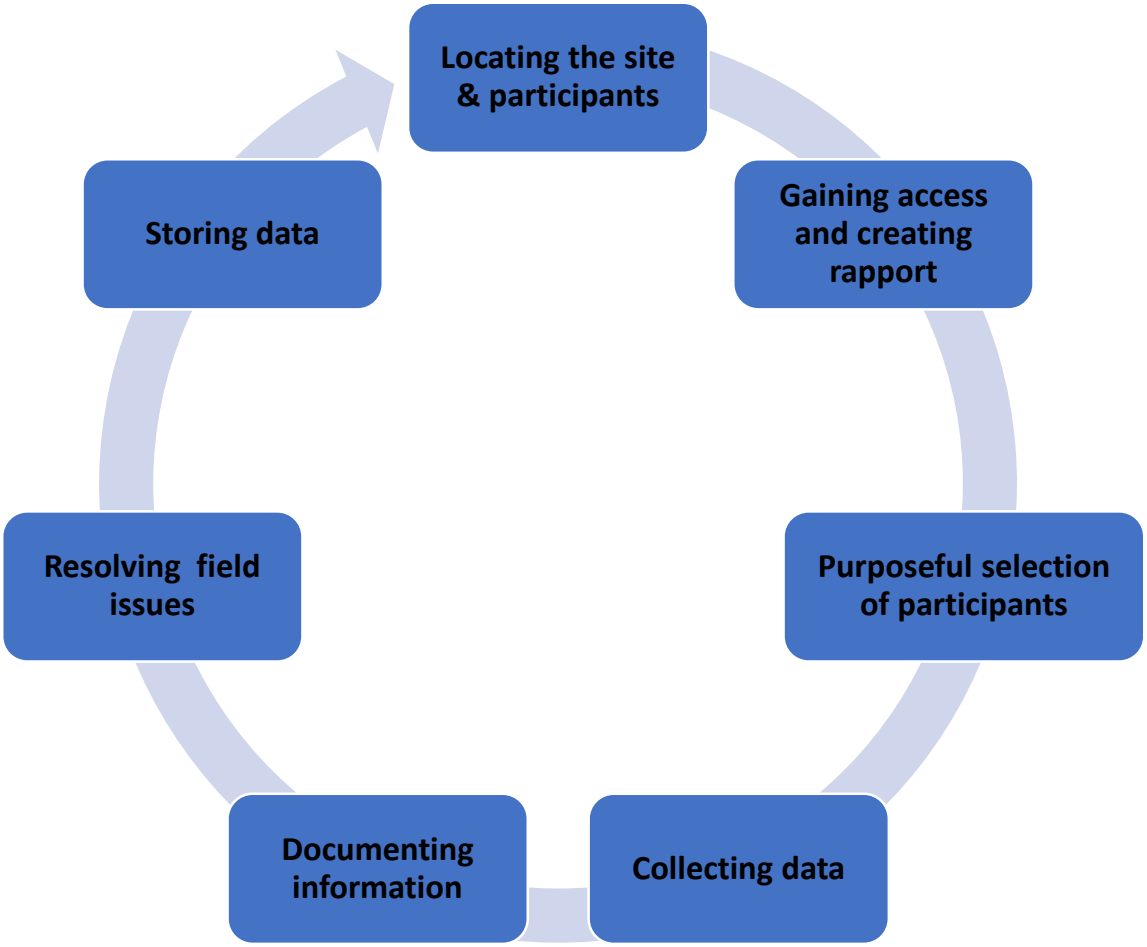


Figure 1.2: Data collection procedure (Creswell, 2014, p. 145)

1.7.4.1 Sampling the site

The unit of analysis for this case study comprises ten rural primary and secondary schools that were conveniently and purposefully chosen (Creswell, 2014) based on their geographic accessibility. The schools are situated in the White Hazy 2 Circuit in the Ehlanzeni District of Mpumalanga Province, within the Masoyi Tribal Authority. The researcher decided not to conduct the research at the school where he works, as there could be risks to him, the school, and the teachers, such as the disclosure of sensitive data or personal information (Creswell, 2014).

1.7.4.2 Gaining access and creating rapport

The University of South Africa and the Mpumalanga Department of Education (MDE) granted permission for the study to be carried out. Thus, the circuit manager and managers of the chosen public rural primary and secondary schools authorised

assistance in gaining access to the schools and making gathering data easier (Creswell, 2014). Establishing a connection with the participants and obtaining their formal consent through a signed consent letter are essential steps in obtaining complete data. The consent letter was thoroughly explained to the participants, and they had sufficient time to review its contents (Taherdoost, 2018).

1.7.4.3 Selection of participants and sampling procedures

Non-probability sampling is employed in qualitative research, where the study aims to provide a detailed account rather than to generalise conclusions. Different non-probability sampling techniques exist (Taherdoost, 2018). This study employed purposeful sampling since it was deemed the best approach to examine and address the study's research questions.

The research was conducted in the White Hazy 2 Circuit. The circuit is situated in rural Mpumalanga Province in the Ehlanzeni District. It comprises 25 schools (7 secondary and 18 primary schools). Ten schools were randomly selected, with a preference for a balance of primary and secondary schools. Two SMT members were selected per school, consisting of either the Principal and Deputy Principal or the Principal and Departmental Head, depending on the size of the school in terms of learner enrollment. The research, therefore, consists of twenty participants. There were two stages of sampling (Creswell, 2014): one for the site and one for the participants in the chosen schools.

Twenty participating members of the SMTs from the ten schools were chosen through criterion sampling, with the help of the principals (in terms of granting the researcher permission to conduct research in their schools and also providing the researcher with time and space to make presentations) (Creswell, 2014; Taherdoost, 2018). It was crucial to choose managers for this case study who would be reachable, open to sharing details about how they employ EI to promote teachers' well-being in their schools, and available to spend time on the school premises. The researcher sought to involve a sufficient number of SMT members because the study would be both exploratory and investigative, thereby enabling the generation of rich data and thick descriptions (Creswell, 2014).

1.7.4.4 Data collection and documentation strategies

A case study design was applied in real-world contexts (Symonds & Symonds, 2016). Any data phenomena that capture the researcher's interest are examined in this type of case study (Symonds & Symonds, 2016). Qualitative data collection methods enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Consequently, the researcher is able to explore the subject and provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Using questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, the researcher was able to obtain the most direct and straightforward method for collecting rich and comprehensive data regarding the phenomenon under study (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

A case study approach was employed in real-life settings (Symonds & Symonds, 2016). According to Symonds and Symonds (2016), this kind of case study investigates any phenomenon in the data that draws the researcher's interest. The researcher gains a deeper understanding of the opinions and experiences of the participants by using qualitative data collection methods (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). According to Barrett and Twycross (2018), this allows the researcher to delve deeply into the phenomenon being studied and investigate the topic. The researcher can obtain rich and extensive information about the phenomenon being studied in an easy and direct manner by using questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

1.7.4.4.1 Semi-structured individual interviews

The principals, deputy principals, and department heads of the chosen schools participated in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The relationship between EI and its application by school leadership in supporting teacher well-being was established through the perceptions of all the chosen participants regarding the use of EI in supporting teacher well-being and observations in the schools (Bipath, 2008).

Face-to-face, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted since they allow for greater participant flexibility and informality. As a result, the participant felt more at ease, free to answer, and eager to participate in the conversation. To address the research topics of the study, a collection of pre-set open-ended questions was

formulated well in advance (Nieuwenhuis, 2013b). The interviews took place in a private room after school in the selected schools to reduce any possible distractions. The research was conducted at a time that suited the participants. The researcher interviewed each participant for 30 to 60 minutes; however, those who agreed to participate were granted an extension whenever necessary.

Advantages of semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ask various open-ended, individually customised questions and provide participants more freedom to respond creatively to queries. Interview questions could be tailored to participants' experiences and based on what they mentioned during the interview (Igwenagu, 2016; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews

If either the interviewer or the participant gets carried away in the conversation, semi-structured interviews may omit important questions. Semi-structured interviews, which are more loosely planned, run the risk of going off course, wasting time, and missing crucial questions. Participants in semi-structured interviews may be asked the same questions regardless of their gender, age, colour, or religious affiliation, which might lead to prejudice (Igwenagu, 2016; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

1.7.4.4.2 Qualitative questionnaire

Though there is an extensive range of questionnaire types, a semi-structured questionnaire was used for this research. The research sample was smaller in size, less structured, and more open, and the questions were word-based (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). This allowed the participants enough room to express their views concerning understanding the concept of EI and whether they utilise it to support teacher well-being in rural South African schools.

Advantages of semi-structured questionnaires

On the other hand, open-ended questions allow participants to avoid the limitations of predetermined response categories, explain and qualify their answers, and compose a free response on their terms (Cohen et al., 2011).

Disadvantages of semi-structured questionnaires

Responses from semi-structured questionnaires may be difficult to code and classify (Cohen et al., 2011). It is, therefore, essential for the researcher to formulate questions that are appropriate and relevant to the research.

1.7.4.4.3 Document analysis

Document analysis is a qualitative study in which the researcher analyses documents to give certain elements a voice and meaning (Bowen, 2009; Davie & Wyatt, 2021). Documents, including school budget statements, minutes from meetings of the SMT, vision and mission statements, and school development plans, were analysed to complete document analysis (Bipath, 2008).

Advantages of document analysis

Documents may be an inconspicuous source of information, as the researcher can access them whenever it is convenient. Because participants may have paid attention when gathering the data, they might represent thoughtful data. They might reduce the time and cost of transcription for the researcher (Creswell et al., 2007).

Disadvantages of document analysis

Due to their classification, certain records could be restricted to private or public access. They may not contain accurate and complete information.

To prevent manipulating school managers' replies or behaviour and their use of EI, which was the phenomenon of interest, the non-intrusive data collection methods included document analysis, questionnaires, and interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2013b).

The study involved twenty participants, two from each school. Based on their enthusiasm and active participation, ten SMT members (two from each school) were selected to participate in one-on-one interviews. In the end, the number of participants (SMT members) allowed the research to continue even though some individuals decided to withdraw from the study.

1.7.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for, and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories, and regularities (Cohen et al., 2011).

According to Nieuwenhuis (2013b), the process of analysing qualitative data is continuous and iterative, with the researcher interacting with the data during the investigation to interpret the information gathered from various sources. The researcher can develop the research questions and reach preliminary conclusions through this ongoing process of analysis and interpretation (Nieuwenhuis, 2013b). Furthermore, included in the examination of qualitative data are the three steps involved in data analysis: 1) data preparation and organisation; 2) data description, classification, and interpretation into codes and themes; and 3) data representation and visualisation in the form of tables, figures, or discussions. Since drawing conclusions is the primary goal of data interpretation, the study's findings and conclusions may constitute a bounded conclusion, as they are limited to the participating managers and the context in which their school exists (Nieuwenhuis, 2013b).

Using exact quotes from the interviews with the participating SMT members, document analysis, and questionnaires, the data analysis took the shape of a descriptive narrative throughout the study and was presented chronologically. Gathering relevant information, transcribing each participant's interview following each session, and reviewing the verbatim transcriptions to acquaint the researcher with the material are the initial steps in developing the narrative analysis. The second stage examined the similarities between texts and emergent themes to help readers and researchers understand participants' perspectives on the role of EI in SMTs (Nieuwenhuis, 2013a; 2013b). To classify the data, the researcher created initial codes and code headings. To create themes and classifications, emerging patterns were highlighted (Creswell, 2012; 2014). Thirdly, the researcher collaborated with his supervisor to refine, define, and categorise the possible themes by tabulating the emerging themes, sub-themes, categories, and subcategories. In order to support each topic, sub-theme, category, and subcategory, the fourth stage collected evidence from a variety of data sources, such as one-on-one interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. The

researcher then employed member checking to eliminate potential errors and researcher subjectivity, thereby helping the current study fulfil its quality criteria (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2013a; 2013b). Lastly, a general summary of the information and patterns discovered was provided.

1.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability are the fundamental components of trustworthiness. Stahl and King (2020) state that the degree to which the research findings align with reality is a measure of **credibility**. This can be accomplished by using the triangulation process. Data from multiple field sources were analysed to identify recognisable patterns (Stahl & King, 2020). Among the many triangulation techniques, methodological triangulation, which uses many data-gathering techniques, such as semi-structured interviews, qualitative questionnaires, and document analysis, was employed.

To lend credibility to the current study, the researcher had to spend more time conducting research and interacting with the participating SMT members before drawing any inferences from the findings (Mertens, 2018). During the data collection process, trust was built with the participating SMT members in order to gather rich, meaningful, and sufficient data (Ary et al., 2002; Creswell, 2014). Member checks were also carried out after the initial analysis of the in-person interviews with the participating SMT members, and participants had the opportunity to evaluate and comment on the data analysis (Ary et al., 2002; Creswell, 2014; Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

Because they think patterns and descriptions from one context may apply to another, qualitative researchers seek to deepen understanding by applying findings from one context to another (Stahl & King, 2020). Transferability was made possible by providing a comprehensive and detailed description (contextual information about the field worksite) that sufficiently portrays the circumstances for application to other situations (Stahl & King, 2020).

According to Stahl and King (2020), there should be some objective reality for the research to be audited. The research study findings should be based on participant

narratives and words to meet the criterion of **confirmability**, hence minimising potential researcher bias.

Stahl and King (2020) define dependability as trust in trustworthiness. Participants and the researcher should be able to actively develop their trust in the events as they happen through qualitative research (Stahl & King, 2020). Two study techniques that foster trust between the researcher and participants are mentioned by Stahl and King (2020), namely bracketing and peer debriefing (scrutiny). Another researcher was allowed to view and respond to the researcher's field notes through peer debriefing. Before the study was made public, this enabled the researcher to receive insider analysis and criticism (Stahl & King, 2020). The method of separating data into observations and interpretations by a fellow researcher is known as bracketing. This motivated the researcher to be cautious about what they record as fact and what they set aside as their interpretations of the data (Stahl & King, 2020).

The researcher methodically, accurately, and fairly analysed the data to reflect the thoughts, actions, emotions, and everyday activities of the participating SMT members, thereby demonstrating the validity of the current study (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

1.9 RESEARCH ETHICS

Strict ethical guidelines had to be followed because this study involved human subjects and private data on the participants' EI (Mertens, 2018). Ethical questions were relevant both inside the study itself and in the research field. Consequently, all applicable legislation and moral principles were followed (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2018). The description of the ethical guidelines considered in this study is provided below. In this explanation, the researcher covered a variety of ethical requirements, including authorisation to perform research, privacy, informed consent, anonymity, voluntary involvement, ensuring anonymity, safeguarding against damage, access to findings, and beneficence and non-maleficence (Mertens, 2018).

1.9.1 Permission to conduct research, informed consent, and voluntary participation

The researcher applied to the University of South Africa's Faculty of Education Ethics Committee for permission to conduct research at 10 public primary and secondary schools.

The process by which a competent, knowledgeable individual freely decides whether or not to participate in human research is known as informed consent. During this process, prospective participants are informed about the research, what they will be asked to complete, how their data will be handled, and their rights as participants. Before consent paperwork is signed, the procedure begins and continues until the person is removed from the study (Reegan, 2021). In order for participants to give their informed consent, they should have a proper understanding of the research, which entails fully disclosing all relevant information to prospective participants, including the research procedures, the risks and rewards of the study, the subjects' rights, and the voluntary nature of participation (Reegan, 2021).

In addition to providing protection against liability, the informed consent agreement, which should include an information sheet for the participant to keep, verifies that participants understand exactly what is involved in the study and what they are expected to accomplish (Reegan, 2021). Participants should be well-informed, fully aware of the study's objectives, and able to understand the material presented.

The MDE provided authorisation. To obtain permission to conduct research at the chosen schools, school principals received a notification, an informed letter, and a consent form. They could ask any questions and receive additional information about the study during the first meeting with the department heads, deputy principals, and principals involved in this study. The principals provided a location for the presentation and extended an invitation to interested SMT members to take part in the study. All interested SMT members received an informed letter and consent form outlining the purpose of the study.

Additionally, the researcher reviewed participants' ability to leave the study at any time. Participants were informed that if they decided to leave the study at any point, they

would not face any consequences or lose rewards. The participants were informed that participating in the study would not result in financial compensation.

1.9.2 Confidentiality, anonymity, and trust

In addition to assuring participants of their privacy and security when taking part in research studies, confidentiality and anonymity procedures assist in establishing a positive rapport and trust (Eungoo & Hwang, 2023). Participants become free and take charge of the process as a result of being guaranteed their privacy and having their trust and respect established (Eungoo & Hwang, 2023). A qualitative researcher builds a relationship with participants; nevertheless, it is essential to understand that this relationship cannot be equal, as the researcher typically has the upper hand. The researcher should ensure that the participating SMT members' right to privacy is upheld and that the information they submit is secure enough to prevent identity theft (Cohen, 2012). To protect the participants' identities, the ethical principles of participants' privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were respected at all times during the study.

Throughout the research procedure, the identities and personal information of the participating SMT members and the chosen schools remained anonymous. The names of the participating schools, their identities, and other personal information were excluded from the research data. The only two people aware of the names of the participating managers and the schools are the researcher and his supervisor. Pseudonyms were used to guarantee that the managers’ and the schools’ identities were hidden and untraceable. The responses from questionnaires and interviews were verbatim transcribed with the participants' permission. To further protect participant confidentiality, composite narratives were used in data reporting. Before signing the informed consent letter, conducting interviews, providing documents, and responding to questionnaires, participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time or elect not to answer a question if they felt it could reveal sensitive information.

To gain their trust, participants were informed that the responses from questionnaires and transcriptions of their interviews would be safely saved in password-protected computer files. The data from the participating managers will be utilised solely in this

study, and access to the information will be restricted to the researcher and research supervisor.

1.9.3 Beneficence and non-maleficence

According to Griffith and Tengnah (2020), the two ethical principles that will help researchers address and manage any moral issues that may occur within the research are beneficence and non-maleficence. Cohen et al. (2011) state that participants will not be harmed and that the researcher will not commit any known forms of deception during the study. Protecting people against harm (physical, emotional, psychological, and other) is essential (Ary et al., 2002). According to the non-maleficence principle, one should either not harm or do the least amount of harm required to achieve a desired outcome. According to this idea, no volunteer may be harmed while taking part in the research (Mertens, 2018).

1.10 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Research reporting and project writing limitations pertain to matters that are occasionally outside researchers' control, yet can nonetheless influence the outcome of a study (Simon, 2011). There can be restrictions, like with any research, as Creswell (2012) explains. Since data gathering depends on scheduled appointments with specific responders, it may take a while. It might be difficult for the researcher to get SMT participants in this study to follow the set timetable. Consequently, the research might be continued for a long time. The researcher's presence may impact subject replies during data collection, which is inevitable in qualitative research. It is possible for participants to feel pressured to give answers that are seen as favourable and appropriate from the researcher's perspective.

Research reporting and project writing limitations pertain to matters that are occasionally outside researchers' control, yet can influence the research's conclusion (Simon, 2011). As with any research, limitations may exist (Creswell, 2012). Collecting data may take some time, as it depends on scheduling appointments with specific respondents. The researcher could find it challenging to get SMT participants in this study to adhere to the schedule. As a result, the research could be prolonged for an extended period. The researcher's presence could impact the subject responses during data collection, which is inevitable in qualitative research. Furthermore,

participants may feel the need to present responses deemed positive and acceptable by the researcher. When presenting findings, concerns about confidentiality and anonymity may arise.

The boundaries of a study relate to the scope of its objectives and research questions. According to Jansen (2022), delimitations are the intentional choices the researcher makes regarding the study's goals and objectives, as well as the exclusion of particular research questions and targets. The researcher should have a tight, narrow focus for their study in order to delve deeply into the issue, focus their efforts on a specific area, and produce meaningful findings (Jansen, 2022).

The purpose of this case study was to determine how much SMTs utilise EI to promote teachers' well-being. The goal of this study is to determine whether SMTs understand the idea of EI and whether they can apply it to challenges that often threaten teachers' well-being. Most SMTs are senior teachers, department heads, the principal, and the deputy principal. The primary focus of the study was on the views of SMT members regarding how they utilise EI to support teachers' well-being in rural schools.

1.11 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Circuit Management Team: A cluster of principals who belong to the same circuit. It is mainly headed by the Circuit Manager. The team is responsible for managing, supporting, and monitoring all the schools within the circuit.

Emotional Intelligence: The capacity to recognise, utilise, and control your own emotions in order to minimise stress, communicate clearly, empathise with others, overcome obstacles, and resolve differences.

Rural area: A geographic area outside of towns and cities. It is primarily populated by black people in South Africa and is typified by inadequate services, infrastructure, and basic utilities.

School leadership: Formal structure managing the school that comprises a principal, deputy principal, departmental heads, and senior teachers in some situations. Managing the school is their primary responsibility.

School Management Team: It is a team of school managers, who mainly comprise the principal, deputy principal, and departmental heads. They are responsible for professional leadership and the daily operation of a school.

Well-being: We feel good about ourselves, spirit, and purpose when our physical, mental, emotional, and social needs are met. The present study conceptualises well-being as follows: Psychological well-being is demonstrated by acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, healthy relationships, environmental mastery, and a sense of purpose in life. Keyes (2006). A person's social well-being includes social coherence, social actualisation, social integration, social acceptability, and social contribution. Emotional well-being is characterised by positive emotions, interest in life, and life satisfaction (Keyes, 2006).

1.12 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and overview

Chapter 1 outlines the background and problem statement of the study, followed by the research aims, objectives, and the formulation of primary and secondary research questions. It further presents the pragmatic research perspective underpinning the study and details the adopted research methodology. The chapter also describes the data collection and analysis methods and addresses ethical considerations, quality criteria, and key concept clarifications.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of literature focusing on leadership perspectives regarding the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. It provides an overview of the South African education system, the importance of teacher well-being, and the contextual challenges faced by rural schools. The chapter further explores the application of EI within educational settings and its relevance to addressing these challenges. Leadership theories in education are examined, with particular emphasis on the relationship between leadership and EI. The chapter concludes by discussing the challenges experienced by rural school teachers and school leadership in South Africa.

Chapter 3: Conceptual framework

Chapter 3 concentrates on the conceptual framework by exploring the concept of EI, looking at its models, theoretical underpinnings, and historical evolution. Furthermore, this chapter looks at the relationship between leadership (in schools) and EI. With special reference to rural South African schools, critiques and discussions on EI, teacher well-being, and their relationship to EI and school leadership are explored.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

Chapter 4 outlines the research processes, strategies, and methodology underpinning the study, situating it within a qualitative methodological paradigm and an interpretivist meta-theoretical framework. The chapter details the research design, sampling strategies, participant selection, and the phases of the study, including data collection, recording, analysis, and interpretation, while also discussing the benefits and limitations of these methodological choices. It concludes with an overview of the study's quality criteria and ethical considerations.

Chapter 5: Presentation and discussion of results

Chapter 5 presents and discusses the results of the study**.**

Chapter 6: Discussion of findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study and systematically relates them to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 as well as to the conceptual frameworks outlined in Chapter 3, thereby situating the results within the broader theoretical and empirical context of the research.

Chapter 7: Summary, conclusions and recommendations

Chapter 7 addresses the secondary research questions before responding to the primary research question. It provides an overview of the study and revisits the conceptual framework underpinning the research, while also outlining the study's limitations and potential contributions. The chapter concludes with recommendations for practice, future research, and policy development.

1.13 CONCLUSION

Teaching and learning in South African rural schools are significantly impacted by several issues. Teachers who are at the core of curriculum delivery want leaders who can support them and give them the resources they need to deal with everyday challenges. In order to better understand and support teachers' well-being, it is critical to have managers or leaders with strong EI skills.

Chapter 1 presented a general overview of the study. In Chapter 2, research is conducted on leadership perspectives and the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. The literature review provides an overview of the South African educational system, the importance of teacher well-being, the specific challenges faced by South African rural schools, and the applicability of EI in educational contexts. Leadership, its relevance to educational environments, the connection between leadership and EI, and the challenges that South African rural school teachers and school leadership encounter are also covered.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 presented a general overview of the study. The study's introduction and justification were presented, followed by a description of the problem statement. Additionally, the purpose, aims, and objectives of the research were discussed.

In Chapter 2, research is conducted on leadership perspectives on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. The literature review comprises seven sections, namely an overview of the South African educational system, the importance of teacher well-being, the specific challenges faced by South African rural schools, and the applicability of EI in educational contexts, which are covered in the first section. The topic of leadership, its relevance to educational environments, and the connection between leadership and EI are covered in the next section. The final segment focuses on the challenges that South African rural school teachers and school leadership encounter.

2.2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Since the beginning of educational systems, one of humanity's main concerns has been pursuing a just education (Sonkqayi, 2021). This is because schools and many other educational establishments serve as microsocieties that simulate what happens in broader communities (Sonkqayi, 2021). In a progressive society, it is therefore important to focus on the education system, which plays a vital role in shaping the future of the country.

2.2.1 Overview of the South African education system

The Republic of South Africa's 1996 Constitution (Sachs, 2023), the Basic Education Laws Amended Act 32 of 2024 (Department of Education, 2024), which attempts to amend specific sections of the South African Schools Act (Ross, 1996), and related regulations and policies on equity all state that every South African learner should have access to learning and teaching, comparable facilities, and equal educational opportunities. Even with the official changes, it is still challenging to distinguish

between the post-apartheid South African government's educational difficulties and the legacy of colonial and apartheid structures (Sonkqayi, 2021).

South Africa's fragmented educational system remains unreformed despite public spending, which is the silent tragedy and catastrophe of the democratic era (Landaburu, 2016). Unfortunately, even while specific reform initiatives in the 2000s were successful, they did not endure and have been undone by the COVID-19 pandemic (Landaburu, 2016). The pandemic's effects on education in South Africa and around the world included learning losses due to school closures, which exacerbated existing educational gaps and led to the loss of learning gains accumulated over time (United Nations, 2020; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2022). In terms of reading, maths, and science learning outcomes, South Africa continues to rank last in all international tables (Landaburu, 2016). Because of this, most impoverished children in South Africa who are primarily black still do not acquire the education they require to overcome their circumstances.

The educational system in South Africa is dualistic. Schools in affluent metropolitan regions, particularly those in traditionally white neighbourhoods, typically have superior facilities, highly educated teachers, and more access to digital resources, according to a 2020 report by the South African Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, 2020). On the other hand, many schools in underprivileged urban and rural regions continue to deal with a lack of basic facilities, including insufficient classrooms and poor sanitation, as well as excessive teacher absenteeism and a teacher shortage (HSRC, 2020). Although this tendency for the affluent to have well-resourced schools and poor areas to have under-resourced schools exists around the world, the differences are more pronounced in South Africa (Landaburu, 2016). As a result of this setting, poor learner performance is most commonly observed in poorer settlements across the country. Schools that have traditionally served primarily Black and Coloured learners perform much worse than schools that have historically served White and Indian learners (World Bank Group, 2018), suggesting that learning occurs in schools in a highly unequal way based on children's race and socioeconomic position.

South Africa's struggles to provide free, high-quality education are largely due to resource constraints (Mkhize & Davids, 2023). According to Dube (2020), significant and persistent social disparities result from the unequal allocation of school resources,

which form the basis of the extremely complex, diverse, and complicated South African education system. It is on this note that some historically black schools struggle, as they are expected to perform on par with well-resourced schools. It should be noted from the argument above that most South African schools, especially those in historically black areas, are faced with the following challenges: a shortage of or inadequate physical infrastructure, school infrastructure safety challenges, poor school building conditions, school infrastructure hazards and poor maintenance of school infrastructure, as well as a shortage of qualified teachers.

Learners in South African schools are performing worse academically (Landaburu, 2016). One of the reasons for the continuous decline in learner achievement and poor educational results in public schools is the inadequate leadership displayed by many school leaders (Naidoo, 2019). By improving the working conditions for their teachers, as well as the school's environment and atmosphere, school leadership can have a substantial impact on the quality of education and teaching in their schools, and subsequently, learner attainment (Kumari, 2022). Aside from the selection criteria and interviews, which are primarily conducted by School Governing Bodies (SGB) or prerequisite qualifications, school leadership have the potential to lead and manage effective and successful schools, even though there are no stringent requirements for appointing Principals, Deputy Principals, and Departmental Heads (Naidoo, 2019). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) should provide adequate support to school leadership.

Amid these challenges, teachers are at the core of the education system. It is therefore important to focus on their well-being, as it directly impacts educational outcomes. Since teacher well-being has a direct impact on learner outcomes, teacher retention, and educational quality (Fourie & de Klerk, 2024), it should be prioritised to create a more effective and sustainable educational system. It is therefore necessary for school leadership to prioritise teacher well-being and provide the necessary support for teachers to successfully navigate the daily challenges they encounter in schools.

2.2.2 The comparative analysis and challenges faced by rural schools worldwide

To better appreciate the unique challenges faced by South African rural schools, it is imperative to examine the difficulties faced by rural schools in other nations. In terms of infrastructure and economics, nations like China are among the most developed in the world. Over the past few decades, China has experienced impressive economic growth and development; however, the country's long-standing, severe urban-rural educational gap continues to impede educational advancement and significantly affects societal development (Tang, 2023). The educational disparity between China's rural and urban areas can be examined using a variety of methods, including learner accomplishment, teacher forces, and resource distribution (Tang, 2023). Chinese residents have been found to have two distinct social identities: one associated with rural areas and the other with urban areas. According to this system, residents of rural areas have fewer opportunities than residents in urban areas to express their civil rights and interests. This results in unequal social status and resource distribution, which in turn leads to unequal educational opportunities (Chan, 2009).

There are two main areas of educational inequity under this system. The first is the uneven allocation of educational resources between urban and rural regions. Research indicates that, in terms of the number of schools, the quality of education, and the classroom environment, rural schools are inferior to urban schools (Liang et al., 2014). The "key schools" system in China also highlights the significant disparity in resource allocation between urban and rural regions (Tang, 2023, p. 294). Key schools in China are more similar to elite schools; they are typically chosen from among those with a proven track record of academic success, given better resources and teachers, and permitted to recruit the best learners for a more thorough education that would prepare them for advancement to the next level of key schools (Tang, 2023).

A country like Colombia is also affected by the aforementioned circumstance, in which inequalities between urban and rural schools are especially noticeable (Bonilla-Mejía & Londoño-Ortega, 2021). Significant differences also exist in learning. These discrepancies between rural and urban schools represent significant inequalities in educational inputs. Furthermore, teachers who work in remote areas are far less likely

to be hired on a permanent basis (Bonilla-Mejía & Londoño-Ortega, 2021). The calibre and consistency of teachers' efforts are strongly correlated with the success of learners (Bonilla-Mejía & Londoño-Ortega, 2021). Stemming from the above, it is therefore crucial to focus on the unique challenges faced by South African rural schools.

2.2.2.1 The unique challenges faced by schools in rural South African settings

It is important to understand the different terms used to describe rural schools in South Africa. According to Duma (2018), rural schools are located distant from cities on the nation's outskirts. Additionally, Sipple et al. (2021) list a number of factors that impact rural schools, such as their distance from cities, the condition of the roads and bridges that lead to those schools, limited access to information technology, poor access to facilities and services like water, electricity, and sanitary facilities, and limited or non-existent access to lifelong learning opportunities. It is worth noting that various definitions of rural schools share several features, such as isolation and inadequate infrastructure.

In South Africa, there is no uniformly accepted definition of ‘rural’ because it depends on a number of factors. Rural refers to places that are controlled by traditional authorities, such as agricultural areas and tribal authorities (Gallent & Gkartzios, 2019). The term ‘rural’ typically refers to sparsely inhabited areas where agriculture is the main source of economic activity, while it may also apply to densely populated areas created by colonial and apartheid-era land settlements (Gallent & Gkartzios, 2019). This category also includes certain mining areas that are no longer utilised.

In many rural South African areas, extreme poverty is a challenge that negatively affects access to high-quality education. Rural schools face challenges because of their geographic location. Effective education is hampered by a number of issues, including underqualified teachers, teaching many grades, a lack of resources, inadequate government financing, and parents' lack of commitment to their children's education (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Teachers and school leadership are under tremendous stress due to these challenges.

Rural public schools are classified according to several criteria that limit the availability of high-quality education. For example, rural populations are typically isolated and impoverished. Because of this, many schools lack the physical resources and basic infrastructure required for roads, water, sewage, power, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Learners attending remote schools are disadvantaged by their parents' low economic status. The primary factor is income level. School fees (development funds) and other costs are typically unaffordable for low-income families, particularly those in rural areas (Wang & Shen, 2022).

Provincial governments are unable to provide rural schools with the necessary funding to guarantee that learners receive a top-notch education because of financial constraints. Additionally, because educational authorities are unable to provide schools with the much-needed human and physical resources, parents are under a lot of pressure to provide their children with basic essentials, such as stationery and cleaning materials. Outside of wealthy farming communities, the majority of parents in South Africa's impoverished rural areas prioritise education less, have lower levels of education, and work in low-paying occupations (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Teaching and learning in these schools suffer as a result of these parents' inability to pay for the extra resources that teachers need.

Overcrowding in classrooms, a lack of Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM), poor facilities, teacher shortages, and systemic and administrative problems are only a few of the challenges faced by teachers in rural locations. It is quite challenging to recruit and hire learners with the necessary training because of limited resources, the fact that teachers are sometimes expected to teach multiple grades or subjects, organise extracurricular activities, and successfully manage personal concerns. This opinion is echoed by Lombo and Subban (2024), who further support the argument that teachers and school leadership receive very little support and that accountability for education in rural areas is minimal. To address inequities in rural environments and meet the teacher deficit, schools frequently recruit unqualified or underqualified teachers, resulting in poor standards of learning, underperformance, and poor learner discipline (Lombo & Subban, 2024).

Rural schools are largely characterised by a shortage and poor state of physical infrastructure, such as school buildings, classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and other infrastructural facilities, which are key to effective learning and teaching, as well as improved teacher functionality and learner performance. The Department's austerity measures, gaps in the application of policies, geospatial difficulties, and a general lack of maintenance planning negatively influence the provision of high-quality education (Lombo & Subban, 2024).

The South African Schools Act mandates that schools use SGBs to supplement state resources (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Given the state of the economy, it is the duty of school stakeholders to increase school resources, which are critical to the schools' continued existence. SGBs in many rural South African schools lack the resources they need to fulfil their duties, according to a number of studies, including those by du Plessis and Mestry (2020), Gamede (2020), Mestry (2020), and Veit (2022). This highlights the importance of empowering SGBs to take on more responsibility in their tasks, which may include providing resource supplements. Teachers facing the above challenges are more likely to have their teaching and learning environment negatively affected, which can lead to poor performance by the teachers themselves (du Plessis & Mestry, 2020). Over time, this can also decrease overall classroom effectiveness and learners' performance. Understanding how EI affects teachers' emotional well-being is crucial for recognising and addressing the challenges they face daily in the school setting.

2.2.3 The relationship between emotional intelligence and teacher well-being for positive educational outcomes

Teachers, as well as learners, are vital components of educational institutions, and teachers have a significant impact on how the next generation is shaped (Farhana et al., 2023). Teachers play an important role in producing better outcomes for learners and their communities. However, the demanding nature of teaching combined with mental strain, such as stress, exhaustion, and depression, has increased psychological disorders among teachers (Farhana et al., 2023). Given the notable increase in sick leave and job resignations among teachers globally (Benevene et al., 2020), teachers' well-being has garnered considerable attention over the past several decades (Benevene et al., 2019). According to Benevene et al. (2020), well-being

encompasses both the absence of illness and teachers' efficient and productive performance in their professional duties. Well-being primarily refers to teachers' ability to create a positive but dynamic balance between their resources and challenges (environmental, social, individual, physical, mental, and psychological), whereas physical, psychological, and mental health are more concerned with the absence of impairment (Benevene et al., 2020).

There is no denying that a teacher's well-being is impacted by stress and work pressure (Lever, Mathis, & Mayworm, 2017). An employee's ability to adopt coping mechanisms may be compromised by workplace constraints and expectations that are out of line with their skills and competencies (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Stress can occur across a variety of work settings, and it usually worsens when workers feel they have little control over work procedures and receive little direction and support from peers and managers (Bhui et al., 2016). False perceptions of stress, strain, and workload are frequently used as an excuse for inefficient personnel management practices.

Negative mental health concepts like stress or burnout are frequently the main focus in conversations about teacher welfare. In academic studies on teacher welfare, this is also frequently the case, with an emphasis on the negative aspects like stress, burnout, and teacher attrition (Cann, 2019). It is essential to think about and support teacher wellness from a much more comprehensive perspective in order to improve outcomes for learners as well as teachers (Cann, 2019).

Teachers' mental health has a significant impact on learners, teachers, and schools. Stress or burnout connected to teacher shortages caused by attrition is one of the many well-publicised detrimental repercussions of negative teacher well-being. For the long-term sustainability of the profession, recommendations have been made that teacher well-being be given substantial consideration (Cann, 2019). Poor teacher well-being can harm learners, so addressing teacher attrition is not enough; it is also necessary to address teacher well-being. Teachers who are under stress or burnout have fewer positive interactions with students and provide lower-quality instruction.

When a teacher's skills, interests, and abilities match the demands of their position, their well-being is improved. According to the person-environment fit theory, teachers'

subjective feelings tend to influence their sense of competence, confidence, and role and task self-efficacy when there is a match, which improves their well-being at work (Akanni, Kareem, & Oduaran, 2020).

Schools can foster better classroom environments and high-quality instruction that results in student achievement when they prioritise the well-being of their teachers and support their professional development. Addressing teacher well-being is an essential first step in school-wide activities to improve the welfare of learners, since there is a correlation between teacher and learner well-being (Cann, 2019). Investigating the factors that influence teachers' psychological health is essential to ensuring that they have useful coping strategies for handling work-related challenges.

2.2.4 Emotional intelligence and its relevance in educational settings

Although the term emotional intelligence is frequently used, it is a poorly defined psychological concept. Scholars have attempted to provide a universal definition of EI (Krén & Séllei, 2021). It is widely acknowledged that EI is a generic phrase that encompasses social and emotional problem-solving. It includes the ability to recognise emotions, absorb new information, use emotions in cognitive processes, understand and reason with emotions, and regulate our own and other people's emotions (Mayer et al., 2001). However, the general idea of EI, a term first used by Salovey and Mayer (1990), refers to the capacity to recognise, express, and control one's own emotions as well as comprehend those of others. Put differently, EI refers to the ability to identify emotions, access and express emotions to support thought, understand emotions and their meanings, and reflectively manage emotions to support both improved emotion and thought (Mayer et al., 2016). Individuals are able to identify and comprehend both their own and other people's feelings and reactions. Therefore, intelligent thinking, natural emotional responses, and handling stressful situations all depend on EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

It is crucial to understand the idea of EI by examining how human intellect develops. Goleman (2000) brings to the fore opposing views on the understanding of intelligence. One is the narrow view, which argues that intelligence is genetic and thus cannot be changed by life experiences. This view also argues that these aptitudes largely fix our destiny in life. This argument does not consider the more challenging

questions, such as: Is there anything that can be done to help individuals fare better in life? There are instances where people with high Intelligence Quotients (IQs) struggle in certain aspects of life, and those with modest IQs perform surprisingly well.

Goleman (2000) defined EI as self-control, zeal, perseverance, and self-motivation. Unlike the other viewpoint, these abilities can be taught to people, providing them with a greater opportunity to utilise any intellectual capacity that their genes may have bestowed upon them. According to Goleman (2000), people can acquire EI regardless of their genetic makeup.

EI qualities include self-motivation and perseverance in the face of challenges, impulse control and delaying gratification, mood regulation, and avoiding distress by not overwhelming one's capacity for thought, empathy, and hope (Goleman, 2000). Being able to understand emotional concepts intellectually is a standard definition of EI (Farhana et al., 2023). Additionally, it can be thought of as possessing at least three distinct skills, which are: i) identifying emotions and rules for emotional control to understand the process and complexity of emotional experiences; ii) efficiently expressing feelings and emotions through rapid expressions and cultural commodities; and iii) learning how to use and manage emotions (Elfenbein & MacCann, 2017).

Research indicates that individuals with EI, those who are able to comprehend and control their own emotions as well as accurately identify and react to those of others, have an advantage in a number of areas of life, including romantic relationships and negotiating the implicit norms of organisational dynamics (Goleman, 2000). EI thus provides a competitive advantage in the workplace (Goleman, 2000). Emotionally competent individuals tend to be happier and more productive in life, skilfully forming mental habits that boost productivity; in contrast, those who are unable to control their emotions experience internal conflicts that hinder their ability to concentrate and think clearly (Goleman, 2000).

Goleman (2000) mentions five main competencies in his basic definition of :

1. **Understanding one's emotions.** Self-awareness, or the capacity to recognise an emotion as it emerges, is the cornerstone of EI. It is crucial to closely monitor one's emotions in order to develop psychological insight and self-awareness. When we are unable to identify our true feelings, we are at the mercy of our emotions. When it comes to making personal decisions like choosing a spouse or a job, people who are more secure about their emotions are better at managing their lives.
2. **Managing emotions**. Self-awareness is the foundation for the ability to manage emotions appropriately. This looks at the ability to calm oneself, get rid of excessive worry, depression, or impatience, and the repercussions of not being able to do so. Individuals who struggle with this skill are always struggling with emotions of anguish, but those who succeed in it are able to recover from life's upsets and setbacks far more rapidly.
3. **Motivating oneself**. This is necessary for paying attention, self-motivation, mastery, and creativity and entails mobilising emotions in support of a purpose. Every kind of achievement is based on emotional self-control, postponing gratification, and suppressing impulsivity. Additionally, exceptional performance of all kinds is made possible by being able to enter the "flow" (p. 89) condition. Individuals who possess this ability are typically more successful and prolific in all they do.
4. **Recognising emotions in others.** Another skill that expands on emotional self-awareness is empathy, which is a basic quality that anyone can have. People with empathy are more perceptive of the subtle social cues that reveal the needs and desires of others. They become more adept at vocations like teaching, sales, management, and caring professions as a result.
5. **Managing relationships.** The art of relationships has a major role in the capacity to control other people's emotions. This field examines the specific skills linked to social competence and incompetence. These abilities enhance popularity, leadership, and interpersonal effectiveness. People who are proficient in these skills excel at anything that relies on their interpersonal communication skills; they are socially successful individuals.

Bar-On’s (2007) and Goleman and Boyatzis’ (2017) models are examples of mixed models. According to Mandell and Pherwani (2003), they are blended in such a way that they function with social behaviour, characteristics, and emotional capabilities. Bar-On (2007) conceptualised EI in terms of social and emotional skills. Bar-On's theory of social and EI states that a range of skills affect people's behaviour. Although there are different theories and definitions of EI, Goleman's Competency Model serves as the conceptual basis for this study.

2.3 UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP

According to Winston and Patterson (2006), a leader is one or more individuals with a variety of skills, abilities, and talents who choose, mentor, coach, and influence one or more followers. They then bring the organisation's objectives and mission to the followers' attention, inspiring them to freely and enthusiastically devote their physical, mental, and spiritual resources to a coordinated effort to achieve these objectives.

In order to exercise this influence, the leader should humbly and clearly communicate to followers their principles and beliefs, as well as their vision of the future, in a way that enables followers to fully understand the future and apply it to useful activities in the present (Winston & Patterson, 2006). Through the use of critical thinking abilities, insight, intuition, persuasive rhetorical strategies, and interpersonal communication, including both positive discourse and active listening, the leader presents a vision of the future in contrast to the organisation's current state. This approach encourages and brings forth followers' thoughts and beliefs in order to assist them in moving from uncertainty to a clearer understanding and shared insight. According to Winston and Patterson (2006), this causes the follower(s) to perceive and accept the organisation's future state as a desirable situation worth committing personal and corporate resources towards its realisation.

The leader pursues the greater good of the follower(s) through action steps and uses ethical methods to improve the follower(s)' well-being as a result of their interaction with the leader, including their personal growth, as well as emotional and physical healing. Leaders achieve a comparable state for themselves by pursuing personal growth, renewal, and regeneration as well as improved mental, physical, emotional,

and spiritual endurance through interactions with followers (Winston & Patterson, 2006).

In every workplace, managers or leaders are crucial. Ineffective leaders can sometimes be damaging to an organisation, while effective leaders can offer many advantages (Xianjun, 2022). It is the responsibility of leaders or managers to oversee, maintain, and run organisations. The process of persuading and guiding others towards the accomplishment of a shared goal is known as leadership (Bahshwan, 2024). A recent study found that EI is essential for leaders (Bahshwan, 2024). In the modern world or the era of globalisation, a successful manager or leader should be sensitive enough to recognise any strategic opportunities, be an organisational architect, and inspire staff members to embrace this new change by applying and practising both EI and IQ (Xianjun, 2022).

It is essential to focus on the core elements of EI (self-regulation, self-awareness, social skills, empathy, and motivation) and examine how these traits significantly impact organisational performance and leadership efficacy (Bahshwan, 2024). Every business needs leadership because it gives direction and inspires employees to work towards certain objectives (Vera, 2019). In the fast-paced world of leadership, EI is a critical component that sets great leaders apart. It involves the ability to recognise, understand, and regulate one's own emotions as well as those of others. EI is necessary to improve effective leadership (Bahshwan, 2024).

People are influenced by a leader to take actions they would not otherwise take (Vera, 2019). To inspire employees to achieve organisational goals, leaders should be able to understand both their own and their followers' emotions (Vera, 2019). Winston and Patterson (2006) assert that a leader grows both themselves and their followers by persuading staff to achieve organisational objectives and by conveying the strategy and vision in a relatable manner.

In the era of globalisation, institutions and organisations are continuously under pressure to adapt in order to endure and remain relevant (OECD, 2009). As a result, it is crucial for leaders in the twenty-first century to successfully steer change within their organisations. However, because few people value giving up their ideals or the comforts of their current situation, the process of transformation is emotionally taxing

(OECD, 2009). Leaders should, however, overcome these obstacles, especially the emotions of those affected by the change (OECD, 2009). Consequently, in order to manage the process of change, leadership is emphasising EI more (OECD, 2009).

It is therefore critical to explore the characteristics of effective school leadership. Excellent interpersonal skills and professionalism are hallmarks of successful school leadership. As reflective learners who hold themselves and their staff accountable, these leaders create a welcoming and safe environment (Barkman, 2015). Together, these components form an effective learning environment that is essential to the success of a school leader. In order to foster a culture of respect, collaboration, and advancement within the school, effective school leaders should actively reflect on themselves (Barkman, 2015). Additionally, they express their clear vision and direction for the school to learners as well as colleagues. They are supportive and continuously monitor the development of learners and teachers. They understand the importance of incorporating all stakeholders and are also outstanding time managers and team players. Effective leadership and EI appear to be related. The link between the two components is examined in the section that follows.

2.3.1 Challenges faced by school leadership worldwide

Education for sustainable growth in Africa refers to the process of achieving sustainable human development, encompassing economic growth, social development, environmental protection, scientific advancement, and fair employment opportunities (Olowoselu & Bello, 2015).

The primary duties of school leadership include supervising human and material resources and offering expert advice on curriculum development, teaching strategies, and evaluation (Olowoselu & Bello, 2015). The leadership of the school should be able to take advantage of every opportunity to maintain a healthy atmosphere for staff, learners, and the public in order to enable the institution to operate efficiently. Teachers should be guided, inspired, and motivated by school leadership to achieve excellence in their profession. According to Olowoselu and Bello (2015), this circumstance influences the commitment of all societal stakeholders to the accomplishment of educational goals, provides a welcoming school environment, and

establishes acceptable criteria for academic and behavioural achievement by learners.

Given the numerous difficulties schools confront, this is fairly challenging. Schools are faced with many challenges, such as a shortage of resources, a lack of discipline among learners, brutal violence (between learners and teachers), low moral values, demotivated teachers, absenteeism, and late coming, which in most cases may lead to poor academic performance.

These challenges highlight the school leadership's ability to uphold stability and academic success in the workplace. School leaders should deal with emotional pressures in their roles since organisational transformation is linked to emotional and interpretive conflicts (Kareem & Kin, 2019). Emotion has a crucial psychological role in influencing the success of leadership, especially when it comes to school leaders' coercive role in bringing about school transformation (Kareem & Kin, 2019). Therefore, it is essential for school leadership development to comprehend the emotional experiences and behaviours of school leaders.

Pagán-Castaño et al. (2021) state that school leadership is responsible for organising and supervising initiatives to improve teacher performance and achieve more challenging administrative and instructional goals. Research indicates that while effective school leadership is important, it is not a need for successful school change on its own (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). It illustrates how teachers, school culture, and organisation are all greatly impacted by leadership. Learner outcomes, which are primarily indirect, are directly impacted by the organisation, culture, and teaching and learning environment (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Studies conducted in East Asia indicate that recent educational innovations have often failed to take hold at the classroom level, and school managers are finding it difficult to adapt to these new expectations of their job (Hallinger & Walker, 2017). Since a number of extensive educational changes have been implemented over the past 10 years, these results have also presented challenges for principals (Chen & Guo, 2020). Researchers have worked hard to highlight the technical and cognitive aspects of principals' leadership roles, such as instructional supervision and direction-setting

(Hallinger, 2010), but they have mostly overlooked the principals' emotive dimensions (Bridges, 2012; Crawford, 2011).

2.3.2 Challenges faced by school leadership in rural South African schools

Poverty is an important issue in many African countries, which negatively impacts the provision of high-quality education. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) state that rural schools face substantial challenges unique to their environment. A lack of parental involvement in their children's education, insufficient governmental funding, a lack of resources, underqualified teachers, and teaching several grades are some of the problems that hinder effective education (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

The South African Schools Act of 1996 added another level of difficulty for rural schools by decentralising education to communities. In order to ensure that learners receive a top-notch education, SGBs are required by the Schools Act to employ effective and efficient governance. The SGB is composed of parents, secondary school learners, teachers, non-teaching staff, and the principal. However, the majority of SGB members should be parents (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

Due to the fact that many parents in rural areas lack the skills and information necessary to understand school governance, the Act's composition of the SGB has created further challenges. Due to their inability to handle matters pertaining to their children and to offer their knowledge and assistance on matters that could jeopardise the efficient operation of schools, school leadership (SMT), which faces numerous obstacles, receives little assistance from SGBs. SMTs and the teachers they lead are under pressure to deal with challenges brought on by the nature of the job, behavioural challenges from learners, and challenges they have in their personal lives.

2.3.3 Relationship between leadership and emotional intelligence

An organisation's survival depends on its ability to manage its people resources effectively. Human resource management is in charge of handling and resolving employee conflicts. Human resources are the sole resource with ideas, feelings, aspirations, drive, and labour, making them an important asset that the business

should effectively manage (Chin & Chen, 2011). The ability of an organisation's personnel to collaborate determines the organisation's success.

Leaders are crucial in the workplace because they foster teamwork and are crucial to an organisation or institution's successful operation. While incompetent leaders can sometimes be damaging to a company, effective leaders can offer several advantages (Xianjun, 2022). Leaders should consider including an emotional component to some degree in order to achieve success. This will enable them to collaborate with others, manage their stress, lead their teams, and provide constructive criticism.

The foundation of emotional components is the organisation's understanding of the leader (Çayak & Eskici, 2021). As a result, possessing EI skills is now crucial for a leader to succeed. Goleman (2017) asserts that EI is critical to a leader's success since it shapes their behaviour, especially at work.

It is believed that human resource management, which falls under the responsibility of leadership, will develop workers who are highly devoted, morally upright, capable of positive thought, and self-motivated (Chin & Chen, 2011). Performance needs to be improved in order to meet the company's goals. This has a direct bearing on how satisfied employees are with their jobs. Everybody who works wants to feel satisfied with their work. Internal and external variables are the two categories into which satisfaction may be separated. The employees themselves are the source of internal variables. The employee is the source of the internal factor, which could be a need or an aspiration (Chin & Chen, 2011). Workplace regulations, interpersonal interactions, corporate rules, and the payroll system are examples of external influences that originate from outside the employees (Chin & Chen, 2011).

Leadership should be actively involved in managing change within the organisation. Change is always accompanied by some emotion because people choose comfort. People who encounter this comfort are left feeling uneasy and uncomfortable whenever they get disrupted by change (OECD, 2009). People who are affected by change, for instance, are likely to react emotionally because of worry or fear of the unknown. Additionally, people may be unwilling to accept the suggested status if it significantly alters their identities, assumptions, values, and beliefs (OECD, 2009). EI

promotes better decision-making, a productive workplace, and stronger bonds between leaders and their teams (Bahshwan, 2024).

Employee well-being and EI are related. Employees should be able to handle mental health concerns and the high levels of stress they encounter at work, particularly in times of crisis (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023). Workplace crises can cause employees to feel overburdened and worried, which can lead to an increase in mental health problems because they are unable to control their emotions and deal with the difficulties (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023).

One important non-observable factor linked to organisational performance is having the essential EI skills (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). For instance, it is critical to observe how we express and regulate our emotions (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023), as well as how we identify and handle the emotions of others. Being emotionally knowledgeable is crucial for leaders because effective leadership has a significant emotional component. EI is essential for effective leadership because, in order to effectively inspire, connect with, and mentor people, leaders should understand and regulate emotions.

Goleman (2002, p. 12) opines that excessive stress results in a state of "disengagement" and "frazzle", which both impair the brain's prefrontal zones, which are responsible for learning, focus, creativity, and comprehension. The aforementioned states clarify the fundamental responsibility of a leader, which is to assist staff members in entering and remaining in the "brain zone" where they can work and perform at their best. According to Goleman (2002), EI is an essential part of leadership, and without it, a person can have the best training possible, a bright and analytical mind, and an endless supply of creative ideas, but they will not be a great leader.

Major corporations have employed psychologists with expertise to develop the "competency model", which affirms the importance of EI in leadership (Goleman, 2002, p. 26). This model can be used to identify, develop, and advance potential leaders. Goleman (2002) examined competency models from 188 organisations, most of which are large, global, and governmental. The main objective was to determine which specific skills and how much they contributed to extraordinary performance

inside these companies. Like every other skill set, EI has benefits and drawbacks. Strong social skills and EI can be employed for prosocial behaviour or maladaptively to manipulate others to achieve one's own goals (Goleman, 2002).

One of the most well-known administrative concepts in the human sciences is leadership (Lubbadeh, 2020). The finest leader is one who can assist others in achieving and sustaining the most desired emotional attitude (Goleman et al., 2002). We refer to this as primal leadership. According to Goleman et al. (2002), a number of studies have shown that a leader's emotions are contagious to other group members. People will become more confident in their performance as a result of the leader's positive attitude, which fosters creativity and improves decision-making. On the other hand, if the leader is in a negative mood, others will follow suit, and performance will decrease (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2006).

Researchers have examined the possibility that individuals with high EI may use their skills in more dishonest and unethical ways to further their own objectives, frequently at the expense of others (Austin et al., 2014). For example, people with high EI are more likely to use their EI to enhance their own interests or even to influence others in order to accomplish strategic goals in a resource-constrained business (Kilduff et al., 2010). Kilduff et al. (2010) suggested four dark-side tactics that people with strong EI can use, based on Salovey and Mayer's four branches' ability model. For instance, by concealing and expressing emotions for personal gain, a leader may portray his or her self-serving actions or goals as neutral (Kilduff et al., 2010). This highlights the potential misuse of EI for immoral or self-serving purposes in leadership and social relationships.

2.3.4 Leadership in educational settings

Due to the fast-changing nature of society and its members' growing needs, educational institutions are under pressure to become more dynamic and adapt to these demands. Among the most significant organisational structures are educational establishments, where the primary input and output are essentially human. As a result, educational institutions are set up to address the current demands and recognise, select, and develop individuals with leadership potential (Kalkan et al., 2020). School leadership is a fundamental component of this process.

The significance of leadership in educational environments cannot be emphasised, and implementing democratic leadership principles has the potential to promote constructive transformation in educational institutions (Uy et al., 2024). Effective leadership in schools can yield positive effects on teacher job satisfaction and retention. When teachers feel valued and empowered, they tend to be effective in their work and are always willing to go the extra mile in assisting colleagues and learners.

Important duties for school leaders include setting the course and establishing and maintaining a positive school culture. In order to support and enhance staff, learners' motivation, engagement, and well-being, as well as the collective commitment required to foster improvement and promote and sustain success for schools and classrooms that serve a variety of advantaged and disadvantaged communities, a proactive, collaborative school mindset should be established (Leithwood & Sun, 2018). The objectives and values of school leaders determine their success. They are responsible for both the current and upcoming generations. The quality of education and learner achievement in the nation's classrooms are directly impacted by their leadership.

Like any leadership, but especially in educational settings, leadership is complex and requires a variety of skills (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). Learners, parents, instructors, facilities staff, managers, local politicians, and other stakeholders are all served by school leaders. They should always be prepared to deal with a range of challenging circumstances (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

Effective leaders approach their organisations from a systemic perspective. Leaders of schools in the twenty-first century understand that they need to work with a range of stakeholders to ensure that every young person has access to a top-notch education. To improve schools, they support reform. They create a shared goal by fostering collaborative cultures headed by people and organisations committed to in-depth research in education (Fullan & Quinn, 2015).

Teachers may be reluctant since they are frequently under tremendous pressure to learn new curricula or improve their existing ones. Since change disrupts one's comfort, it can be challenging and emotionally taxing. Pierce (2014), Price (2012), and Berkovich and Eyal (2017) all assert that trust is necessary for leaders to encourage

and inspire others to take chances. In addition to the many other difficult circumstances that teachers and leaders at schools deal with on a daily basis, this can be very unpleasant. Burnout may result from it (DeMatthews et al., 2021).

This kind of continuous leadership necessitates an emotionally intelligent leader who is aware of their own feelings and capable of identifying, comprehending, and controlling them in a way that enables them to react to any circumstance in a timely and sincere manner (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). The school leader goes through a variety of emotions during the school day. It might be challenging to learn to be aware of one's own feelings while also paying attention to those of others. Emotional labour may result from repressing one's feelings in order to be present for others (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

Since emotional factors affect motivation, workplace adjustment, interpersonal relationships, personal well-being, and learning processes, EI is a psychological concept that is significant and pertinent to leadership (Brackett et al., 2016; Caruso & Salovey, 2004; Fischer & Manstead, 2016; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2012). Because the school leader should continually collaborate with individuals and groups (teachers, learners, and parents) and make decisions that affect the social functioning of the entire school, EI is essential to educational leadership.

Gray (2009) explored EI skills in the context of educational leadership, pointing out that school leadership should be aware of and deliberate with emotions as they cannot entirely eradicate them from decision-making (Pellitteri, 2022). Adaptive use of emotions is necessary for both the creation of an emotionally charged learning environment and for effective interpersonal interactions (Pellitteri, 2022).

2.4 THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

The most important organisational assets in any educational institution are academic and non-academic staff, who are ultimately in charge of the quality of teaching given. Thus, the degree to which they carry out their responsibilities may depend on their quality of well-being (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023). Understanding the factors that contribute to employee well-being at work is crucial for both the personal development

of employees and the health of the organisation. Evaluating the several elements that determine the degree of workers' well-being at work is equally significant (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023).

According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), EI is a crucial employee resource that allows people to accurately perceive, evaluate, and express emotions, access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought, comprehend emotions and emotional knowledge, and regulate emotions to support both intellectual and emotional development.

Research has examined how employees' engagement, creativity, and well-being are impacted by EI in several types of organisations (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023). It is critical to investigate the relationship between EI and three elements: employee engagement, creativity, and well-being (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023).

A crisis can have numerous consequences for workers (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023). Stress and decreased job satisfaction among employees might result from a crisis in the workplace. The psychological health and well-being of employees, as well as the performance of organisations, may be further impacted by this (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023). The crisis has an impact on work-related procedures and causes tension and stress among team members. The crisis's effects on workers may have a detrimental psychological effect on the team. The team members' workload, job stability, and mental health are all questionable (Koch & Schermuly, 2021).

Studies and research have shown that organisations are impacted by EI in ways that are critical to future workplace success (Papoutsi, Drigas, & Skianis, 2019). According to Papoutsi et al. (2019), it is an essential prerequisite for success. Under duress, people with high EI can recognise and regulate both their own and other people's emotions. Furthermore, employees with a high level of self-awareness are more self-assured, have a positive attitude towards their work, can handle difficult situations at work, and connect with coworkers more successfully. As a result, they are more cooperative, which improves their job performance, job satisfaction, and lowers their inclination to leave.

Due to a variety of variables, including working hours, deadlines, high goals under pressure, interpersonal problems, and others, employees and leaders experience significant levels of stress at work (Papoutsi et al., 2019). Additionally, workers are anxious about their future in an organisation due to the ongoing changes in organisational demands and expectations. Employee happiness and performance can be significantly impacted by stress and anxiety, which will also have a detrimental impact on an organisation's productivity and performance (Papoutsi et al., 2019).

Diener et al. (2009) and Frey and Stutzer (2010) describe well-being as a person's emotional states and perceived quality of life, which might vary from happiness to depression. A person's well-being can also be described as feeling happy, content, and healthy (Davis, 2019). This means developing mental wellness, a high level of life satisfaction, a sense of purpose or meaning, and the ability to handle stress (Farhana et al., 2023). More specifically, well-being is comprised of both the experience and the state of feeling well. On the other hand, psychological well-being is commonly defined as a pleasant mental state or as a state of happiness or contentment (Farhana et al., 2023).

2.5 THE RELEVANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Despite many challenges, including the feelings of those affected by the change, leaders in the education sector are motivated to successfully transform their organisations. Alongside the growing emphasis on EI in leadership, the role of school leadership is becoming increasingly important in managing the transition process (OECD, 2009). These leaders can develop resilience, trust, and teamwork by incorporating EI into their leadership, all of which are critical for effectively overseeing transformative processes in educational institutions (Issah, 2018).

Schools worldwide are faced with ever-increasing expectations concerning academic excellence. Regardless of the many challenges that schools face, they are expected to perform at the highest level. As a result, decision-makers, particularly administrators and leaders, have come to value EI and its effects in the workplace (Ahsan, 2023). EI has been favourably associated with a number of outcomes, such as employee satisfaction, corporate success, and leadership effectiveness (Cheng et al. 2020;

Goleman et al., 2013). The significance of EI in organisational decisions has also been viewed as critical throughout this time.

In order to promote and optimise the quality of interpersonal interactions, teachers should endure a substantial emotional workload as part of the emotional activity of teaching. This is due to the fact that education requires learners as well as teachers to be sensitive and knowledgeable about how to control and regulate their emotions (Poulou, 2016). EI is a fast-expanding field of educational study because the emotional connections between teachers and students are the most important part of the teaching and learning process (Valente et al., 2020). In an effort to incorporate a more comprehensive approach to teaching and learning, EI is becoming increasingly important in determining academic achievement.

It is necessary to interpret the abilities that teachers need to acquire in order to obtain training that meets their demands in anticipation of changes in education in a world where information and knowledge are rapidly globalised (Valente, Lourenço, & Dominguez-Lara, 2022). In light of these changes, teachers should be able to manage the difficulties of novel circumstances and ensure the efficacy of the teaching and learning process (Valente et al., 2022).

EI is positively correlated with both occupational stress and the quality of life of school teachers (Hamid & Azizi, 2012). For example, compared to teachers with low EI, those with high EI had a better quality of life (Anjum & Swathi, 2017; Hamid et al., 2015). EI, which is crucial for teachers' professional success, has a significant impact on their behaviour (Khan, Sial, & Hassan, 2022). An emotionally intelligent teacher can enlighten and enrich the lives of their students. Highly emotionally intelligent teachers are better at inspiring learners and have a deeper comprehension of their behavioural and psychological characteristics (Dham, 2019). They can significantly improve their learners' academic performance and interpersonal abilities while turning their disruptive tendencies into useful skills. Self-regulation is a crucial element of EI (OECD, 2009). Consequently, a teacher who is more self-aware is more equipped to handle students who might have challenges with controlling their behaviour.

Another element that influences a teacher's creativity is EI. Muthian (2016) asserts that creativity increases with EI. According to Goleman (2017), EI is the ability to

intelligently manage one's emotional life, maintain emotional harmony and their expression through skills of self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills, as well as the ability to recognise the emotions of others, empathise, motivate oneself, and effectively manage emotions in oneself and their correlations with others. He went on to say that mood synchronisation is the cornerstone of healthy social connections. If someone is adept at empathising with others or adjusting to their emotions, they will have a higher level of EI and be more equipped to adapt to social correlations and their surroundings (Asih, Mahrita, & Effendi, 2023).

EI promotes a person's capacity for self-motivation, self-regulation, emotion control, delayed gratification, and resilience in the face of hardship (Asih et al., 2023). Such EI allows a person to control their emotions, gauge their level of contentment, and manage their mood. According to Sumarni (2021), teacher creativity is influenced by teacher accomplishment incentives. If a teacher is continuously motivated to perform at a high level, their creativity will grow (Asih et al., 2023). Because the impulse to consistently excel drives the desire to consistently do well in terms of maximising one's potential to the utmost extent feasible. Producing excellent work depends on the drive to succeed, which is a person's intense desire to accomplish something that has become their goal.

The roles of school leaders are constantly challenged by the growing demands for accountability and educational reform. Since emotions and change are related at the micro level of organisational behaviour, school leadership is now emotionally compelling rather than task-driven in the traditional sense (Kareem & Kin, 2019). In order to meet the department's ever-evolving demands, school leaders should possess the essential applicable abilities to start the change process, particularly with regard to ongoing school improvement. It is imperative to assess if school principals have the EI necessary to lead and carry out change in the school (Kareem & Kin, 2019).

Effective leaders should adopt a comprehensive approach to their schools. Managers of schools should be aware that they collaborate with a variety of stakeholders to guarantee that every learner has access to superior education (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). To turn schools around, leaders at schools should push for reform. They should build a shared goal by fostering collaborative cultures run by individuals and groups

committed to in-depth inquiry processes in education (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). The heads of schools have an obligation to overcome obstacles and bring about change in their institutions (OECD, 2009). For example, leaders' lack of EI to overcome reform-related obstacles has been blamed for the long-term failure of school reform initiatives (OECD, 2009).

Principals are expected to understand the relevant stakeholders, handle relationships and conflicts, be resilient, inspire change, and control their own emotions, as well as those of those around them, in order to manage school dynamics (Chen & Guo, 2020). Therefore, focusing on a principal's EI as part of instructional leadership may be a technique to encourage employee instructional transformation and, consequently, the learning process (Chen & Guo, 2020).

The principal's leadership style has a big impact on teachers' inventiveness. Lack of contact between the principal and teachers, unfair task distribution, and a lack of communication during the task division process all contribute to conflict and negatively impact teaching and learning. According to Sipayung (2018), in order for the school community as a whole to succeed, principals and teachers should be willing to collaborate. Aslamiah (2015) noted that the principal has a significant influence on learners at the school regardless of the circumstances; this idea is essential to the success of a school. One crucial element that supports the execution and enhancement of the quality of education in schools is the principal's effective leadership (Asih et al., 2023).

As an educational leader, the principal should make every effort to manage teachers effectively in order to retain competent teachers (Asih et al., 2023). According to Asih et al. (2023), creative teachers will undoubtedly always have an open mind, strive for success, and want to do things better than they have in the past. The principal's leadership is one of the many aspects that affect a school's success.

Research on the relationship between principals' leadership behaviours, EI, and teaching strategies is limited (Chen & Guo, 2020). Research has been done on the relationship between two of the structures (Chen & Guo, 2020), for example, the correlation between primary school administrators' EI scores and their leadership styles (Munroe, 2009). Furthermore, Goldring et al. (2015) discovered a relationship

between instructional leadership and principals' EI in school environments. Therefore, it is crucial to determine what school administrators think about the value of EI in promoting teacher well-being, particularly in rural South African schools.

2.6 EMOTIONS IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

From birth, no two people are precisely the same. Potential parameters vary across individuals (Maryanti et al., 2021). Individuals have special qualities and are responsible for their actions. Emotional development is one of the many facets of life or personality traits that each individual should grow (Estrellan & Loja, 2021). A person's likes and dislikes, shyness or extroversion, calmness or anxiety, and impulsivity or coolness under difficult circumstances are all included in this component (Estrellan & Loja, 2021). These distinctions also hold true for leaders in the workplace.

Because of their irrational, physical origin, emotions have been compared against reason in a Cartesian duality (Navas, Vijayakumar, & Sulthan, 2022). Emotional labour is the manifestation of emotions in the workplace that the community judges as acceptable to meet organisational standards. Employees may be required, if not forced, to adjust their emotional expressions in the workplace as part of their professional role to improve the task, performance, and efficiency of the organisation (Navas et al., 2022).

In the classroom, teachers and learners interact and respond to one another's actions on a regular basis, creating a highly complex social environment (Valente et al., 2022). These relationships are influenced by the experiences, expectations, beliefs, and goals of both teachers and students (Savina et al., 2022).

Teaching is a challenging profession that requires a great deal of emotional work. Teachers frequently have to deal with multiple emotional circumstances at once in the classroom. Teachers have a responsibility to support learners emotionally, create an engaging classroom environment, and effectively manage disruptive behaviour throughout the teaching and learning process (Keller et al., 2014; Valente et al., 2020). Therefore, emotional challenges often result in feelings of worry, annoyance, tiredness, and a desire to escape (Granziera, Martin, & Collie, 2023). Therefore, being emotionally intelligent or able to use emotional processes adaptively is a crucial talent

for any teacher (Brackett & Katulak, 2007; Valente & Lourenco, 2020). Being sympathetic and emotionally helpful to learners in the classroom and during their challenges is another aspect of working in education. Teachers should thus be able to detect and comprehend the emotions of both learners and colleagues, as well as correctly express and regulate their own emotions in the classroom (Valente et al., 2022).

Teachers should develop EI in order to create effective teaching strategies, emotionally educate pupils, and maintain their own emotional well-being, given the importance of emotions in the teaching and learning process. Positive emotions can therefore encourage teachers to develop positive emotional relationships with learners, parents, and teaching staff, which, in turn, can lead to positive thinking and problem-solving. This enables the teachers to resolve some of the most common conflicts in the classroom (Valente & Lourenco, 2020).

The work demands of teachers have increased in recent decades. This forces teachers to emotionally adjust to the different roles that involve greater participation and decision-making inherent to pedagogical practice (Valente et al., 2022). All social changes place teachers in situations that surpass them and for which they were not prepared throughout their academic training (Valente et al., 2022).

Given the significance of emotions in the teaching and learning process, teachers should develop EI in order to develop effective teaching tactics, emotionally educate learners, and maintain their emotional well-being. Therefore, positive emotions can motivate teachers to cultivate positive emotional connections with children, parents, and/or teaching staff, which can result in positive problem-solving and thinking (Isen, 2008). As a result, some of the most frequent disputes in the classroom can be resolved by teachers (Valente & Lourenco, 2020).

In order to successfully adopt any new method to skill development, teachers should be mindful of and attentive to their own personal and professional requirements when developing new skills (Valente et al., 2022). However, the development of emotional skills is still an issue for most teachers because these skills are not taught in academic curricula at educational institutions. It is critical to emphasise the importance of

teachers' EI skills in the teaching role because their work requires a high level of sensitivity to both their own and their learners' emotions (Valente et al., 2022).

2.7 CHALLENGES FACING TEACHERS IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

Nowadays, offering top-notch education is the main goal of many educational institutions around the globe. To accomplish this goal, greater focus should be placed on factors affecting teaching in rural areas, where teaching is generally perceived as compromised (Shikalepo, 2020). Teachers in rural schools encounter a number of challenges, including poor working conditions, incompetence, isolation, and inadequate pay (Shikalepo, 2020).

South Africa, like many countries worldwide, has experienced challenges to their education system. Increased workloads for teachers, learners and their poor performance, especially in township and rural schools, learners having trouble expressing themselves in the medium of instruction, packed classrooms, learners and their declining level of discipline, a lack of resources required for effective and efficient teaching and learning, along with learners who did not acquire the necessary foundations during the Foundation Phase and thus performed poorly in Grade 12, are some of the challenges the South African education system experiences (du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020).

Without doubt, a teacher's well-being is impacted by stress and work pressure (Lever et al., 2017). According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015), work-related stress arises from job expectations, pressures, or limits that are incompatible with their abilities and competencies, endangering their capacity to manage their coping mechanisms. Stress occurs in a variety of work settings and tends to get worse when workers believe they have little control over their work environment and little direction and support from their managers and colleagues (Bhui et al., 2016). Poor working management practices are frequently justified by misconceptions about stress, pressure, and difficulties at work.

Teachers and their pedagogical relations are being affected by the economic, sociological, psychological, and pedagogical order expressions of the current educational crisis in many nations (Apple, 2011). Teaching has been significantly

impacted by factors such as job losses, absenteeism, and professional frustration (Gomes et al., 2006; Murofuse, Abranches, & Napoleão, 2005). Teachers are frequently diagnosed with anxiety and depression (Apple, 2011).

Attracting and keeping teachers and other professionals to work in remote schools has proven to be challenging. As a result, the quality of teaching in rural schools keeps declining due to the ongoing challenge of recruiting and retaining competent teachers (Shikalepo, 2020). Due to their difficult working conditions, teachers frequently avoid teaching in rural areas, which leads to a shortage of qualified teachers and, ultimately, high student achievement (Shikalepo, 2020). Teachers are the first to suffer, but they are not the only ones, as they affect many learners, the teaching population's workplace, and often the teacher's family (Gomes et al., 2006; Martins, 2005). Thus, the number of impacted teachers is undoubtedly crucial for additional investigation into the origins, dynamics, and methodology of the issue. The physical and mental weariness brought on by the constant demands of the teaching profession surely affects the health and well-being of most workers in this area.

In today's classroom environment, teachers need to be creative and use new ideas in presenting lessons to make them more attractive to learners. Teacher creativity should create a space for students to self-actualise, realise their potential, and encourage them to develop new ideas in presenting learning in the classroom, making it more attractive to students and avoiding boredom (Asih et al., 2023).

Despite the wealth of research demonstrating a correlational relationship between employees' EI and their psychological well-being, teachers' emotional health has gotten less attention, especially among secondary public school teachers (Farhana et al., 2023). Apart from that, little study has been done on the impact of EI components on the psychological well-being of teachers (Farhana et al., 2023).

Teachers in remote schools encounter numerous substantial problems that have a considerable impact on teaching and learning. Most youngsters do not regularly attend school since they are frequently obliged to work on farms and are not encouraged to complete their education (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Learners who go to school often find that the material is unrelated to their lives and that their education is not supported at home. One of the most significant barriers preventing children from receiving the

finest education possible and leading fulfilling lives is the poor socioeconomic status of parents and the budgetary constraints of governments to provide free basic education to all of their residents. As school managers and teachers, particularly in rural South Africa, seem to be buckling under the pressure of handling learners from poverty-stricken communities, teachers and managers should be able to utilise EI in their daily lives, even in the face of particular difficulties. SMTs, in this case, can be agents of change concerning supporting teachers' mental health and equipping them with skills that enhance EI so they can be at their optimum best concerning their performance and that of learners.

2.8 KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEWED

Despite the numerous laws and regulations, including the most recent Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Act 32 of 2024, which aims to improve school management, strengthen education governance, and address problems in the educational system, literature suggests that the South African educational system remains dualistic. Affluent areas (in suburbs) have good schools, while poor areas (in townships and rural areas) tend to have under-resourced and poor schools (Landaburu, 2016).

Despite these challenges, teachers are the foundation of the educational system. Prioritising their well-being is essential since it directly affects academic results. Since it has a direct impact on learner outcomes, teacher retention, and educational quality, putting teacher well-being first is crucial to creating a more effective and long-lasting educational system (Fourie & de Klerk, 2024).

Given the significant rise in sick leave and employee turnover among teachers in various cultures and nations, the well-being of teachers has drawn considerable attention in recent decades (Benevene et al., 2019). Benevene et al. (2020) assert that teachers' successful and efficient performance in the workplace is just as much a part of their well-being as their absence of disease.

In many rural South African communities, extreme poverty is a concern that hinders the provision of high-quality education. Rural schools have experienced particular difficulties due to their locations. Effective education is hampered by a number of problems, including underqualified teachers, several grade levels, a lack of resources,

insufficient government funding, and a lack of parental engagement in their children's education (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). These challenges put teachers and school administration under considerable stress.

The literature has emphasised the need for EI in leadership, particularly in school leadership. Gray (2009) examined EI abilities in educational leadership, emphasising that school managers should be conscious of and considerate of their emotions since they cannot completely remove them from decision-making (Pellitteri, 2022). The adaptive use of emotions is essential for both the creation of an emotionally charged educational environment and effective interpersonal connections (Pellitteri, 2022). Another element that influences a teacher's creativity is EI. Muthian (2016) asserts that creativity increases with EI.

Studies have looked at how EI affects workers' engagement, creativity, and well-being when they work within specific types of companies (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023). Examining the connection between three factors, employee engagement, creativity, and well-being, and EI is crucial (Sivanthinathan et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the literature has emphasised both the dualistic nature of the South African educational system and several measures designed to alleviate its problems. Stress negatively impacts the well-being of teachers, who are the backbone of the educational system. The literature also highlights the role that school leadership plays in promoting EI in order to promote teachers' well-being and the significance of EI in addressing problems that teachers encounter on a daily basis.

2.9 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

The concept of EI has become an important topic in educational research (Schaal, Uleanya, & Oloba, 2024). Schaal et al. (2024) investigated the role of school leaders in promoting teachers' emotional well-being in underprivileged public primary schools, aiming to provide valuable recommendations for school leaders to foster a supportive and resilient teaching community in these schools. Floman et al. (2023) recently investigated the role of EI of school leadership in predicting the well-being of teachers. Previous research by Nezha (2014) examined the idea of EI and the leadership function of KwaZulu-Natal primary school principals. The results showed how crucial

it is for school leadership to possess emotional intelligence. The results also provided school leadership with potential strategies for regulating their emotions and relationships in schools (Nezha, 2014).

While Maseko and Chigeza (2024) focus on understanding the relational well-being of primary school teachers in rural South Africa, Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) further explored the relationship between EI and leadership in school leaders. However, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding how school leadership in rural South African schools understand and actively use EI to promote teacher well-being. Therefore, the goal of this study is to close that gap. With a focus on rural South African schools, it is crucial to investigate SMTs' perspectives and determine their understanding of the notion of EI and its significance in promoting teacher well-being.

2.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter examined research on leadership perspectives on how EI promotes teacher well-being in South African rural schools. Three sections comprised the literature review. An overview of the South African educational system, the importance of teacher well-being, the particular difficulties faced by South African rural schools, and the applicability of EI in educational contexts were all covered in the first portion. The topic of leadership, its applicability to educational environments, and the connection between EI and leadership were covered in the following part. The difficulties experienced by South African rural school teachers and school administrators were the subject of the final section.

2.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the literature regarding leadership perspectives on the function of EI in promoting teacher well-being in rural South African schools. The literature review comprises three sections, beginning with an outline of the South African educational system, the importance of teacher well-being, the specific challenges faced by South African rural schools, and EI and its applicability in educational settings. Thereafter, leadership, its applicability in educational environments, and the connection between EI and leadership were also covered. The chapter concludes by

discussing the difficulties experienced by South African rural school teachers and school administrators.

The next chapter focuses on the conceptual framework and models (theoretical) perspectives that underlie school leadership's views on the role of EI, as well as on definitions and components of teacher well-being and its relationship to EI.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explored literature related to school leadership views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools.

This chapter concentrates on the conceptual framework by exploring the concept of EI, looking at its models, theoretical underpinnings, and historical evolution. Furthermore, this chapter looks at the relationship between leadership (in schools) and EI. With special reference to rural South African schools, critiques and discussions on EI, teacher well-being, and their relationship to EI and school leadership are explored.

3.2 THE UNDERPINNING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section outlines the conceptual framework developed for this study. It is situated within the context of school leadership perspectives on the role of EI in promoting teacher well-being in rural South African schools. The perspective of school leaders is first examined, followed by a discussion of EI, and then the historical development of EI as a concept, including its various definitions and models. The conceptual framework and the relationships among the main ideas related to the research title are depicted in Figure 3.1.

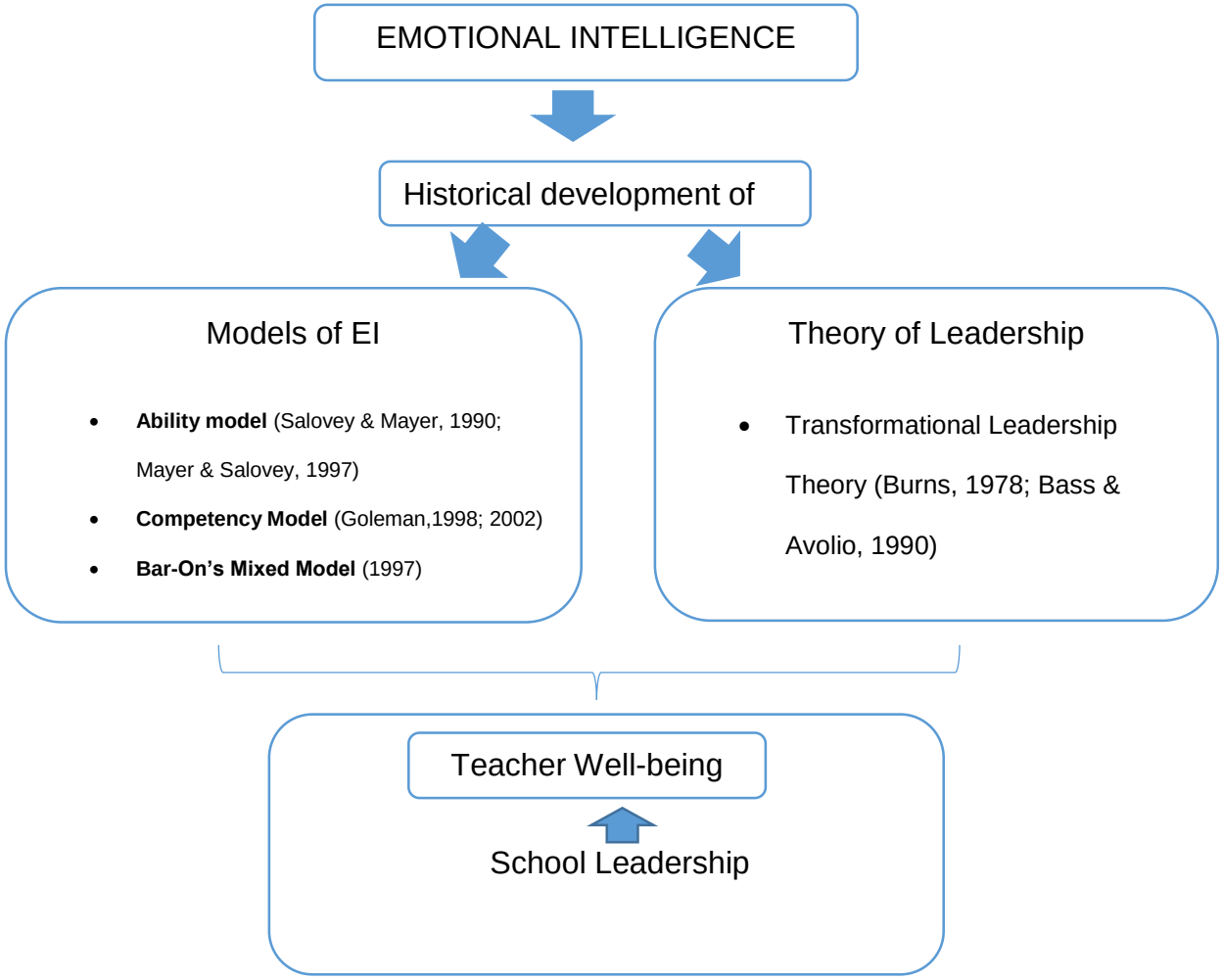


Figure 3.1: Conceptual framework on emotional intelligence and school leadership

3.2.1 School leadership

By creating a supportive school environment, assisting teachers, and cultivating a vision for academic excellence, effective school leadership is essential for learner success and school improvement. It has a direct impact on the teaching, learning, and general functioning of schools.

3.2.1.1 Definition of school leadership

The school leadership is made up of the following members in a South African context, depending on the size of the school in terms of available posts (for teachers) and learner enrolment: Department heads, the principal, the deputy principal, as well as senior teachers. The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document outlines the functions and responsibilities of the SMT, which includes all of the aforesaid

individuals (Department of Education, 1999). Transformational leadership theory, which supports the fundamental idea of leadership, should be the main focus when exploring the views of school leadership.

3.2.1.2 Theory underpinning leadership

Leadership is widely regarded as one of the most multifaceted and complex phenomena studied in organisational and social sciences. Over the years, extensive research has been conducted to better understand its nature and impact, and in today's fast-paced and globally interconnected world, its importance has become increasingly significant (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Consequently, scholars have developed numerous leadership theories to explain effective leadership practices, one of which is transformational leadership theory.

3.2.1.2.1 Transformational leadership theory

James Macgregor Burns, a leadership expert, first proposed the idea of transformative leadership in the late 20th century (Metwally, El-Bishbishy, & Sabri Nawar, 2014). Employee performance and motivation are influenced by transformational leadership. Employees are more inclined to go above and beyond what is expected of them when they perceive that their leaders respect, trust, and appreciate them (Metwally et al., 2014). A transformational leader inspires employees to put the needs of the team or organisation ahead of their own by giving them an exciting mission and vision, as well as a sense of identity.

The transformational leadership theory states that leaders empower, encourage, and motivate those around them (Flyn, 2019). This strategy is utilised whenever an organisation requires a new direction, considerable transformation, or revitalisation. In today's rapidly evolving technological economy, where creativity and adaptability have the capacity to either strengthen or destroy an organisation, it is extremely crucial (Benmira & Agboola, 2021).

Furthermore, Coleman (2000) suggests that in the field of education, at least seven fundamental components are required to direct the future and serve as a basis for principals as they build their institutions: (1) Not waiting, which implies that the principal ought to be forward thinking and secure early victories; (2) Maintaining a dependable character, which implies that the principal should have credibility; (3) Having their head

in the clouds but their feet on the ground, which implies that in addition to vision and guidance, the principal should be mindful of and capable of advocating for and protecting their staff; (4) Having a common set of values, which means that the leaders' statements should be consistent with those they supervise; (5) The winning leadership approach is a mindset of teamwork rather than a solo effort, as principals cannot succeed on their own; (6) The conventional golden rule of leadership is challenged by the principal's legacy of shared lives; and (7) everyone is concerned with leadership, suggesting that everyone is a leader by default (Coleman, 2000).

Bush (2007) defines transformational leadership as a leadership model that highlights the skills and commitment of organisational members. According to Prestiadi, Gunawan and Sumarsono (2020), the principal of the school uses this model to motivate teachers and school personnel to collaborate in the development of educational institutions. The higher the commitment level, the easier it will be for schools to accomplish their educational goals.

Transformational leaders inspire followers by raising their awareness of the significance of work outcomes, encouraging them to put the organisation or team above their own interests and activating their higher needs (Raihani, 2010). Furthermore, individual attention, intellectual stimulation, and the sharing of authority through employee collaboration to effect change are the core of transformational leadership.

The four elements of transformational leadership are as follows: (1) idealised influence, which is behaviour that promotes respect and confidence; (2) inspiration motivation, which is behaviour that may motivate and inspire others; (3) intellectual simulation, which is a leader who can come up with new ideas and solutions; and (4) individualised thoughtfulness, which is the act of listening to and paying attention to those under their direction (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Because they work together to create work environments where people feel inspired, supported, and encouraged to exceed expectations, the four elements of transformational leadership are crucial.

Recognising the significance of these components is particularly relevant when considering how transformational leadership intersects with EI in educational contexts. The salient aspects of models of EI and transformational theory can serve as a vehicle to explore how school leaders, particularly in rural areas, understand and utilise

elements of both models and theory to support the functionality and well-being of teachers. As discussed in earlier chapters, concerning the challenges faced by school leadership and teachers in rural areas, it is essential to have leaders who understand and utilise EI skills to support teachers, thereby promoting effective teaching and learning.

According to Bipath (2007), aspects that leaders systematically focus on are among the most effective tools they have for expressing their values or beliefs. Leaders focus on what they assess, manage, reward, and handle in a systematic manner (Bipath, 2007). As official control mechanisms and measurements, even informal comments and enquiries that are regularly directed towards particular areas can have a significant impact.

Given that transformational leadership (Flyn, 2019) theory highlights a leader's capacity to inspire, motivate, empower, and support those they lead while cultivating positive connections and organisational progress, it was chosen as the theoretical foundation for this study. The theory is especially relevant to this research because it closely resembles the idea of emotional intelligence (EI), notably in its emphasis on motivation, teamwork, individual concern, empathy, and the advancement of employee well-being. Transformational leadership (Flyn, 2019) offers a suitable lens through which to examine how school leadership understands and applies EI to support teacher well-being in the context of rural South African schools, where teachers and school leaders frequently face significant social, emotional, and professional challenges.

The theory also supports the study’s primary and secondary research questions by enabling an examination of how school leaders perceive EI in the workplace, how they use EI to motivate and support teachers, and how leadership practices can contribute to the development of programmes and support structures aimed at enhancing teacher well-being. Furthermore, transformational leadership theory highlights the importance of leaders creating supportive and collaborative environments that encourage trust, commitment, and professional growth, which are essential for improving teaching and learning outcomes in rural educational settings.

3.2.1.2.2 Roles and responsibilities of school leadership in the South African context

The South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996, is the primary legislation governing and guiding the management and governance of South African schools (Ross, 1996). The Act clearly places the principal and their SMT in control of the overall operations of schools by outlining the duties and functions of the school's professional management. Here, the focus is on principals working with the SMT and taking on leadership roles.

The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (Department of Education, 1999) are part of the Employment of Educators Act, Act 76 of 1998. According to this policy, the principal's main duties include overseeing and exercising professional leadership within the school (Department of Education, 1999). According to the PAM, the deputy principal's responsibilities include assisting the principal and monitoring employee performance (Department of Education, 1999). Additionally, the PAM emphasises that the Departmental Heads are responsible for overseeing the school's curriculum (Department of Education, 1999). The PAM provides a more detailed explanation of the roles and responsibilities of each SMT member in South African schools, including teaching, personnel, general administration, extracurricular and co-curricular activities, and communication.

The roles and responsibilities of SMTs usually overlap and complement each other at every level of school management. As the first line of management on the ground, SMTs are crucial to teacher support (Department of Education, 2023). It is impossible to overstate their contribution to creating an atmosphere that supports teaching and learning by making sure that the necessary frameworks and materials are allocated to this goal. Sufficient time, space (provided by infrastructure), and suitable LTSMs are necessary to provide teachers with meaningful support (Department of Education, 2023).

SMTs are responsible for offering assistance in establishing an appropriate setting for the efficient delivery of the curriculum and addressing any difficulties that may arise. This can be made possible by offering practical tools that serve as valuable resources for teacher development. SMTs are in charge of enhancing teachers' knowledge, abilities, and capacity to improve teaching practices and fostering an environment

where discussions about teaching and learning are constructive and professional, thus promoting introspection and career development, establishing trustworthy working relationships that encourage cooperation (Department of Education, 2023).

SMT's other responsibility is to establish a culture of openness, respect, compassion, competence, and integrity that fosters strong professional, cooperative relationships within schools. This is made possible through installing efficient monitoring and support systems that enable them to monitor and assist in teaching and learning, following a planned Annual Management Plan (Department of Education, 2023).

3.3 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

EI is generally concerned with how people comprehend, regulate, and express their own and others' feelings (Maamari & Majdalani, 2017). The two essential components of EI as it is now understood in academics are ability EI and trait EI.

EI is the capacity to recognise our own feelings as well as those of others, to motivate ourselves, and to control our feelings both within and between relationships successfully (Goleman, 1998). EI, according to Salovey and Mayer (1990), is the ability to control one's own emotions as well as those of others and to use emotions to direct one's thoughts and behaviours.

Goleman (1998) proposed an expanded framework for EI that shows how the fundamental elements of EI—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management—translate into professional success. Our capacity to comprehend the fundamentals of self-mastery and related abilities is determined by our EI, but our emotional competence shows how well we have grasped those ideas in relation to our line of work. To be proficient in emotional competencies like customer service or teamwork, one should have a fundamental grasp of EI concepts, especially social awareness and relationship management (Goleman, 1995).

Both an "ability-based model" and a "trait-based model" have been used to conceptualise EI (Sambol et al., 2022, p.1). EI is primarily concerned with how people view and control their own emotions as well as those of others. Ability EI refers to cognitive skills associated with the perception, regulation, and comprehension of emotions, acknowledging the relationship between emotions and cognition (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2019). Ability-based exams that mimic the evaluation of

intelligence, such as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, are frequently used to determine ability EI (Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

According to the trait model, EI is a personality attribute that includes a variety of dispositions and self-perceptions related to emotions (Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, & Martos, 2012). On the other hand, trait EI is described as a collection of consistent traits pertaining to an individual's experience, expression, and comprehension of emotions (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Petrides and Furnham (2001) theorised that characteristic EI has 15 linked facets which can be separated into four domains: well-being, emotionality, sociability, and self-control.

According to Goleman (2020), EI can be influenced by two factors:

(i) **Internal factors.** The psychological and physical components are the source of this element. A disruption in one's physical well-being can have an impact on one's development of EI. Experience, emotion, motivation, and reasoning are all part of the psychological side and are influenced by EI. Therefore, a person's health, the human mind, and its functions should all be in good condition for them to be able to exercise a high degree of EI.

(ii) **External factors.** These come from outside of a person, specifically the environment that surrounds us and shapes our attitudes on an individual and collective level. They may also be obtained through other channels, such as information from social media or print and electronic media. It encompasses not just the surroundings but also life experiences since they enable people to work for the benefit of others. This encompasses both the home and school environments based on education. Depending on how it is viewed and understood, people's attitudes can be either positively or negatively impacted by their surroundings.

When it comes to how teachers and school leadership use EI (Singleton, Roberts, & Bradford, 2024) in rural South African settings, internal aspects, including psychological states and physical health, are crucial. A leader's ability to self-regulate, empathise, and manage stress may be weakened when their physical health is damaged (for example, by a chronic disease or exhaustion), which could impair their emotional awareness and decision-making. Strong reasoning abilities and emotional resilience make a leader (or teacher) more capable of correctly interpreting their own

emotional signals, bouncing back from setbacks, and providing constructive assistance to others. Maintaining such internal balance is especially important in rural schools, where resources are frequently limited, and stress levels are high. Without it, leaders' emotional support may be inconsistent, weakening attempts to promote teacher well-being.

However, the application of EI is greatly influenced by external environmental factors, particularly in rural South African schools. These elements include the family, school, community, and wider social influences. The school's emotional climate and attitudes can be significantly impacted by the social environment, which includes things like cultural standards, community expectations, and group struggles. For instance, leaders should carefully manage the socioeconomic difficulties, inadequate infrastructure, and communal stress that rural instructors may encounter. Similar to this, a recent systematic assessment of EI in school leadership identified cultural and contextual elements (including community and school environment) as important drivers of how EI appears in various circumstances (Sasere & Matashu, 2025).

Therefore, in order to enhance teachers' well-being, rural school leaders should manage and understand these external influences.

3.3.1 Historical development of emotional intelligence

It is supported by an increasing body of research and current trends in studies that EI is a range of mental capabilities and emotion-based qualities (Mohammed Alhamami, 2016). Consequently, it is essential to delve more deeply into emotions and how we might comprehend or experience them. Not only do they include physical contact, but they also involve taste, sensation, and, above all, how our imaginations react to the things we touch. In other ways, emotions enable individuals to apply a more proactive approach by inspiring themselves to make their battle more successful (Salovey, 1990). Understanding emotions provides the basis for distinguishing between the intensity and expression of emotional experiences, which is essential to how people identify, control, and use emotions in different situations.

Although one’s moods and feelings have received more attention from researchers, as they are important to human affairs and people's daily behaviours, it is the intensity of feelings that distinguishes between moods and feelings (Mohammed Alhamami,

2016). Accordingly, emotions are produced when feelings are intense, while moods are produced when feelings lack intensity (Mayer et al., 2008). From a different perspective, emotions are crucial in human behaviour. For example, seminal authors like Goleman (1995) have become more interested in workplace problems and conflict, particularly during emergencies.

Over the past few years, research on human intelligence and rational thought has centred on explaining various viewpoints (Mayer et al., 2008). As a result, EI has been associated with the term ‘intelligence’ and with individuals who possess specific intelligence components. Thus, intelligence is associated with intellect and cognition (Mohammed Alhamami, 2016).

However, because of its ongoing evolution, intelligence has taken on a variety of definitions. One of them said that intelligence is the ability to learn from experience, gain knowledge, think conceptually, act intentionally, or adapt to different environmental conditions (Wade et al., 2005). Mayer et al. (2008) claim that intelligence is also a combination of intellectual or emotional abilities that facilitate information recognition, memory development, and the acquisition of thinking skills. However, social intelligence, which was developed by Edward Thorndike and refers to the capacity to comprehend people and make them well-managed and organised so they may flourish in interpersonal relationships, is where the foundations of the concept of EI originate (Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004).

The concept of EI first appeared in an early study by Charles Darwin, who defined it as the manifestations of emotions in both humans and animals (Mohammed Alhamami, 2016). Darwin also discovered that emotional expressions are the most important component to obtain the sound adaptation of types (Mohammed Alhamami, 2016). As a result, insightful questions about why we experience emotions arise. These initial explorations into the adaptive function of emotions paved the way for later researchers to look at how emotional capacities affect social understanding and interpersonal interactions outside of the individual.

The term ‘social intelligence’ was first used by Edward Thorndike to describe the ability to comprehend and interact with people of all genders, including boys and girls (Mohammed Alhamami, 2016). Furthermore, he has underlined that social intelligence

can be used to manage human connections among individuals and comprehend their needs, desires, and wishes (Bar-On, 2006).

John Mayer and Peter Salovey invented the idea of EI in the 1990s. They both proposed that emotions, which are internal processes, govern physiological responses, perceptions, and understandings (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Based on a survey of EI models conducted over the past 20 years, the construct can be classified in a number of ways, some of which are complementary and compelling. Following the publication of Goleman's book in 1995, several approaches can be classified as a first division (Goleman, 1995).

The idea of EI has gained traction (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Because it gauges people's overall emotions and sentiments at work, it has thus been extensively researched, especially concerning its significance in organisations. A framework for organising and evaluating people's daily performance in organisations has been developed based on EI (Caruso & Salovey, 2004).

3.3.2 Definitions, models and theories underpinning emotional intelligence

Based on a review of the literature from the past 20 years, several plausible classifications of EI have emerged, some of which are persuasive and complementary (Dhani & Sharma, 2017). The trait, ability, and mixed approaches are the three primary schools of thought that encompass the ideas and models used to conceptualise EI (Dhani & Sharma, 2017). Mayer and Salovey, Bar-On, and Goleman proposed these models (Dhani & Sharma, 2017).

EI is conceptualised in each of their theoretical frameworks from one of two perspectives: either as a type of pure intelligence made entirely of mental ability, or as a mixed intelligence that combines mental ability and personality traits like optimism, adaptability, and well-being (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Up until recently, the primary ability model of EI was put forth by Salovey and Mayer (1990), who saw EI as a separate type of intelligence made up only of cognitive skills. Different viewpoints on EI account for the differences between the two mixed models (see, for instance, Gayathri, 2013; Goleman, 1998; Bar-On, 1997). Bar-On (1997) created a model that includes personality dimensions, emphasising the connection between EI skills and personality qualities, as well as their relationship to general well-

being. In contrast, Goleman (2001) developed a mixed model of performance that incorporates an individual's personality and skills and applies their respective implications in the workplace.

Below are the three main models of EI explained in detail:

(i) Mayer-Salovey-Caruso ability model

Peter Salovey and John Mayer first proposed the idea of EI in 1990 (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), and they have since carried out additional research on the construct's importance. Mayer and Salovey (1997) created the Ability-Based Emotional Intelligence Model based on Gardner's research and his idea of human intelligence. Self-motivation, recognising others' emotions, controlling one's own emotions, understanding one's own emotions, and managing relationships with others are the five key elements of their paradigm (Dhani & Sharma, 2017).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional perception, the first area of EI, as the ability to effectively convey one's needs and feelings to others. It also entails the ability to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate emotional expressions, as well as between true and deceptive ones (Dhani & Sharma, 2017). The second branch, emotional integration, refers to the capacity to distinguish between the different emotions one is feeling and to identify which ones are affecting one's cognitive processes by highlighting important information (Dhani & Sharma, 2017).

The third branch, emotional understanding, is the capacity to grasp complex emotions and identify emotional transitions, such as the shift from rage to satisfaction or from anger to shame. The fourth branch, emotion regulation, includes the capacity to control our own and other people's emotions, stay open to both happy and negative emotions, and connect or disengage from emotion depending on whether it is viewed as informative or helpful. Mayer et al. (2001) state that the four branches act in an orderly way, with emotion perception serving as the most basic or bottom branch and emotional regulation as the most complex or top branch.

(ii) Goleman’s Competency Model

Daniel Goleman popularised the concept of EI in 1995. He argued that self-motivation and tenacity in the face of difficulty, impulse control and postponing gratification, mood

regulation and avoiding distress from overwhelming one's cognitive capacities, empathy, and hope are all components of EI (Goleman, 1998).

The four elements of EI are described in Goleman's Competency Framework (Goleman, 2002). The Competency Framework consist of Self-awareness, Self-management, Social-awareness and Relationship Management.

The ability to identify one's feelings and their implications while making decisions based on intuition is known as self-awareness. The capacity to control one's emotions and impulses in order to adjust to shifting conditions is known as self-management. Social awareness is the capacity to recognise, understand, and react to the emotions of others while understanding social networks. The ability to manage conflict while inspiring, influencing, and developing others is the final component of relationship management. Goleman's paradigm includes a set of emotional skills in each EI component. According to Goleman (2002), emotional competencies are learned abilities that need to be developed to reach exceptional performance rather than innate talents.

The model's four basic dimensions are: 1) self-awareness, which includes emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence; 2) social awareness, which includes empathy, service orientation, and organisational awareness; 3) self-management, which includes self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, initiative, and drive for achievement; and 4) relationship management, which includes attachment, cooperation, teamwork, influence, communication, conflict resolution, leadership, and change catalyst.

(iii) Bar-On’s mixed model

Bar-On (1998) coined the term "emotional quotient" (EQ) to refer to intellectual quotient (IQ). His concept of EI is a complex construct that includes not only cognitive capacity but also aspects of personality, health, and well-being. It is related to performance and success potential and is considered a process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented approach (Bar-On, 2006). He defines EI as a set of non-cognitive skills, competencies, and abilities that influence an individual's ability to effectively handle pressures and expectations from their environment (Bar-On, 1997).

The definition includes, among other things, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualisation, independence, empathy, interpersonal relationships, social responsibility, problem-solving, reality testing, flexibility, stress tolerance, impulse control, happiness, and optimism (Dhani & Sharma, 2017).

Although there are various models and definitions of EI, as indicated in Chapter 2, this study's conceptual framework follows that of Goleman's Competency Model.

3.3.3 Importance of EI in educational leadership

Principals, administrators, department heads, and educational leaders all have a significant impact on how the educational environment is shaped. High levels of EI greatly improve their capacity to lead successfully (Bahshwan, 2024). According to Bahshwan (2024), EI helps leaders in education by allowing them to manage their own emotions and those of whom they lead.

Below are some of the duties that school leadership manage in schools on a daily basis:

- **Manage complicated relationships**: School leadership deals with a wide variety of individuals, each of whom has certain emotional requirements. EI creates a friendly and inclusive atmosphere by empowering leaders to recognise and accommodate these demands.
- **Handle conflicts empathically:** In any school institution, conflicts will unavoidably occur. Highly EI leaders are able to handle disputes with empathy, understanding all viewpoints and creating solutions that take into account the needs and feelings of all parties.
- **Encourage and motivate**: Even during trying circumstances, leaders can encourage staff and students to remain confident and motivated by acknowledging and managing their own emotions.
- The benefits of developing high EI in educational leadership are multifaceted (Bahshwan, 2024). Effective communicators who possess high EI promote better relationship management and communication, fostering candid discussions and trust within the school community. Improved decision-making and problem-solving enable leaders with emotional awareness to make well-

informed, well-balanced decisions that consider both the emotional and logical consequences of their choices.

- **Good school climate and culture:** EI helps establish a nurturing and upbeat school climate that promotes learning and individual development for both staff and learners.
- **Support for teacher and staff development:** By identifying their areas of strength and improvement, leaders with high EI may offer teachers and staff members significant support and development opportunities.

3.3.4 The role of EI in effective school leadership

Teachers are professionals in the field of education who instruct, mentor, counsel, train, and evaluate young children as they progress through the formal, primary, and secondary education levels. Creative teachers will be able to generate numerous ideas, present diverse approaches to problem-solving, devise innovative solutions, comprehend complex issues, and adopt various perspectives on problems (Asih et al., 2023). School leadership (SMT), the school climate, accountability, and communication activities can all influence a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

Teachers' effectiveness is greatly influenced by the SMT's leadership style, which may contribute to the unfair distribution of tasks, the absence of communication during task division, and a lack of openness between teachers and school management. Significant difficulties may result from a lack of concern for one another as well as a lack of cooperation between instructors and school administration (Asih et al., 2023).

EI is another element that affects a teacher's efficacy and creativity. According to Muthiah and Ratnaningsih (2016), an individual's creativity rises as their EI does. According to Goleman and Boyatzis (2017), EI is the capacity to use self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills to effectively manage one's emotional life, preserve emotional equilibrium, and express feelings. It also entails identifying the feelings of others, inspiring oneself, and skilfully controlling one's own emotions as well as those of others. Furthermore, healthy social interactions are built on the foundation of mood control.

If a person is skilled at empathetically adjusting to the moods of others, they will have a greater level of EI and be able to adapt to social connections and their surroundings.

EI increases a person's capacity for self-motivation, self-regulation, delayed gratification, emotion management, and resilience in the face of hardship (Asih et al., 2023). An individual with this level of EI is able to control their emotions, gauge their level of satisfaction, and manage their mood. Teacher creativity is also influenced by teacher achievement and motivation. If a teacher is constantly motivated to perform at a high level, their creativity will grow.

Effective school leadership with a high degree of EI can encourage teachers' creativity and help them reach their full potential (Amiruddin, 2018). One of the key indicators of a teacher's creativity in learning is their readiness to prepare instructional materials. It is the duty of school leadership to supervise the learning resources that teachers present so that their inventiveness in completing the task is evident.

In order to guarantee that every learner receives an excellent education, leaders at schools in the twenty-first century should establish a community of stakeholders (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). To improve schools, they advocate for change, establish a common goal, and cultivate collaborative cultures led by individuals and groups dedicated to in-depth inquiry-based teaching and learning processes (Amiruddin, 2018). Emotionally intelligent leaders approach their schools from a systemic perspective.

3.3.5 Critiques and debates surrounding emotional intelligence

Locke (2005) argues that the concept of EI is flawed since it lacks a clear definition due to its inclusivity and generality, and is not a separate kind of intelligence. Furthermore, the concept of intelligence is portrayed as being imprecise and overly comprehensive. Mayer (1999, p. 50), cited by Locke (2005), describes EI as "the capacity for reasoning with emotion in four areas: the ability to sense emotion, to integrate it in thought, to understand it, and to manage it." This definition is, however, inconsistent. Rather than being a distinct type of intelligence, EI is a type of intelligence (the ability to comprehend abstractions applied to a particular area, namely emotions) (Sfetcu, 2020).

According to Sfetcu (2020), Goleman argues that fostering positive emotions in individuals under their leadership is the primary responsibility of leaders, a claim often regarded as untrue since the purpose of organisations is to achieve objectives and

guarantee profitability for their benefit (Sfetcu, 2020). According to Locke (2005), EI should be reclassified as an aptitude. Grant (2014) warned against viewing EI as a virtue, contending that it may be used as a weapon to manipulate people in addition to being a tool for achieving objectives.

The term ‘intelligence’ is central to the debate, and the claim that EI is more important than IQ and general intelligence suggests that, according to studies, general intelligence is the only reliable indicator of success (Murphy, 2006). The question of whether EI can be measured meaningfully and predict high performance has been a topic of hot debate. It is commonly believed that EI measuring scales are ineffective because they mask too much diversity with overly broad criteria. The test responses should be based on either expert judgment or consensus; they are not simply true or false (Murphy, 2006). In other words, focus groups or an expert panel decide whether an answer is correct or incorrect. These decisions are rarely made unanimously, and it is important to recognise disagreements. This suggests that those with high scores are conformists who give the typical response, whereas talented non-conformists often go unrecognised.

The debate over the nature of EI remains prominent in scholarly circles. Some proponents contend that EI is primarily a cognitive skill, while others see it as a combination of motivational, personality, and affective traits (Zeidner et al., 2012). This discussion has led to the classification of EI measures into two main types: performance-based tests assessing cognitive ability, and self-report inventories capturing non-cognitive, personality traits (Zeidner et al., 2012).

3.3.6 Relationship between emotional intelligence, well-being and teacher well-being

People can see how EI (or lack thereof) manifests in other people's behaviour, despite the fact that EI is invisible (Stoewen, 2019). People with low EI are more prone to emotional stress, depression, anxiety, drug use, and even suicidal thoughts. Because of their limited emotional vocabulary, they struggle to recognise and properly manage their feelings. Instead of expressing their genuine emotions, they mask their negative feelings with insincere or unhelpful positivity. Because they do not convey their message in a way that others can understand, they frequently feel misunderstood (Stoewen, 2019).

Individuals with low EI often avoid taking responsibility for their own feelings, instead blaming others. They tend to struggle with self-assertion, reacting passively or aggressively when provoked. Such individuals frequently jump to conclusions and defend them vehemently despite contradicting evidence. They resist reconciliation because they hold grudges and find it difficult to grow or change since they do not recognise their errors. Those with low EI are easily offended due to a lack of self-confidence. According to Bradberry (2022), these traits are indicative of low EI, which adversely impacts personal well-being.

People with high EI, on the other hand, respond to situations and people rather than being reactive. They can better regulate their emotions than most because they understand their feelings and the reasons behind them. They are able to understand others' perspectives and empathise with their emotions. They can help resolve disputes and guide difficult discussions towards a mutually acceptable solution. They stay focused on their main objectives and are aware of the steps needed to achieve them. They recover quickly from setbacks because they tend to be upbeat and optimistic. They are aware of both their strengths and limitations.

The well-being of an individual can be impacted by both high and low EI features. One could contend that although strong EI fosters positive well-being, low EI contributes to negative well-being. EI is a useful tool for workers (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It includes the capacity to recognise, evaluate, and communicate emotions accurately, produce feelings that support thought, comprehend emotional knowledge, and control emotions to promote both intellectual and emotional growth.

Employees are the most valuable organisational resources in any educational institution and are responsible for the quality of education provided. Therefore, the degree to which they perform their duties may be influenced by their level of well-being.

3.4 TEACHER WELL-BEING

3.4.1 Definitions and components of teacher well-being

Understanding the definition of overall well-being is essential to understanding teachers' well-being. Well-being encompasses concepts of what it means to have a fulfilling life in addition to coping with difficult situations. Diverse viewpoints on well-

being frequently take different approaches. For instance, psychological well-being is associated with concepts such as meaningful connections and a sense of purpose in life, while subjective well-being is associated with life satisfaction and experiencing happiness more often than unhappiness (Cann, 2019).

Teacher well-being is situated within its broader relational and professional context, highlighting the importance of conceptual clarity and recognising teacher well-being as a distinct construct—separate from generic or individual models of well-being that lack contextual relevance (Ozturk, Wigelsworth, & Squires, 2024). Since the rise of managerialism in the 21st century (Skinner, Leavey, & Rothi, 2021), teaching has become more complex and demanding, with teachers reporting poorer mental health than professionals in other sectors (McLean et al., 2017). This growing difficulty occurs amidst widespread government initiatives aimed at swiftly implementing educational improvements (Skinner et al., 2021).

The concept of teacher well-being has attracted increasing attention in recent years. This has led to a rise in scientific research focusing on teachers' well-being. Aldrup et al. (2018) describe teacher well-being as the relationship between enthusiasm for work and emotional exhaustion, whereas Capone and Petrillo (2020) define it broadly as mental health. Discussions about teachers' well-being often centre on issues like stress and burnout. Similar to this, much scholarly research frequently emphasises drawbacks like stress, burnout, and attrition (Cann, 2019). To improve outcomes for teachers in schools, it is necessary to take a more holistic approach to teacher well-being.

Teachers are believed to have some of the highest rates of work-related stress, depression, and anxiety, according to data comparable to other high-stress professional sectors like health, social work, finance, and human resources (Ofsted, 2019). The Department for Education (DfE) suggested that teachers' overall well-being was a major influence in their decision to quit their jobs (DfE & CooperGibson Research, 2018). It makes sense that academics and policymakers are worried about the increase in reports of mental health problems, especially in the teaching profession (Brady & Wilson, 2020). The financial and psychological strains that teachers bear are implicit in these worries. More significant institutional challenges include lost

productivity as a result of employees missing work, difficulties fulfilling educational needs, and problems with skill retention as a result of teachers leaving the profession.

Although there is a compelling argument for taking a closer look at teacher well-being, the current literature demonstrates a rigid and fragmented approach to defining teacher well-being, with many descriptions provided and some scholars altogether avoiding an explicit definition of the term (Field, 2019). Reviews have started to incorporate different points of view, although they may not be as thorough as the broader literature suggests, since they may not use a domain-specific approach or may overlook important discourses in the field. As such, the concept of teacher well-being is a special creation with gaps and contradictions. In general, it seems that there are differences in the theoretical underpinnings and ways of conceptualising teacher well-being (Ozturk et al., 2024).

To gain a clearer understanding, teacher well-being can be divided into several dimensions or facets, each of which can influence a teacher's overall well-being. Viac and Fraser (2020 describe these characteristics as subject well-being, social well-being, cognitive well-being, and physical and mental wellness. Teacher well-being covers a broad range of concepts because of its complex and multifaceted nature. This means it includes various factors, such as social interactions, job satisfaction, mental health, and more. It is a broad and intricate topic because all these elements contribute to teachers' well-being. Three primary perspectives of teacher well-being can be used to analyse various aspects: teacher well-being as professionalism (self-efficacy, work commitment, and fulfilment with work, among other things); teacher well-being as positivity or flourishing (content, enthusiastic, and positive emotions); and teacher well-being as negativity or deficiency (stress, fatigue, and anxiety, etc.) (Ozturk et al., 2024).

The incidence of burnout, stress, and anxiety in the teaching profession has historically been the main emphasis of negative approaches to teacher wellness (Ozturk et al., 2024). This viewpoint highlights the emotional exhaustion, burnout, and pressures that teachers may experience when navigating the rigorous landscape of schools and educational systems. According to Taajamo and Puhakka (2020), the United Kingdom (Savill-Smith & Scanlan, 2022) and the United States (Herman et al., 2020) show that teachers experience significant levels of work-related stress worldwide. Burnout,

anxiety, and depression are among stress-related challenges that affect teachers' academic performance.

The key human resource driving the country's educational system is its teachers. Teaching is a dynamic process in schools these days. As curriculum, learning theory, pedagogy, and educational objectives continue to evolve, teachers encounter some challenges. It is critical to give teachers' well-being first priority when it comes to the quality of their working lives. The quality of teachers' working lives can determine how well schools and the workplace support and meet the psychological, social, political, and economic demands by offering a variety of possibilities for growth and self-development (Zakaria, Don, & Yaakob, 2021). In order to improve the quality of teachers' working lives and so favourably impact their general well-being, schools can play a crucial role in developing a better and more effective working environment.

3.4.2 Dimensions of teacher well-being

Eight main dimensions define teacher well-being, encompassing a specific set of indicators related to teachers' well-being at work, making them both distinct and closely related. Well-being, then, can be defined as being at our peak in terms of our emotions, surroundings, intellect, physical health, social interactions, spirituality, and financial situation. Mawlood and Hamadameen (2023) describe eight dimensions, as expanded upon below:

3.4.2.1 Emotional well-being

Emotional well-being is vital to a teacher's everyday life since it affects relationships with learners, parents, peers, and administrators. For instance, teachers frequently need to control their own frustrations in order to react to the difficult behaviour of learners. Emotions influence a teacher's thoughts and behaviour. Teachers need to be able to express and comprehend their own emotions as well as those of others. Teachers' resilience, life skills, and emotional control are all related to their emotional well-being (Ibid).

3.4.2.2 Environmental well-being

The phrase "environmental well-being" (p. 308) describes the physical and decorative surroundings, the systematic processes that are adhered to, and the structures in

which teachers operate; these may include the workday structure, school facilities, departmental resources, and learners themselves. These elements collectively make up the working environment. Furthermore, each of these locations may have a favourable or unfavourable effect on a teacher's well-being (Ibid).

3.4.2.3 Intellectual well-being

Education systems should provide teachers with opportunities to continually improve their pedagogical approaches and content knowledge, particularly in the area of interacting with learners in a culturally responsive manner. Developing intellectual well-being requires high-quality professional learning. It helps teachers stay up-to-date with emerging research and implement new best practices (Ibid).

3.4.2.4 Physical well-being

Every event in life has the potential to affect our physical well-being. It depends on our self-care routines, diet, sense of security, and readiness to face the day. Teachers who are physically and emotionally exhausted are more susceptible to physical and mental health problems, which directly impact their ability to teach, their relationships, and their attendance. The capacity of other teachers to support education may then decline as a result of this (Ibid).

3.4.2.5 Social well-being

To meet their needs for social well-being, teachers should take advantage of opportunities that allow them to interact with people outside of the workplace. Lesson planning, professional regular learning, department group events, and evening sporting events can all interfere with teachers' efforts to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Ibid).

3.4.2.6 Spiritual well-being

According to Montoya and Summerd (2021), enabling teachers to discover their passion and purpose in their work is vital to their spiritual well-being because it motivates them to get out of bed in the morning. It may be connected to community, religion, or culture. It comprises the values and beliefs teachers uphold, which guide all their decisions and interactions with others. Through introspective journaling, meditation, self-help book studies, and mindful reflection, teachers can create the

space needed to improve their spiritual well-being by exploring personal desires, seeking deeper meanings, and analysing recurring patterns (Ibid).

3.4.2.7 Occupational well-being

Enabling teachers to find their passion and purpose in their profession is essential to their spiritual well-being since it inspires them to get out of bed in the morning (Montoya & Summerd, 2021). It might have anything to do with culture, religion, or community. It consists of the principles and values that teachers adhere to, which direct all their choices and social relationships. Teachers can create the space necessary to enhance their spiritual well-being by investigating their personal needs, looking for deeper meanings, and evaluating recurring patterns through introspective journaling, meditation, self-help book studies, and mindful contemplation (Ibid).

It is the ability to apply formal education and special talents to personally fulfilling work. Feeling confident in one's ability to carry out duties for the school community is one aspect of this dimension. A feeling of career advancement, which is linked to job satisfaction and engagement, is another component (Ibid).

3.4.2.8 Financial well-being

Teachers' ability to maintain their lives, health, and mental well-being is directly affected by their financial well-being, making it a crucial dimension. Economic difficulties can impair a teacher's mental capacity and prevent them from being fully aware and critically aware of their relationships and instructional methods (Ibid).

3.4.3 Factors influencing teacher well-being

A career in teaching can be important and fulfilling. However, teachers frequently deal with several demands and difficulties that can be detrimental to their well-being, making it more difficult for them to foster a supportive learning environment for their learners. As part of their job, teachers deal with a wide spectrum of emotions of varying intensities. The work is acknowledged as being very challenging, demanding, and stressful at all educational levels (Chaudhuri et al., 2022). This is partly because governments worldwide frequently implement reforms aimed at improving education on such a scale and pace that it often impacts teachers' physical, mental, and professional well-being. The resulting pressures and difficulties influence the quality

of teaching, reduce teachers' occupational well-being, increase emotional exhaustion, and lower job satisfaction.

In South Africa, government policies that affect organisations and individuals often place considerable pressure on teachers' well-being. Teachers, in most instances, are expected to implement departmental policies with very little support and few resources from the department. Expectations from the Department of Education concerning learner performance are very high, and this pressure on teachers can compromise their well-being. It is believed that job demands cause health impairment and, as a result, harm well-being (Zhou et al., 2025). A situation where teachers who cannot find their values of creativity, autonomy and integrity often put teachers at odds with departmental officials who look for standardisation and conformity across all levels of the teaching profession.

Any organisation's success depends on its leadership style because it influences how effectively its employees perform. Leadership has become an increasingly vital component of management in the constantly changing social, technological, and economic landscape. While managers concentrate on pooling resources, developing plans, and coordinating and regulating activities to achieve set goals, leadership performs the influential role of management. Consequently, SMT’s leadership styles also significantly affect teacher well-being. When interactions between leadership and staff focus solely on measurable targets, there is less scope for developing self-actualisation, loyalty, professional respect, and emotional connections, all of which are essential for positive well-being. Teachers empowered by their leaders to solve problems independently may experience anxiety because they bear greater responsibility for the processes and outcomes of their work.

A precise classification of the elements that affect teachers' well-being is essential. In the context of data analysis, this kind of classification is crucial. Alterman et al. (2007) distinguished between two categories: educational characteristics (basic support, support for professional growth, workload, and class size) and personal characteristics (gender, age, experience, and professional standing). Teacher well-being is also acknowledged to be influenced by individual characteristics (educational level and background), professional attributes (teaching beliefs and practices, as well as professional development activities), and organisational characteristics (school

climate, resources, leadership style, classroom environment, workload, and staff collaboration).

3.4.4 Teacher well-being and educational outcomes

Teaching demands a high degree of motivation and well-being, much like most occupations. Teachers' well-being, which includes work satisfaction, physical and mental health, and a positive attitude towards teaching, affects interactions between learners, learning experiences, the classroom, and the actual learning process. Teachers perform at their best when they feel better. Therefore, a key aspect of good practice is teachers' well-being. However, teaching at all levels currently faces high pressure, a high rate of teacher turnover, and one of the highest rates of burnout in the profession (Mawlood & Hamadameen, 2023).

Schools, teachers, and learners are all significantly impacted by the well-being of their teachers. Many negative consequences of poor well-being are widely known; for example, stress or burnout has been connected to teacher attrition and the global shortage of teachers (Cann, 2019). As a result, the long-term viability of the teaching profession now places a high priority on teacher welfare. Low teacher well-being can have a detrimental impact on learners. This means that a teacher whose well-being is negatively impacted cannot discharge their functions fully in the classroom, which can directly lead to poor learner performance. So, it is not just teacher attrition that has to be addressed (Cann, 2019). Teachers who are under stress or burnout have poor relationships with learners, and the quality of their teaching decreases. Teachers with poor well-being may find it difficult to manage learner misbehaviour, which can lead to low learner motivation and poor academic performance (Maduna, 2022).

Enhanced classroom environments and the delivery of high-quality education that supports learners' success can be cultivated in schools by prioritising teachers' well-being and providing support for their growth. Since there is a link between teacher and learner well-being, addressing teachers' well-being is a vital initial step in school-wide wellness programmes aiming to boost learner well-being. Research shows a connection between teacher satisfaction and well-being. As such, teachers who have access to the right resources will be better equipped to meet the demands of their roles more effectively (Dreer, 2023).

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) hypothesise that teacher well-being can be viewed as a type of job resource that predicts both lower motivation to leave and higher job engagement and satisfaction. This demonstrates the necessity for all parties involved, including the Department of Education, to promote teachers' well-being and bolsters the notion that teacher well-being is crucial for educational success. According to Frenzel (2014), teachers who have had more good experiences in their day-to-day school lives are more equipped to foster healthy working relationships, are more receptive to novel concepts and methods, and are more adaptable in the face of difficulties and uncertainty. On the other hand, teachers who experience more negative emotions at work are less likely to actively build relationships, adhere to established protocols, and struggle to overcome unforeseen obstacles.

The effectiveness of the educational system depends on addressing teachers' well-being, as well as their personal health and job satisfaction. A contented and mentally healthy teaching staff is better equipped to provide high-quality instruction and support the well-being of schoolchildren. Consequently, teachers' engagement and effectiveness in the classroom can be influenced by their well-being (or lack thereof). When a teacher's well-being is negatively affected, they may become demotivated, which could lead to high absenteeism and poor student performance (Rajgopal, 2010).

3.4.5 Correlation between teacher well-being and learner performance

Teachers are the most crucial stakeholders in the education system. Learners' performance is greatly influenced by teacher well-being (or the lack thereof) (Arens & Morin, 2016). Research indicates that teachers experiencing negative well-being may gradually impact their students negatively over time (Klusman, 2016). A positive classroom environment, along with learners' social, emotional, and academic development, is linked to teacher well-being. This factor significantly affects positive teacher-learner relationships, classroom management, and social-emotional learning success.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the precise ways in which teacher well-being, or its absence, can influence learner performance remain unclear to researchers (Marsh, 2017). Few studies have established clear links between these two factors, although most research examines how stress impacts learning in the classroom (by learners). The majority of studies have been exploratory, indicating indirect

connections through teacher-learner interactions, teacher involvement, and teacher quality (Marsh, 2017). Marsh (2017) claims that no research has found any patterns of causal effects in the connections between the achievement of learners, school atmosphere, and teacher well-being.

Other research indicates a high correlation between teachers' attitudes, instructional methods, and interpersonal approaches and the enthusiasm of learners, as well as their academic achievement (Bartholomew et al., 2018). Furthermore, research has shown a link between key learner outcomes, including academic success and engagement with learning and teacher well-being (such as work satisfaction and burnout) (e.g., Arens & Morin, 2016). Despite growing interest, there are still few studies in the field that fully examine the connections between average teacher well-being and average learner accomplishment, especially at the whole-school level (Granziera et al., 2023).

3.4.6 Long-term effects on teacher retention and professional development

Teaching can be classified as one of the most stressful occupations in the public sector (Tsubono & Mitoku, 2023). Teachers respond differently to stress and challenges and have varying coping mechanisms (Fouche, 2015). Given that poor teacher retention results from it, there appears to be a growing understanding that many educational institutions place a high priority on teachers' professional well-being (Acton & Glasgow, 2015).

In contrast to teacher attrition, which involves skilled teachers leaving the profession prematurely, teacher retention focuses on keeping qualified teachers within the profession (Thomas et al., 2019). Teachers' performance, well-being, retention, and the growth of positive connections with a variety of stakeholders, such as learners, parents, SMTs, and colleagues, are significantly influenced by their motivation and personality (Bardach, Klassen, & Perry, 2022). Teachers who are in good health are more likely to be driven to stay in their positions and perform well.

3.4.7 Emotional intelligence and teacher well-being

Since EI influences resilience, job satisfaction, and stress levels, it is crucial to examine its relationship with teacher well-being.

3.4.7.1 Relationship between emotional intelligence and teacher well-being

Stress, engagement, morale, and job satisfaction are all significantly impacted by teachers' emotions. Understanding and controlling one's own emotions, identifying emotions in others, inspiring oneself, and managing relationships are all components of EI, which is linked to better well-being (Cann, 2019). According to research, teachers who possess greater EI tend to be less burned out (Lourenco et al., 2024). Teachers' social and emotional abilities are acknowledged as significant variables influencing students' social, emotional, and intellectual development, and the concept of social and emotional competence is strongly related to EI.

3.5 HOW EI SKILLS CAN HELP TEACHERS MANAGE STRESS AND EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

Stress is the primary driver of teacher burnout and attrition (Singleton et al., 2024). Some potential sources of stress include secondary trauma stress, workload demands, and issues with classroom management. Instructors frequently experience worry, mental stress, impatience, exhaustion, anxiety, and sleep issues, all of which can quickly lead to burnout. Their incapacity to manage ongoing stress raises the possibility of burnout, which negatively affects their performance at work and in school (Singleton et al., 2024). Teachers who use EI strategies in the classroom can benefit learners by reducing stress and helping them deal with difficult circumstances.

Research on the relationship between EI and burnout has also demonstrated that mood swings, motivation, and EI are predictive of burnout (Kant & Shanker, 2021). EI has a major impact on teachers' well-being and offers methods for stress management and reducing burnout at work (Currie, 2021). Furthermore, making wise decisions, achieving academic goals, and long-term success in life are all supported by EI skills (Cherry, 2022).

Understanding, evaluating, and successfully managing emotions all depend on the development of EI skills. Developing self-awareness is a crucial component of EI. Currie (2021, p. 1) claims that teachers are "more in tune with their emotions and aware of the things that cause them stress." They can employ the appropriate strategies to lessen stress and stop worry from taking over their lives by identifying their triggers (Currie, 2021).

The complex organisational and psychological demands of managing a school, such as supervising educational programmes, hiring and staffing, school budgets, and creating an inspiring school climate, put school leaders at risk for occupational stress, low job satisfaction, and burnout if their emotional burden is not addressed. The emotional state of a school leader may cause teachers to experience comparable emotions (Bower et al., 2018). Leader-driven feelings, since emotions are a basic component of well-being, can have an impact on teachers' well-being, as school administrators can transmit their emotions to others, who subsequently take them in. For instance, an administrator who exhibits obvious fear about how community disturbance may affect school safety and who is unable to manage their emotions may also cause anxiety in teachers.

On the other hand, teachers' well-being can be improved by emotionally intelligent leaders in schools. For instance, leaders at schools who are adept at controlling their own emotions may be better able to promote more inspiration, optimism, and pride while lowering anxiety, anger, and depression. Teachers' well-being can be improved in a number of ways by leaders creating school environments that are dominated by positive rather than negative emotions (e.g., less emotional tiredness, more positive affect, and greater job satisfaction) (Mahfouz, Greenberg, & Rodriguez, 2019). This is important because happy feelings serve as psychological resources that promote well-being, teamwork, creative problem-solving, and productive work.

3.6 THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN FOSTERING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STAFF

High EI has a significant impact on and enhances our relationships with others, as well as our general success in a variety of domains. By sharing their own resources and burdens, school leaders who are adept at assisting others in managing their emotions can boost or restore teachers' psychological resources and counterbalance risks or losses (Floman et al., 2023). This is particularly vital during crises when resources may be scarcer. Teachers working under emotionally supportive leaders may, therefore, feel more content and less depressed (Floman et al., 2023). Facilitating interpersonal communication, empathy, conflict resolution (Lal Bahadur, 2023), and the development of meaningful connections all rely on EI. Grasping the complex web

of human relationships requires understanding how EI influences our interactions with friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances.

Research shows that people with high EI are usually better leaders who can handle difficulties at work more easily and create a healthy work environment (Lal Bahadur, 2023). By being able to empathise and support colleagues, they encourage the development and success of organisations. EI, which serves as the foundation for productive interactions and deep connections, has a significant impact on interpersonal relationships. Higher EI makes people more understanding, sympathetic, and communicative, which enhances their capacity to settle disputes, establish trust, and preserve satisfying relationships.

In both personal and professional spheres, interpersonal interactions are vital because they significantly influence success, productivity, and overall well-being. Their EI directly affects people's ability to negotiate and manage these interactions. Research shows that practical interpersonal skills and EI are closely linked. Understanding EI can greatly enhance empathy, trust, communication, and conflict resolution, all of which foster happier and more rewarding relationships (Prabha, 2023).

Over time, organisational roles have changed. These days, organisations emphasise that leaders should take on new responsibilities, such as organising and supporting employees' behaviour at work. Therefore, to continue growing, organisations need to establish and sustain a competitive advantage, with particular attention to human concerns. Additionally, work groups are becoming more common within organisations, and many employees should collaborate in teams to achieve complex organisational objectives. EI shapes relationships within the team.

According to Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023), employees with high EI scores are highly dedicated to their work because they can control their emotions, which reduces the likelihood of conflicts, fosters stronger bonds with co-workers, keeps a positive outlook, and allows them to modify their objectives to fit those of the organisation. Additionally, a leader who possesses EI is skilled at inspiring their staff, which helps them attract and retain talent (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023).

3.7 STUDIES ON EI INTERVENTIONS AND TEACHER WELL-BEING

Numerous scholars from various disciplines have investigated the relationship between EI and well-being. In the context of education, the relationship between these aspects has been briefly discussed. There is compelling evidence of a substantial relationship between teachers' EI and their well-being (Kamboj & Garg, 2021). It was shown that teachers' ability to control their emotions had a positive impact on their psychological well-being (Suárez Martel & Martín Santana, 2021). Furthermore, EI can boost teachers' self-efficacy, which promotes resilience in the workplace (Ngui & Lay, 2020).

Teacher training programmes can help equip teachers with skills to address issues and challenges related to their well-being. Teachers who complete the teacher education programme are prepared to teach learners in the classroom and manage the many diverse responsibilities of the teaching profession within a school context (Ngui & Lay, 2020). Therefore, teachers should have a strong sense of confidence in their ability to complete the duties assigned to them.

3.8 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Focusing on intervention programmes that promote the well-being of teachers is essential. Only a small number of studies have shown the efficacy of intervention programmes in emotional education; some of these studies only evaluated other domains, which limits comparisons and a thorough approach to interventions (Jennings et al., 2017). In several instances, they have focused on creating guidelines for classroom activities that teachers can use (Arteaga-Cedeño et al., 2025).

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the conceptual framework by examining the concept of EI, including its historical evolution, underlying models, and theoretical underpinnings. The connection between leadership (in schools) and EI was then examined. With special reference to South African rural schools, the concept of teacher well-being and its connection to EI and school leadership were examined, along with criticisms and discussions surrounding EI. The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology that underpins the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explored the conceptual framework, the concept of EI, as well as various definitions and models of EI. Theoretical perspectives on EI, critiques and debates surrounding EI, as well as the concept of teacher well-being and its relationship with EI, were further explored.

Chapter 4 explains the study's processes, strategies, and research methodology. It has been determined that qualitative research is a methodological paradigm and interpretivism is a meta-theoretical paradigm. The selection of study designs, sampling methods, and participant selection is then covered in detail. The chapter discusses the benefits and limitations of the decisions made. The many phases of this study are then described, along with the methods utilised for data collection, recording, analysis, and interpretation. An overview of the study's quality standards and ethical considerations concludes the chapter.

4.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Teachers in rural South African schools deal with a variety of challenges that affect their ability to teach. Among the challenges they face are classroom overcrowding, discipline problems (du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020), a lack of resources, inadequate parental involvement in their children's education, insufficient departmental funding, and multigrade teaching (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Contrarily, teachers deal with family issues and financial limitations, which can cause stress, which, in turn, can result in depression and the potential for hospitalisation. Rural schools are directly affected by the aforementioned issues, which also threaten school managers' ability to fulfil their responsibility to run the schools properly.

Principals of schools are part of a CMT. The CMT in White Hazy 2 Circuit, a rural area, meets throughout the year. To review curriculum, administration, and other issues affecting schools, the team meets at least once a month. The focus of the discussions is the growing number of issues that SMTs deal with. Among the topics that school managers talk about each month are increased stress, early departure, and increased absenteeism due to illness among teachers (Lizana et al., 2020). Despite these discussions, empirical research into these matters in this region has not been

conducted previously. Therefore, this study explored the role of SMTs' EI in promoting the welfare of teachers in rural schools.

4.3 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research is guided by a number of interrelated topics in order to better understand the relationship between school leadership, EI, and teacher well-being in rural South African schools. The primary research question aims to explore school leaders' views on the role of EI in promoting teacher well-being in order to situate leadership practices within the broader psychological and organisational contexts of rural education. The secondary questions investigate the aspects of EI that school leaders understand and apply in the workplace, as well as how these competencies can be strategically utilised to foster teacher well-being amid the unique challenges of rural schooling.

Below are the secondary research questions that the study aims to explore:

- What aspects of EI in the workplace are understood by school leadership?
- How can school leadership use EI to promote teacher well-being in rural South African schools?
- Which programmes and support networks are deemed pertinent by school administrators to improve the well-being of teachers in rural South African schools?
- How can available programmes be enhanced to offer relevant training and support to school leadership to develop their EI skills?

Additional research should focus on identifying current programmes and support systems that school managers believe are most crucial for improving teacher well-being. It also should focus on how these initiatives can be strengthened to offer relevant training and opportunities for capacity-building that will help teachers and school leaders in their respective schools develop their EI. In order to enhance sustained teacher well-being in rural educational contexts, these questions aim to produce contextually grounded insights that guide professional support systems, leadership development, and policy reforms.

4.4 PARADIGMATIC ASSUMPTION

A research paradigm, according to Ebohon et al. (2020), is a collection of widely accepted opinions and concepts among subject matter experts about how challenges should be understood and addressed. In general, it is a perspective on the world. According to Ebohon et al. (2020), research paradigms can be distinguished by their ontology, methodology, and epistemology.

Interpretivism, as the meta-theoretical paradigm guiding this study, is addressed in the subsequent section. The research design and meta-theoretical paradigm are discussed after the research methodology, which forms the basis of this study (refer to Figure 4.1).

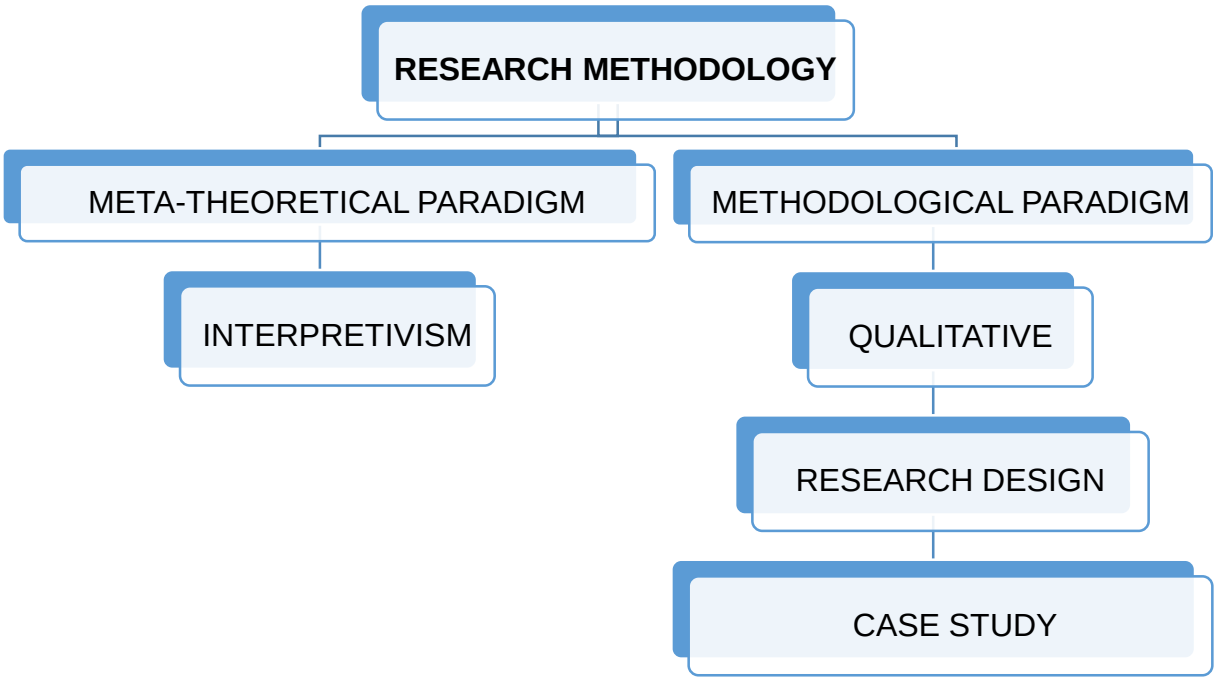


Figure 4.1: Overview of the research methodology

4.4.1 Meta-theoretical paradigm

Interpretivism has been selected as a meta-theoretical paradigm to gain a comprehensive understanding of school leadership views on the role of EI to improve teacher well-being in rural South African schools. Every empirical study employs an interpretive methodology, according to Ryan's (2018, p. 9) perspective, which maintains that "truth and knowledge are subjective" because of variations in life

experiences and culture. Inspiration came from Berryman's (2019, p. 273) interpretive approach, which maintains that "social construction, language, shared consciousness, and other social interactions" are crucial tools for the formation of facts (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

In addition to describing objects, people, or events, interpretivist scholars can use their diverse viewpoints on phenomena to fully understand them within their socio-cultural contexts since they believe that the culture in which they live has established belief systems (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). This is a significant benefit of this approach. Researchers can also explore an interviewee's ideas, values, biases, perceptions, attitudes, and opinions by employing the critical approach of interactive interviews. This makes it possible for researchers to investigate and draw attention to problems that the general public might miss.

Because interpretivism relies on the notion that people cannot be examined in the same way as physical facts, it is more concerned with context-related elements and situations. It sees humans as different from physical phenomena because they generate deeper meanings (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The different cultures, circumstances, and eras that give rise to different social realities are taken into consideration by interpretivism. Interpretivism aims to accept the richness of insights acquired rather than attempting to establish precise, universal norms that can be applied to everyone, regardless of some significant components and elements (Myers, 2008; Bhattacherjee, 2012; Saunders et al., 2012).

Interpretivist ontology infuses meaning into social and experiential research and knowledge by adopting a relativist view of reality and viewing it as intersubjective (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). From this angle, the basis for understanding and influencing reality is found in the individual experiences of every person. Early educational experiences have a significant impact on how people interpret and perceive knowledge (Lyu, 2024). They also show a significant amount of subjectivity and a dependence on context in discussions and decision-making.

Interpretivism places a strong emphasis on subjectivity and social construction, arguing that people's interpretations are influenced by their own beliefs, expectations, and experiences and change as they are exposed to new information over time (Lyu,

2024). This frame of view emphasises how crucial diverse viewpoints and cooperative settings are to deepening and expanding understanding.

4.4.2 Strengths of the interpretivist paradigm

The primary advantage of the interpretivist approach is that it is more humanistic. Rather than restricting the study topics to investigate the nature of the event, the interpretivist method uses qualitative research to understand human emotions (Kaliyamurthi, 2021). The interpretivist approach is the only approach that can assess how individuals construct their social reality around significant subjects like happiness or self-worth (Lepore, 2000). Because the data in these types of studies are typically trustworthy and dependable, primary data produced through interpretivist research may have a high degree of validity. The primary goal of this study was to portray each person's physical surroundings as an interpretive world rather than the real universe because of the variety of human behaviour, perspectives, and experiences. It was essential to employ the social environment and, to the greatest extent feasible, rely on the experiences and viewpoints of SMTs in order to fully understand the role of EI in promoting teacher well-being (Creswell, 2014).

This approach's contextual aspect and in-depth analysis are beneficial for the local context and research on limited cases (Kaliyamurthi, 2021). It takes into account people's time- and context-bound objectives, meanings, and other experiences. To sum up, context interpretation is necessary when studying family conflicts, taboos, organisational change management, and leadership. Only an interpretive approach can uncover the circumstances and background that led to this, which provides the option of improving those situations (Kaliyamurthi, 2021). Additionally, interpretivism does not simply match the researcher's point of view; it enables one to understand new concepts or frameworks and their societal importance.

4.4.3 Limitations of the interpretivist paradigm

The interpretivist approach may produce original research results that are only applicable to the local setting. According to Lowndes, Marsh and Stoker (2017), interpretivists struggle with reflexivity if they are not completely aware of their biases. Interpretivism approaches to ethnography, such as transcribing the text and maintaining diaries, are rejected by Bevir and Rhodes, who refer to them as our

constructions of other people's constructions (Lowndes et al., 2017). Interpretivists are condemned for not being able to forecast the future like positivist researchers (Kaliyamurthi, 2021).

According to Tarko (2015), interpretivism fundamentally undermines all epistemologies since its norms demand that different perspectives be treated equally and because its ontology enables a variety of worldviews. The ethical responsibilities of scientists may be hampered by this level of relativism (Tarko, 2015). Instead of extending the phenomena to other domains, which could leave gaps in the validity of the verification results, the interpretivist method aims to explain the phenomenon more thoroughly in a complex context (Cohen et al., 2011).

Because the interpretive paradigm focuses on understanding contemporary social phenomena rather than individual and societal rights, Hay (2011) criticises it for neglecting to address the impact of politics and ideology on society, such as the issue of prejudice in education. According to Tuli (2011), interpretivism is often inconsistent when attempting to describe social phenomena because of its subjective ontology. In the meantime, bias will surely result from the researcher's own beliefs and perceptions.

To address the limitations of interpretivism (Hittleman & Simon, 2006), this study applies strategies to enhance credibility (Stahl & King 2020), reflexivity (Lowndes et al., 2017), and trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020). Thick description and contextual analysis are used to improve the transferability of findings to similar contexts. Reflexivity is strengthened through self-reflection, reflexive journaling, and peer debriefing to minimise researcher bias. Triangulation of multiple data sources and participant validation further improve the credibility and confirmability of the findings (Ahmed, 2024). Although interpretivism does not predict future phenomena like positivist approaches, it provides a deeper understanding of complex social realities within their natural settings. The study also acknowledges the influence of politics, ideology, and ethical responsibility by ensuring fairness, transparency, and respect for diverse perspectives throughout the research process.

4.5 METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM

Methodologies are a collection of approaches used in educational research to collect data that will be the foundation for inference, interpretation, explanation, and prediction, according to Cohen et al. (2011). According to Maree (2013), this method enables researchers to obtain data about social reality from individuals, organisations, items, and texts in any format. For this investigation, a qualitative methodological paradigm has been chosen.

Altheide and Johnson (2011) claim the contextual component of qualitative research puts the researcher in the real world. A number of tangible, interpretive exercises reveal the world. The world is altered and turned into a collection of representations through these tools, which include field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and self-reflections. The world is seen through an interpretive, naturalistic lens in qualitative research. In order to understand or interpret events in light of the meanings people assign to them, qualitative researchers examine events in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Creswell (2014) maintains that qualitative research gives language precedence over numbers when gathering and analysing data. Its primary emphasis is on an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which theories are developed prior to supporting data. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research emphasises how individuals view their social surroundings, viewing social reality as dynamic and emergent.

According to Creswell (2014), in this instance, the researcher aims to ascertain the significance of a phenomenon from the viewpoints of participants. This entails locating a group of individuals who share a culture and examining how common behavioural patterns have changed over time (ethnography). One of the most crucial aspects of collecting data in this way is observing how individuals behave during activities. Maree (2013) goes on to add that in order to uncover solutions, qualitative research examines various social environments and the individuals that inhabit them. As a result, the main focus of qualitative research is on how individuals organise themselves and their surroundings, as well as how they make sense of their surroundings through social structures, rituals, roles, and symbols.

The study's objectives, which included learning more about school leadership perspectives on the function of EI in promoting teacher well-being in the context of a

rural South African school, were therefore best served by the qualitative approach. This was achieved by examining how school leaders utilise EI to help teachers who are struggling with challenges related to their well-being in the classroom.

Qualitative research examines how individuals or groups perceive and understand social events in society. It is based on assumptions and the use of interpretive frameworks. Qualitative researchers employ both deductive and inductive data analysis to find patterns or themes. Additionally, they gather information in an environment that is sensitive to the individuals and locations they are researching. Participant voices, the researcher's reflexivity, a comprehensive explanation and analysis of the subject, and its literary contribution are all included in the final written report or presentation (Creswell, 2013).

Rather than being numerically representative, the aim of qualitative research is to better understand a specific problem. In qualitative research, the researcher is both the subject and the object of the investigation. The qualitative approach aims to produce comprehensive and illustrative data in order to fully understand the different facets of the topic under study (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017).

4.5.1 Strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative methodological paradigm

Table 4.1 below summarises the main advantages and disadvantages associated with each method considered for the qualitative methodology.

Table 4.1: Advantages and disadvantages associated with qualitative methodology (Queirós et al., 2017, pp. 378-379)

Qualitative methodology	Advantage	Disadvantage
Observation	• Information should be gathered concurrently with the occurrence • A non-intrusive approach that does not depend on an individual's response • Flexible and committed to learning	• It requires a great deal of preparation • Takes a long time and depends on the objectivity of the observer • Gathering data in real time is difficult
Ethnography	• Based on direct author observations and interviews • Provide comprehensive results • Suitable for exploring new research possibilities	• It requires a lot of time. • It is difficult to reach precise and understandable results • It necessitates an extensive understanding of the problem domain
Field research	• The significance of the social environment is emphasised • It is sufficient to acquire very exact data	• Gathering information from a large number of people and making generalisations can be challenging • It depends on the observer's objectivity • Documenting observations could be challenging
Focus groups	• Enough to gather thorough information about both individuals and groups • Allow others to make enquiries. • Less time and cost compared to one-on-one interviews	• It is difficult to manage and control • It is difficult to get people to participate • It is unable to represent the whole population
Case studies	• Provide particulars about each individual • Provide the perfect environment for innovation and modify pre-existing theoretical presumptions • It might be a helpful supplement or replacement for focus groups	• Determining cause-and-effect linkages and making generalisations from a small number of case studies are difficult • Creating a case study that works for every topic can be difficult; ethical issues, especially those pertaining to secrecy, may come up
Structured interviews	Responses from participants are easily comparable and well-organised; a large sample can be reached Interviewing someone is comparatively simple and quick	Extremely rigid; no flexibility in response options Difficult to obtain particular information Time-consuming interview schedule
In-depth interviews	Adapted to gather thorough and insightful data on a certain subject Requires a limited number of participants to provide relevant and useful insights Can be done in casual environments	It is not generalisable; it is time-consuming and somewhat costly It necessitates a longer verification process to obtain comparative data It requires careful participant selection to prevent bias

The strengths and limitations of qualitative research can be addressed through careful planning and methodological triangulation. Qualitative methods provide rich, detailed, and context-based insights into social phenomena. Reflexivity, peer review, and participant validation help to minimise researcher bias (Amin et al., 2020) and subjectivity. Time and cost challenges can be reduced through effective scheduling and the use of digital recording and transcription tools. The credibility and reliability of findings are strengthened through the use of multiple data sources and methods (Ahmed, 2024). Ethical issues such as confidentiality and participant selection are addressed through informed consent, transparency, and adherence to research ethics principles.

4.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology, according to Swarooprani (2022), is a systematic explanation of the research problem. The objective of research methodology is to provide a methodical description of the research problem. Analysing how scientific procedures are applied in research may be an implicit discipline. It centres on the several approaches a researcher often takes to analyse their research problem and the rationale behind such approaches (Swarooprani, 2022). Both the approach and the research methods or techniques should be decided by the researcher.

4.6.1 Research design

Since the purpose of this study was to examine school leadership perspectives on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools, a case study design was employed. According to Priya (2021), case studies are one of the most frequently used methods in qualitative social research. According to Aberdeen (2013), a case study is a type of research that examines a phenomenon in its actual context. A range of data gathering methods is used because case study research requires a detailed analysis of a phenomenon. Yin (2009) states that a case study is not a method for collecting data, but rather a research methodology or design used to assess a social unit.

A comprehensive and understandable explanation of case study design is given by Creswell (2014), in which the researcher thoroughly analyses a programme, event, activity, method, or one or more people. Time and activity limits apply to the case or

instances, and researchers use a variety of data collection strategies to collect thorough data over a lengthy period.

A case study is a systematic research approach used in a constrained context to gain a thorough grasp of a present challenge or occurrence. To fully understand real-life phenomena, case study research requires a thorough examination of a person, organisation, or event (Ellinger & McWhorter, 2023). In the humanities and social sciences, it is frequently employed to investigate difficult problems and offer explanations for certain circumstances or events. A variety of data sources, including documents, interviews, and observations, may be used in a case study (Ellinger & McWhorter, 2023). Developing new theories or insights and gaining a thorough understanding of the case subject are the two main objectives of case study research.

A case study is a kind of research approach that analyses a phenomenon in its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the challenge is examined from several angles, allowing for the recognition and comprehension of various facets of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2015). A case study is one of the various techniques employed in social science research (Yin, 2015). Case studies are generally more pertinent when the focus is on current phenomena in a real-life setting, the researcher has minimal influence over the happenings, and "how" or "why" concerns are being addressed (Yin, 2015, p. 1).

The identification of a case is subject to boundaries, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), which means that what is being studied may be described or characterised within particular parameters. According to Baxter and Jack (2015), a case study also possesses the following qualities: it should be limited by time and location to a specific case, and it should offer a thorough comprehension of the case. Focus groups, interviews, field notes, articles, autobiographies, historical documents, films, and more are some of the methods utilised to gather data. The analysis of data varies depending on the circumstances. For case study research to produce high-quality descriptions, themes should be successfully identified.

Case study research involves an in-depth inquiry to evaluate the context and processes involved in the phenomenon, sometimes employing empirical data collected over time from a clearly defined case (Rashid et al., 2019). A case study

researcher should invest a substantial amount of time in the research process. According to Chowdhury and Shil (2021), the case researcher should plan the objective and set aside a specific amount of time in advance.

Examining and understanding complicated situations is made feasible by case study research. It can be considered an effective research method, especially when thorough research is needed. The case study approach is acknowledged as a helpful tool in numerous social science investigations. In sociology (Grassel & Schirmer, 2006), education (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006), and community-based concerns (Johnson, 2006), its significance in research continues to increase.

Priya (2021) highlights the following essential characteristics of the case study technique:

- A case study is a research strategy rather than merely a data collection method, methodology, or procedure.
- The unit of analysis in issue is thoroughly examined in its natural environment in a case study. Case study research is not significantly impacted by a decontextualised study.
- Since a case study is an inclusive investigation, the researcher may use any method of data collection that best accomplishes their goals (as long as it is feasible and ethically appropriate). A sound, unbiased, and objective investigation of the phenomenon under study usually uses a variety of data collection techniques, such as surveys, questionnaires, in-depth interviews, participant and non-participant observation, the examination of documents (books, archival manuscripts, or audio-visual recordings), conversations in natural settings, signs, physical artefacts, and so on (Priya, 2021).

4.6.1.1 Types of case studies

A case study is typically defined by the goal of the case investigation. Crebs (2022) distinguishes between three types of case studies: instrumental (single), collective (many), and intrinsic. The researcher selects a single, constrained scenario to illustrate a problem or issue in a single case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If the researcher wishes to look at one entity (such as a single member of a certain group) or one group

(such as a specific group of people inside a restricted system), a single case study is the ideal choice (Yin, 2018).

A case study employs a number of cases to highlight a certain problem or subject (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The objective of a case study is to compare examples in order to identify common patterns, correlations, or similarities. Regardless of how similar or dissimilar the examples are from one another, the objective of a multiple case study is to identify patterns or connections between cases (Yin, 2016). This method is sometimes used when the phenomenon being studied is rare or difficult to see. Similar to narrative research, an intrinsic case study retains the analytical methods of a case study while concentrating on the case itself because it offers a distinct situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Based on the case studies mentioned before, an instrumental case study is the most appropriate case study design for this investigation (Coombs, 2022), which may be carried out as a collective (plural) instrumental case study due to the inclusion of numerous schools. Since the goal of the study is to gain insight into the larger phenomenon of how EI informs leadership practices that promote teacher well-being rather than just understanding one particular school or leader, an instrumental case study is most appropriate.

The selected cases in this study, rural schools and their leaders, act as tools for the researcher to investigate the more general challenge of how EI influences leadership strategies that improve the well-being of teachers. This approach makes it possible to thoroughly examine the relationships between teacher well-being, leadership behaviour, and EI in the actual settings of rural education. Yin (2018) asserts that case studies are especially well-suited to answering how and why questions in intricate social contexts when the phenomenon being studied is greatly influenced by surrounding factors.

Furthermore, the instrumental case-study approach facilitates the creation of deep, contextually grounded insights into how school leaders perceive, interpret, and utilise EI in managing teacher relationships and well-being. The study's primary goal is to develop theoretical and contextual knowledge that can guide leadership development and policy in rural education environments rather than relying on statistical

generalisation. The study aligns with a collective instrumental case study, as participants from numerous schools are involved, which enables cross-case analysis to identify trends and differences across various rural contexts. This approach aligns with Merriam's (2009) view that instrumental case studies are valuable for refining theory and generating practical insights that extend beyond a single case. Hence, the instrumental case study design provides a rigorous and contextually sensitive framework for investigating how emotionally intelligent leadership contributes to fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. As with any research design, a case study has its strengths and limitations:

4.6.1.2 Strengths of case study research design

A case study's great flexibility, which allows researchers to fully understand the study's scope, contextualise research methods, and ensure research quality, justifies the choice (Sabono et al., 2024). By employing a case study approach, researchers can investigate phenomena utilising a range of data sources, such as literature, field observations, and policy documents (Ajayi, 2023).

Typically, data analysis is conducted within the context of the relevant event. Through a case study, the researcher can watch and engage with the participant in their natural setting (Symonds & Symonds, 2016). In contrast, an experiment purposefully separates an event from its environment (Symonds & Symonds, 2016). A successful qualitative examination of the data is made possible by variations in the intrinsic, instrumental, and collaborative methods of case studies (Symonds & Symonds, 2016). For example, a number of longitudinal studies on individual subjects incorporate qualitative data from journal entries that provide behavioural descriptions.

The comprehensive qualitative reports that sometimes appear in case studies not only explore or describe the data in a real-life setting but also aid in elucidating the complex nature of real-life situations that may not be portrayed by survey or experimental research (Symonds & Symonds, 2016). A case study of a single subject's reading techniques, for instance, can offer quantitative information on the tactics used, their justification, and their interrelationships. Since reading habits necessitate complex cognitive processes, each reading approach should be evaluated in relation to other strategies (Zaidah, 2003).

4.6.1.3 Limitations of case study design

Even though case studies are a unique type of empirical research, many scholars still disdain the approach. Case studies have been perceived as a less acceptable scientific endeavour than surveys or experiments (Sabono et al., 2024). The main issue has been the case study research's lack of rigour. Too frequently, case study researchers have been negligent, disregarded methodical protocols, or let ambiguous evidence or skewed opinions sway the results (Sabono et al., 2024).

Some case studies only use one subject, which provides very little basis for scientific generalisation because case studies typically involve a small number of individuals (Symonds & Symonds, 2016). This raises the question of how the researcher may generalise their findings from a specific situation.

Sometimes, case studies have been criticised for being too lengthy, difficult to complete, and producing a significant amount of documentation (Yin, 2018). In particular, a substantial amount of data can be gathered over time through ethnographic or longitudinal case studies. The risk stems from inadequate data management and organisation.

In light of the above limitations, with this case study, I encountered the following challenges: Processing and analysing the large volume of data proved challenging, as more time was needed. My official work schedule was disrupted by the length of time it required to conduct interviews, analyse documents and questionnaires. I may have been subjective and biased as an SMT member.

To address concerns regarding the lack of rigour in case study research, this study followed systematic and well-documented research procedures throughout the investigation. Methodological triangulation and the use of multiple data sources (Ahmed, 2024), including interviews, documents, and questionnaires, were applied to strengthen the credibility (Stahl & King, 2020) and validity (Hittleman & Simon, 2006) of the findings. Although the study focused on a limited number of participants, thick description and contextual analysis were used to support analytical rather than statistical generalisation. The large volume of data generated during the study was carefully organised, coded, and managed through structured data analysis procedures to reduce the risk of poor data management. Time-management strategies were

implemented to minimise disruptions to the researcher's official work schedule during data collection and analysis. Furthermore, reflexivity and continuous self-awareness were maintained to minimise subjectivity and potential bias arising from the researcher's role as an SMT member.

4.7 SAMPLING

Purposive sampling was employed as a non-probability sampling strategy for this study. This approach is appropriate since specific locations, individuals, and events were chosen on purpose to offer knowledge that is not available through other possibilities. In this instance, schools were purposefully selected to look into and examine school leaders' views on the contribution of EI to promoting teacher well-being. Teachers from specific rural primary and secondary schools in the White Hazy 2 Circuit made up the population.

4.7.1 The setting

White Hazy 2 Circuit is situated in Mpumalanga Province, in the Lowveld, Mbombela Municipality, in the Hazyview Municipal zone (City of Mbombela, 2020). White Hazy 2 Circuit is made up of 25 schools (eighteen primary schools and seven secondary schools) and is situated in a rural settlement called Masoyi. Situated in the Nsikazi District of Mpumalanga province, the Masoyi Community is a small tribal area made up of six communities. Masoyi is approximately 30 minutes from White River, a small town that is in close proximity to the Kruger National Park (Umsisi House, 2017). The name comes from Masoyi Mashego, a native chief. The name may refer to a location in Siswati that is surrounded by thorny trees, reflecting its geographical description. The population of the area is about 220,000 (Umsisi House, 2017).

The Masoyi community is located in a former homeland area that the Apartheid government had established before democracy was established. The majority of homelands were rural, underdeveloped regions that were cut off from economic opportunities. Because of this, the region is known for having poor infrastructure and high unemployment rates, which are currently around 75% (Umsisi House, 2017). In order to obtain employment in nearby towns, residents frequently have to travel great distances. Others send money home to support their families while living away from

home. People commute between these two bordering countries, Mozambique and Eswatini, which are not far from the area (Umsisi House, 2017).

Black South Africans made up 99% of the population, and 94% of them spoke SiSwati as their first language, according to census data (Moultrie & Dorrington, 2024). Four people make up the average household in this area. With a dependency ratio of 58.8%, 65.5% of the population is of working age (15–64 years). A total of 38.6% of those 20 years of age and older have no formal education, compared to nearly 34% who have been exposed to higher education.

The circuit spans around six main informal housing settlements, which are: Mganduzweni, Jerusalem, Swalala, Chochocho, Phola and Mahushu. Inadequate buildings, a lack of furniture, erratic water supplies, a shortage of LTSM, extremely bad access roads, and a lack of sports facilities are just a few of the ways that all 25 schools are characterised.

Ten schools, ideally a mix of primary and secondary schools, were randomly selected for the purpose of this study. Depending on the size of the school in terms of learner enrolment, two SMT members, either the principal and deputy principal or the principal and department head, were chosen for each school. Thus, the study included 20 participants. Two sampling phases were used: one for the location and one for the participants in the selected schools (Creswell, 2014).

With the assistance of the principals (in terms of allowing the researcher to conduct research in their schools and also providing the researcher with time and space to make presentations), 20 participating SMT members from the 10 schools were selected through criterion sampling (Creswell, 2014; Taherdoost, 2018). Selecting managers for this case study who are interested, willing to provide information about how they use EI to support teacher well-being in their schools, and ready to spend time on school grounds is essential. Because the study will be both exploratory and investigative, allowing for the creation of rich data and detailed descriptions, the researcher attempted to enlist a sufficient number of SMT members (Creswell, 2014). The study involved twenty SMT members selected from five primary schools and five secondary schools in the White Hazy 2 Circuit.

The study adopted a two-phase sampling strategy involving the random selection of ten schools and criterion sampling (Creswell, 2014), of twenty SMT members to

ensure the inclusion of participants with relevant knowledge and experience regarding the use of emotional intelligence (EI) to support teacher well-being. The inclusion of both primary and secondary schools enhanced the diversity of perspectives and strengthened the richness of the data collected. Criterion sampling was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to select participants who were willing, knowledgeable, and directly involved in school management practices relevant to the study. This approach supported the exploratory (Creswell, 2014), and investigative nature of the research by allowing for detailed descriptions and in-depth insights into participants' experiences. The method also promoted credibility by ensuring that participants were information-rich and capable of providing meaningful contributions to the study. However, the use of a relatively small sample from one circuit may limit the generalisability of the findings, and participant responses may have been influenced by personal bias or contextual factors within their schools.

4.8 RESEARCH PROCESS

4.8.1 Data collection procedure

This section discusses the data gathering procedures after discussing the case design for the current study. A number of interconnected tasks are used in the data collection procedure for qualitative research in order to obtain information that addresses the research objectives (Olivier, 2017). An outline of the data collection procedure is shown in Figure 4.2 below, followed by an explanation of each step.

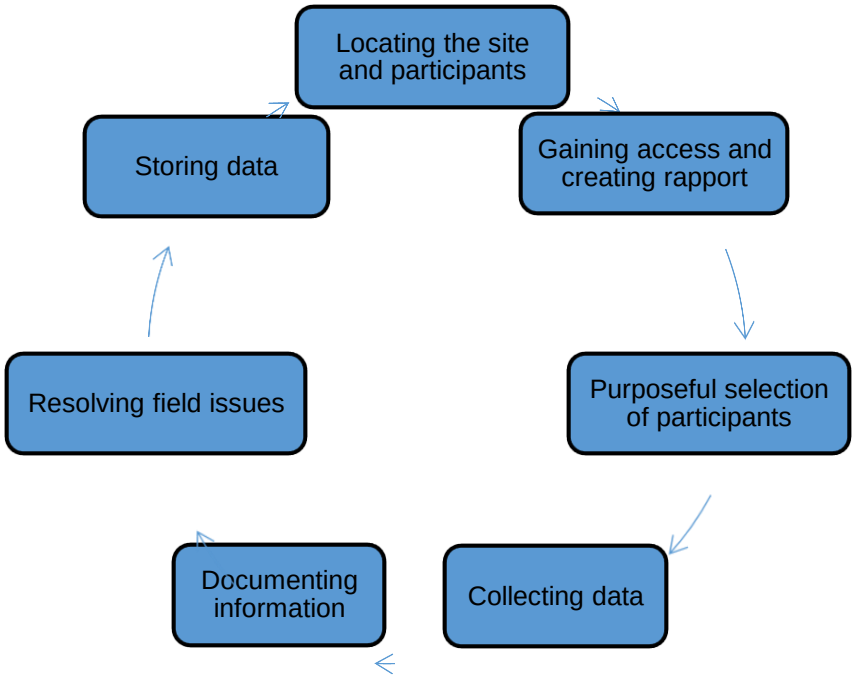


Figure 4.2: Data collection procedure (Creswell, 2014, p. 145)

4.8.1.1 Sampling the site

Based on geographic accessibility, ten conveniently and purposefully selected rural primary and secondary schools in the White Hazy 2 Circuit, located in the Ehlanzeni region of Mpumalanga Province, were included in the unit analysis for this case study (Creswell, 2014). It was chosen not to carry out the study in the researcher's own school since some challenges, including negative data or the sharing of personal information, would jeopardise the researcher, the school leadership, and the school itself (Creswell, 2014).

4.8.1.2 Gaining access and creating rapport

Ethics approval was received from the University of South Africa to conduct the study. The MDE and the White Hazy 2 Circuit Office also granted permission to conduct the study. Consequently, the principals of the public primary and secondary schools permitted the researcher to assist with data collection and access to the schools (Creswell, 2014). Building a strong relationship with the participants and getting their official consent in the form of a signed consent letter were crucial to gathering detailed information. Participants had enough time to review the information in the consent letter after being adequately informed by the researcher (Taherdoost, 2018).

4.8.1.3 Selection of participants and sampling procedures

According to Shaheen et al. (2019), the researcher's judgment and the study's objectives play a major role in selecting participants in qualitative research. Non-probability sampling is used in qualitative research when the objective is to give a thorough explanation rather than generalise results. The researcher chose to employ purposive sampling because it is the most efficient way to examine and address the study's research issues, despite the availability of several non-probability sampling methods (Taherdoost et al., 2016).

Two samples were taken: one for the site and one for the participants. The sample included 10 random primary and secondary schools in White Hazy 2 Circuit, which falls under the Masoyi Tribal Authority. The sample consisted of five primary and five secondary schools. As previously stated, the settlement (Masoyi) is distinguished by a high unemployment rate, inadequate infrastructure, and subpar living circumstances. The researcher selected 20 members of the SMT to take part, two from each of the ten schools, with the help of school principals, using criterion sampling (Creswell, 2014). It was crucial to choose managers for the case study who were accessible, eager to discuss the importance of EI in promoting teachers' well-being, and available on-site throughout the investigation. The aim was to have enough participating school leaders to produce rich data and detailed descriptions because the project was both exploratory and investigative (Creswell, 2014).

4.8.1.4 Data collection and documentation strategies

Data gathering is one of the most crucial phases of a study. In qualitative research, the quality of the study is largely determined by the completeness and quality of the data collected by the researcher (DEWI, 2022). Real-world settings were used for this research case study. Since the researcher had no aim of altering the behaviour, responses, or EI of school leaders, the phenomenon of interest, the data collection strategies, which included interviews, qualitative questionnaires, and document analysis, were non-intrusive.

A range of methods, such as qualitative surveys, interviews, and document analysis, was employed to collect rich, descriptive information in order to crystallise the data gathered for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Twenty individuals completed

qualitative questionnaires as part of the study. Based on their enthusiastic and engaged responses to the questionnaires, one SMT member from each school was chosen to take part in the one-on-one interviews. Regardless of whether any individuals choose to leave the study, the overall number of participants (SMT members) allowed the research to proceed.

4.8.1.4.1 Semi-structured individual interviews

The researcher used face-to-face semi-structured interviews for this study, as they were more flexible and informal (Mackiewicz, 2018). The participants were encouraged to respond and participate fully in the discussion, feeling more at ease. To address the study's research subjects, a series of pre-planned open-ended questions was developed well in advance (Mackiewicz, 2018). To avoid any interruptions, the interviews took place in a private setting at the selected schools after school hours at a time that suited the participants. Each participating SMT member was interviewed for thirty to sixty minutes, but some were more than happy to continue as needed. The time allocated to each participant was increased by around 10 minutes.

While conducting interviews has undeniable benefits, semi-structured interviews have distinct drawbacks (Mackiewicz, 2018). Issues unrelated to the current study occasionally distracted the participants and researcher while investigating EI with the participating SMT members to find new emergent pathways of inquiry. The same research questions were interpreted differently by a number of SMT members who took part in the study than what the researcher determined. The interviewer used a series of pre-planned key questions as guidelines to ensure that the same topics were covered with each participant and to maintain consistency across all participants. Every participant was prompted to add further or relevant information as the interview continued.

Advantages of semi-structured interviews

Participants can respond more creatively in semi-structured interviews, and the researcher may ask a variety of focused, open-ended questions (Mackiewicz, 2018). They could be customised based on the remarks made during the interviews and the participant's experience. Participants can provide historical data in addition to

providing the researcher with options throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews can help with in-depth discussions (Kakilla, 2021). By carefully analysing conversations and a range of initial superficial responses, semi-structured interviews usually allow the researcher to draw complex conclusions (Kakilla, 2021). A researcher can usually follow up on all verbal and nonverbal replies.

Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews

If the interviewer or participant becomes sidetracked by the conversation, semi-structured interviews may miss important questions. There is a danger that semi-structured interviews and other more unstructured interview styles may go astray, waste time, and overlook crucial topics (Igwenagu, 2016). It can be biased for participants in semi-structured interviews to be asked the same questions regardless of their gender, age, race, or religious affiliation. Not everyone is equally articulate and perceptive, and the presence of the researcher may skew responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Instead of providing information in a natural field setting, they do so in a designated location (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The conversation would be undermined by inadequate or unsatisfactory responses (Kakilla, 2021). Generally speaking, a semi-structured interview would be of low quality if the interviewer got sidetracked or attempted to extract an unexpected meaning from a dull conversation.

4.8.1.4.2 Qualitative questionnaires

The questionnaire approach asks participants to self-administer and "submit" their answers on their own, as opposed to requiring direct engagement with the researcher, like more discursive, collaborative qualitative data-generation procedures such as focus groups or interviews do (Tombs & Strange, 2024: p. 281). For participants with a busy schedule and managing many conflicting priorities at work, the many useful benefits that qualitative questionnaires provide may make their use in research initiatives more attractive.

Understanding and dealing with the issues of qualitative research integrity can help researchers avoid assuming that merely asking participants to respond to free-text questions constitutes qualitative research (LaDonna et al., 2018). This misconception may be explained by the lack of methodologically focused research on qualitative surveys (Braun et al., 2021).

Advantages of Qualitative questionnaires

Generally speaking, questionnaires are thought to be a more straightforward method of gathering data than focus groups, interviews, or ethnographic observations, putting a lot less strain on time and resources (Anderson et al., 2014). When used online, data is gathered and entered using specialised software, and it is simple to convert the data into spreadsheets and then into software for qualitative data analysis (Tombs & Strange, 2024).

Disadvantages of Qualitative questionnaires

When participants misread or misinterpret certain questions, it can be difficult to detect bias in the results. The validity of the findings may be impacted by the participants' capacity or willingness to provide information (Senosi, 2004). Due to the possibility of bias from failure to respond, which is hard to quantify, the low percentage of correctly completed questionnaires being returned raises serious issues (Kuphanga, 2024). Furthermore, the efficiency of questionnaires may be limited to participants who are more literate and interested, which would limit their applicability to a broader range of populations.

Additionally, control over questionnaires may be lost once they are made public, which could result in changes or abuse. The questionnaire's intrinsic rigidity presents another difficulty since it is difficult to modify the approach once it has been distributed (Kuphanga, 2024). It is challenging to interpret the data and ascertain the participants' true intentions when there are ambiguous answers or omissions (Kuphanga, 2024). Determining whether willing participants actually represent the desired population is another challenge that raises questions about the veracity of the data collected. Additionally, the questionnaire methodology is usually the slowest among data collection techniques, which could prolong the study's duration.

4.8.1.4.3 Document analysis

Davie and Wyatt (2021) define document analysis as a kind of qualitative research in which the researcher examines documents to provide context and voice to a specific subject.

In order to obtain insight into the phenomenon under study, the researcher focused on written communications, utilising document analysis as a data-gathering method (Maree, 2011). To understand the SMT's role in utilising EI in promoting teacher well-being in schools, administrative records (in this example, Quality Management Systems (QMS), school-based staff development programmes, and minutes of SMTs, departments, and staff meetings) were analysed.

These documents included crucial information that may be utilised to understand the SMT's comprehension and use of EI in promoting teacher well-being in schools.

Advantages of document analysis

The benefits of document analysis include accuracy, broad coverage (across a long period and many events), cost-effectiveness, availability without the authors' consent, documents that are not impacted by the research process, and the ability to review documents repeatedly (Mutekwe et al., 2017).

Document analysis was a successful and efficient way to gather data for this study because these documents are manageable and valuable resources. Compared with conducting one's own study, the process of obtaining and assessing documents has proven significantly more economical and time-efficient (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, documents are reliable ‘non-reactive’ data sources, meaning that even after being read and reviewed multiple times, they remain untouched by the researcher's influence or the study process (Mutekwe et al., 2017). Document analysis can identify scenarios to observe or questions to answer. As a result, document analysis may now be used to guarantee that the research is thorough and critical (Davie & Wyatt, 2021).

Disadvantages of document analysis

According to Mutekwe et al. (2017), the first issue to be taken into account in this study was that the documents were not prepared with data research goals in mind, necessitating further investigation abilities. A document may not have all the necessary material to address the research questions fully. There may be very little or no valuable information in certain texts. More research or reliance on extra papers than anticipated may result from incomplete or erroneous data in other documents (Mutekwe et al., 2017; Davie & Wyatt, 2021).

4.8.1.5 Data analysis and interpretation

4.8.1.5.1 Data analysis procedure

In a qualitative investigation, each step in assessing the various kinds of data gathered should be identified. Interpreting written and visual data is typically the objective. After the data has been disassembled, it should be reassembled (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In qualitative research, data analysis is based on an interpretive philosophy.

Qualitative data analysis is described by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as a process that includes many levels of analysis and sequential steps from the specific to the general. The qualitative data analysis approach used in this study is presented below, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

- **Step 1.** The researcher organised the data to get it ready for analysis. In accordance with the information sources used in this process, field notes were typed up, all visual materials were classified, interviews were transcribed, items were visually scanned, and data were sorted and structured into several categories.
- **Step 2.** The researcher read or examined every piece of information. This first phase provided a thorough summary of the data and an opportunity to evaluate its overall importance. For example, which general ideas were being expressed by the participants? What is the mood of the ideas? How did the researcher feel about the information's trustworthiness, intricacy, and wide applicability? Qualitative researchers can now start making general observations on the data in the margins of transcripts or observational field notes. For visual data, a concept notebook may begin to take shape.
- **Step 3.** All of the data was coded by the researcher. According to Rossman and Rallis (2012), coding is the process of arranging data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and putting a term in the margins that indicates a category. It entails segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or photos into groups using text data or images collected during data collection, then labelling those categories with a term that is frequently based on the participant's actual language (referred to as an in vivo term) (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

- **Step 4.** The researcher developed themes and a description, describing the scene or individuals, as well as the study themes or issues, using the coding method. A detailed portrayal of people, places, or activities in a setting is called a description (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers can develop codes for this description. Writing in-depth descriptions for case studies, ethnographies, and narrative research projects can benefit from this analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, the researcher developed a few subjects or categories using coding. These topics were frequently used as headings in study findings or in the findings section of a dissertation or thesis after emerging as important findings in qualitative research. Themes and descriptions were developed, and the scenes or individuals, as well as the study themes or issues, were detailed using the coding method. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a description is a detailed portrayal of people, places, or events in a setting. Researchers can develop codes for this description. Writing in-depth descriptions for case studies, ethnographies, and narrative research projects can benefit from this analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, I developed a few subjects or categories using coding. These topics were frequently used as headings in study findings sections (or in the findings section of a dissertation or thesis) after emerging as important findings in qualitative research.
- **Step 5.** The most popular way to communicate the analysis's conclusions is to use a narrative passage (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This could include a chronology of events, a detailed examination of multiple subjects (including sub-themes, specific instances, quotations, and various viewpoints), or a discussion with recurring themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Tables, figures, and images are often used by qualitative researchers to enhance their discussions, just as in case studies.

Figure 4.3 presents an overview of the steps followed in the data analysis and the interpretation process of the present study.

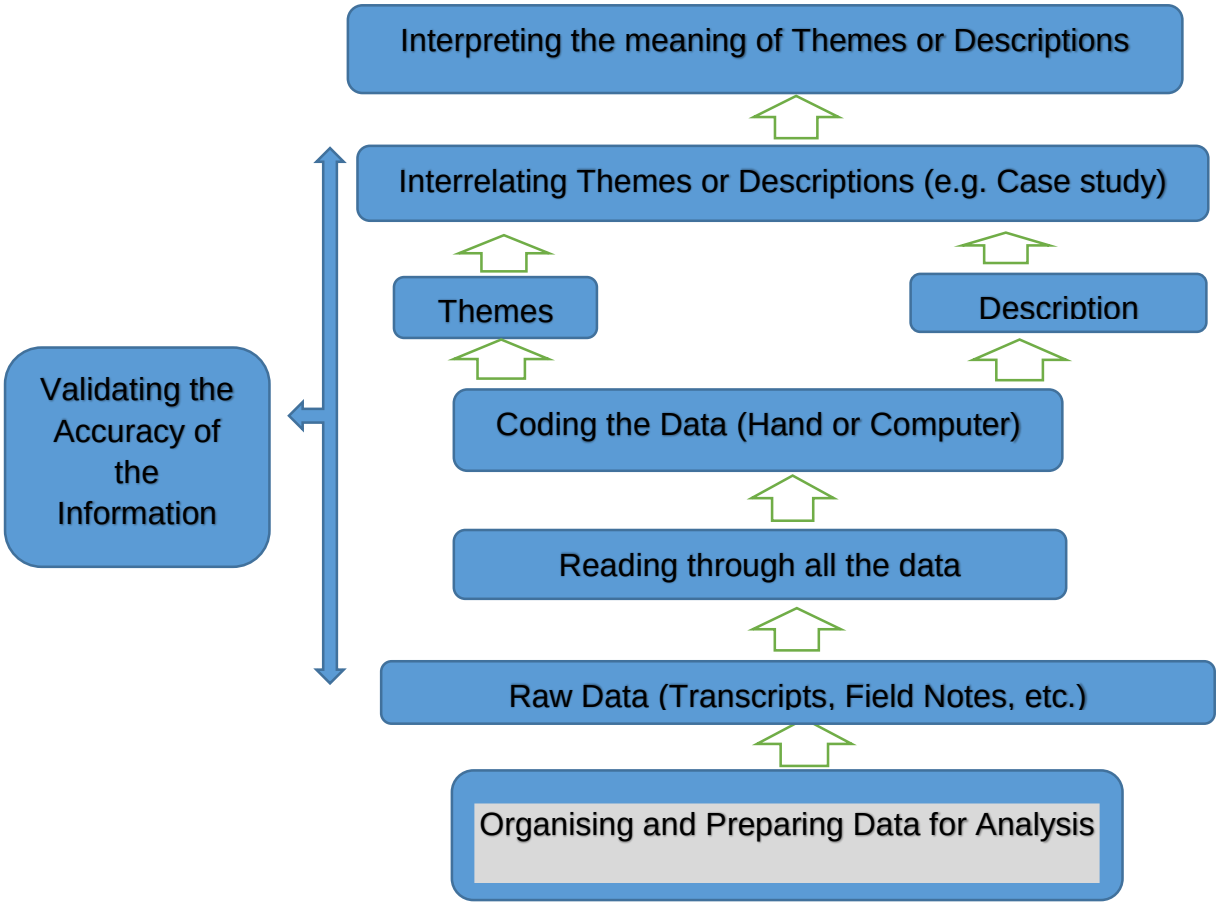


Figure 4.3: Data analysis in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 186)

4.8.1.6 Data interpretation procedures

In qualitative research, interpretation entails a series of procedures, including a summary of the findings, a comparison with existing literature, a discussion of one's interpretation of the data, and a statement of limitations and future research directions. It emphasises the knowledge gained from conducting the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In line with the above procedures, the researcher in the current study compiled a summary of findings, which were compared with existing literature, followed by discussions on data interpretation and a statement of limitations. The researcher's perception of these lessons may be based on the knowledge they bring to the inquiry from their own experiences, culture, and background.

The current study's research findings were interpreted by comparing them to information from theories or the literature. In this manner, the researcher suggested

that the results either supported or contradicted earlier findings. It also raised new issues that need to be addressed, issues that the data and analysis did not foresee at the start of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Additionally, transformative approaches to qualitative research utilised the questioning approach. Using a theoretical lens, the researcher developed interpretations of the current qualitative study that demanded an agenda for reform and change. Researchers could describe how ideas and the entire body of general literature on the topic would be compared with the narrative result (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because of this, interpretation in qualitative research can take many different forms, be customised to fit different designs, and be flexible enough to convey action, personal, and research-based meanings.

4.8.1.7 Data storage

To keep track of all the information gathered, a filing system was created. The qualitative information collected was obtained from documents and participant interview transcripts. According to Creswell (2014), specific data storage concepts were used. For example, all data was stored in password-protected folders on a password-protected computer, and regular computer backups were performed. Anonymity for both the schools and the participants was crucial. All other data sources, including the schools' identities, were concealed, as were the identities of the participants' informed consent letters.

4.9 QUALITY CRITERIA – TRUSTWORTHINESS

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are some of the key components that make up the concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Ahmed, 2024). An overview and explanation of the strategies used are provided in Table 4.2, together with a definition of the relevant quality criteria required for establishing credibility

Table 4.2: Measures of trustworthiness

Quality criteria strategy	Explanation	Quality criteria description	Appendix page
Member checks	Some or all participants are given access to data transcripts for comments (Varpio et al., 2017). The accuracy of the research findings is determined by the participating SMTs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants were given the chance to provide details and assess the reliability and accuracy of the results (Creswell, 2013).	Credibility Authenticity Dependability	272-282
Extended interaction with participants	To gain the participants' trust, collect sufficient, rich, and meaningful data to pinpoint key concerns and eliminate misleading data (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013).	Dependability Credibility	163-166 259-263 266-270
Different approaches to gathering data Crystallisation	Use a range of data sources, such as questionnaires, interviews, and qualitative questionnaires, to prevent bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).	Confirmability Credibility Dependability	163-166 259-263 266-270
Reflexivity	Reflect on the data analysis process by keeping a research notebook, in which you document thoughts, feelings, experiences, and decisions made during the research process.	Authenticity Credibility Confirmability	290
Rich, thick descriptions and field notes during the data collection process	Readers can apply knowledge from field notes and detailed descriptions to other contexts due to similarities (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017).	Transferability Credibility Dependability	290
Building an audit journal	Documents detailing the study's methodology, including raw data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, as well as how working assumptions were created, improved, and evaluated using the data, are included in the audit journal (McLeod, 2025).	Dependability Confirmability Authenticity	163-175 259-263 266-270

Below is a discussion of the four essential elements of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

4.9.1 Credibility and trustworthiness

"How congruent are the findings with reality?" is the credibility question (Anderson et al., 2014, p. 26). As previously stated, this is a highly subjective issue that relies on

individual assessments. Internal validity concerns in quantitative research are similar to those concerning the consistency of findings in qualitative research. Understanding how the reported findings "hang together" is one objective because the concepts should be related to one another (Anderson et al., 2014, p. 26). There is no guarantee that every response to coherence credibility will be the same, in contrast to quantitative investigations. Both the researcher(s) and the reader(s) establish credibility.

According to Mertens (2018), credibility refers to the level of assurance over the accuracy of the research's findings. Mertens (2018) defines credibility as the degree to which research findings accurately reflect participants' initial opinions and are trustworthy, based on the original data. A qualitative researcher may employ time sampling, reflexivity (through a field journal), triangulation, member checking, peer evaluation, interview technique, establishing the researcher's authority, and structural coherence as credibility strategies to demonstrate the rigour of the investigation (Anney, 2014).

Using the various triangulation techniques is one strategy to boost credibility (Ahmed, 2024). Triangulation is the process of regularly identifying distinct patterns using several data sources or field procedures. Replicability in an initial empirical investigation is distinct from consistently finding similar outcomes across many data sources (Anderson et al., 2014).

To lend legitimacy to the current study, it was important to continue interacting with the participating school managers and to spend sufficient time in the field before concluding the study's findings (Mertens, 2014). During the process of gathering sufficient, rich, and valuable data, the researcher earned the trust of the participating school administrators (Creswell, 2014). Member checks were carried out after the initial analysis of the in-person interviews with the participating managers, and they were allowed to examine and comment on the data analysis (Creswell, 2014).

4.9.2 Dependability as part of trustworthiness

Dependability is the methodical record of research data that explains the research procedures and decisions made during the study (Ahmed, 2024). Every step of the research process is meticulously documented. This encourages transparency and enables others to replicate the study or assess the validity of the findings by using the

same procedures and understanding the reasoning behind the choices made (Ahmed, 2024).

Maintaining a record of decisions made throughout the study, such as changes to methodology or analysis, promotes transparency and traceability (Ahmed, 2024). Another tactic to guarantee confirmability was to maintain an audit trail (Ahmed, 2024). It was essential to seek guidance and direction from the research supervisor, who is interested in well-being, particularly in the field of education, to further enhance the study's confirmability.

By offering thorough explanations of the data gathered, the aim was to establish dependability throughout the study. Numerous data sources were used, including detailed field notes and transcriptions, in addition to participant verification of the data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018b). Field notes were used to complement interviews by capturing real-time observations, contextual details, and non-verbal cues. This enhanced the richness and depth of the data while supporting a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. They also strengthened triangulation by allowing comparison with interview transcripts, improving credibility and confirmability. Overall, field notes contributed to greater rigour, transparency, and trustworthiness in the research process.

In addition to cross-referencing data and validating conclusions, the researcher also used crystallisation to look for recurring themes that might support the dependability of the results. To show flexibility and adaptability to change, the researcher also coded and recorded the data and kept an eye on the quality of interview transcriptions and audio recordings (Anderson et al., 2014). Audio recordings were used as an important data-gathering technique to ensure accuracy, completeness, and credibility during the interview process. Recording the interviews enabled the researcher to capture participants' responses verbatim, including tone, emphasis, and pauses, which may have been overlooked through note-taking alone.

This approach enhanced the quality of the data by allowing repeated listening during transcription and analysis, thereby reducing the risk of misinterpretation or omission of important information. Audio recordings (Anderson et al., 2014) also supported consistency and transparency in the research process, as they provided a reliable

record for verification and coding purposes. Furthermore, the use of recordings allowed the researcher to focus fully on engaging with participants during interviews rather than concentrating solely on taking notes. Ethical considerations were maintained by obtaining participants' informed consent and ensuring that all recordings were securely stored and treated confidentially throughout the study.

To avoid bias in the research, it was also crucial to regularly reflect on the journal of the research process (Creswell, 2013).

4.9.3 Confirmability as part of trustworthiness

The impartiality and objectivity of the results, guaranteeing that they are unaffected by the researcher's preferences or prejudices, is known as confirmability (Kakar et al., 2023). Researchers use a range of methods, including peer debriefing, member checking, and reflexive journaling, to strengthen the confirmability of their findings (Amin et al., 2020; Morse et al., 2002; Rose & Johnson, 2020).

In order to reduce researcher bias and validate interpretations, peer debriefing involves consulting with peers or experts (Amin et al., 2020). By offering a variety of perspectives and gathering input from peers or experts, one can lessen personal biases and validate interpretations, enhancing objectivity and confirming the veracity of the results (Ahmed, 2024). Member checking, a process in which participants thoroughly examine and verify the veracity of the outcomes, increases the degree of confirmability (Ahmed, 2024).

Another essential component of confirmability is member checking, which involves enabling participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the results (Ahmed, 2024). Including participants in the verification process guarantees that their viewpoints and experiences are accurately represented, thereby enhancing the findings' confirmability by affording them the opportunity to validate or modify the interpretations (Ahmed, 2024).

Another confirmability element is a reflective notebook, which is utilised to record personal opinions, biases, and reflections during the study (Ahmed, 2024). A research journal was used to enhance confirmability by documenting reflections, decisions, and interpretations throughout the study. This created an audit trail that improved

transparency in data collection and analysis. It also helped the researcher critically reflect on personal assumptions and minimise bias. Overall, the journal strengthened the rigour, reflexivity, and trustworthiness of the research process. By keeping a journal, researchers can better track how their attitudes, biases, and ideas change during the study process (Ahmed, 2024). This introspective approach increases transparency and clarifies the subjectivity of the researcher, supporting the validity of the findings. Using a range of data sources, such as documents, interviews, qualitative questionnaires, and a research journal, the researcher attempted to maximise confirmability in this study to reduce bias.

4.9.4 Transferability in trustworthiness

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings can be used in other situations or contexts (Kakar et al., 2023; Riazi et al., 2023). Qualitative researchers attempt to give thorough and detailed explanations of the study's setting, participants, and procedures in order to boost the possibility of transferability. When researchers provide readers with comprehensive explanations enabling them to evaluate how applicable the findings are to similar situations, the study's transferability is enhanced.

Participants in the current case study were chosen from within a particular community. Because the results did not necessarily represent the views of the entire community, they could not be generalised (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, the primary goal of the current study was to learn more about school leadership's perspectives regarding the role of EI in teachers' well-being in rural South African schools. Mertens (2014) asserts that the research findings may give other education researchers the chance to compare and contrast the many studies that have been conducted and determine whether the conclusions of this study are potentially applicable to other situations.

4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It was crucial to follow stringent ethical guidelines, as this study involved human subjects and sensitive data about them (Mertens, 2018). Both the study itself and the research field are subject to ethical considerations. As a result, all applicable legislation and moral principles were observed (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2018). During this study, the researcher provided detailed information on several key ethical

guidelines, such as permission to conduct research, informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality and privacy, protection from harm, beneficence, non-maleficence, and data access (Mertens, 2018).

4.10.1 Expertise of the researcher

As a member of the SMT and a teacher with extensive experience, the researcher's background provided a solid foundation for his research experience. The researcher became interested in EI and teacher well-being because of his postgraduate studies in educational psychology. He gained the interviewing abilities and competencies from these experiences that helped him stay objective, unbiased, and empathetic throughout the research process. It also helped him come to terms with his choices and potential solutions to challenges. Additionally, his research supervisor's extensive and knowledgeable background in educational psychology provided him with invaluable support throughout the process.

4.10.2 Permission to conduct research, informed consent, and voluntary participation

The Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa's Faculty of Education granted permission for this study to be conducted on ten public schools from the White Hazy 2 Circuit and the MDE.

Research involving participants should be both scientifically valid and carried out in compliance with accepted ethical norms. Research ethics give guidelines for the ethical conduct of studies involving human subjects (Manandhar & Joshi, 2020). It guides and supervises researchers working on health-related projects in addition to safeguarding human research participants to ensure a high standard of ethics (Manandhar & Joshi, 2020).

Giving participants thorough information about the study may influence their decision to participate (Cohen et al., 2011). This is referred to as informed consent. Four components are suggested by Cohen et al. (2011) and Creswell (2012) for informed consent: competence, voluntarism, comprehension, and full disclosure. When participants are selected based on their decision-making skills rather than their mental capacity or limitations, it is referred to as competence. Voluntary participation involves

respecting individuals by ensuring they have given informed consent, ensuring they are willing to participate, and that they are not being threatened or pressured. Full information occurs when participants provide their consent after being fully informed about any potential risks associated with the study. Finally, but just as importantly, understanding demonstrates that participants are knowledgeable, fully aware of the purpose of the study, and able to comprehend the information that is offered.

The researcher contacted principals and provided them with an informed consent letter and consent form after receiving approval from the Circuit office and the MDE. This was done to obtain permission to research the chosen schools. They got an opportunity to discuss the study in more detail and ask any questions they may have had during the first meeting with the study's lead researcher. The researcher had the opportunity to explain the study and encourage interested SMT members to participate. An informative letter and permission form outlining the purpose of the study were sent to all interested SMT members. The researcher also made it clear that participants could leave the study at any time. Participants were assured that they would not be fined or lose any benefits if they decided to leave the study at any point. Participants in the study were informed that they would not receive compensation for taking part.

4.10.3 Confidentiality, anonymity, and trust

According to Igwenagu (2016), a qualitative researcher builds a relationship with the participants, but it is crucial to understand that this relationship cannot be equal because the researcher typically has more authority. The researcher had to safeguard the information provided by the participating SMTs and their right to privacy so that their identities could not be compromised (Cohen, 2012). The researcher upheld the moral values of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to privacy throughout the study to safeguard the participants' identities (Babbie, 2013). Anonymity is defined by Babbie (2013) and Creswell (2014) as maintaining the confidentiality of the participants' identities.

Throughout the research process, the names and personal information of the participating managers and the chosen schools were kept confidential. The study's research data did not contain the names of the participating managers, the schools, or their personal information. Only the researcher and his supervisor were aware of

the names of the participating managers and schools. To protect the managers' and schools' identities, pseudonyms were used. Additionally, the researcher requested permission from the participants to transcribe their verbatim discussions and interviews.

In order to secure participant identification, composite stories were also used when presenting the data. The researcher explained to participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer a question if they believed it would reveal sensitive information before they signed the informed consent document. Furthermore, the researcher assured the participants that their questionnaire responses and interview transcriptions would be securely stored in password-protected computer files. This was essential to gaining their trust. Only the researcher and his supervisor had access to the file, and the data provided by the participating school managers would only be used for this study’s interviews and completed questionnaires.

4.10.4 Beneficence and non-maleficence

According to Cohen et al. (2011), there was no known instance of deception during the study, and participants did not suffer any harm. Participants should be shielded from all forms of damage, including physical, psychological, and emotional. To achieve a positive result, Mertens (2018) defines the principle of non-maleficence as not harming others or causing the least harm possible. No participant suffered any harm during the study, in accordance with this principle.

4.11 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher described and justified the strategies, processes, and research techniques used in the study. The researcher provided a thorough explanation for selecting qualitative research as a methodological paradigm and interpretivism as a meta-theoretical paradigm. The decision to use a case study as a research design was justified in accordance with the previously stated paradigmatic presumptions. Thereafter, sample techniques, participant selection, and the many phases of this investigation, along with the techniques used to gather and record the data, were discussed. The chapter concluded by expanding upon the process of data

analysis and interpretation, followed by the study's ethical issues and quality standards.

The next chapter presents the study's findings by outlining the themes, sub-themes, and categories that surfaced during the thematic analysis and interpretation stage. Categorisation of the data was driven by inclusion and exclusion criteria for each theme. Additionally, verbatim quotes from the questionnaires completed by the participating SMTs, interviews, and other data sources, including official school administrative records and the research journal, strengthen the study's conclusions.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 discussed the research methodology, procedures, and strategies employed in the study.

This chapter presents the results of this study by outlining the themes,[1] sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the thematic analysis and interpretation phase. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for each theme guided the classification of data. The findings of this study are supported by verbatim quotations from the participating SMTs' questionnaires, interviews, and excerpts from other data sources, such as official school administrative documents and a research journal maintained by the researcher.

5.2 RESULTS AND THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

This section outlines the themes, sub-themes, and categories developed from the thematic analysis of the raw data, which included participant questionnaires and participant verbatim interview transcripts. Following data analysis and interpretation, four themes were developed:

- **Theme 1: Emotional intelligence as a catalyst for supportive leadership**
  Sub-theme 1.1: Knowledge, self-awareness and adaptability in leadership practices
    Category 1.1.1: School leaders' ability to understand the nature of EI and respond to teachers' emotional needs to foster emotional resilience
    Category 1.1.2: Self-awareness and empathy as tools for conflict resolution and morale boosting
    Category 1.1.3: Adaptability and reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making
  Sub-theme 1.2: Emotional regulation in high-stress contexts
    Category 1.2.1: Managing emotional responses during crises (e.g., resource shortages, learner trauma)

[1] In presenting the results, the following codes apply: S = School, P = Participant, Int. = Interview, Qre. = Questionnaire

Category 1.2.2: Leaders' recognition of their emotional states and their impact on staff

Category 1.2.3: Modelling conflict management and resilience for staff

- **Theme 2: Emotional intelligence and teacher motivation**

Sub-theme 2.1: Fostering well-being through trust and meaningful acknowledgement

Category 2.1.1: The role of emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement

Category 2.2.2: Open, honest, and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers

Category 2.2.3: Trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale

Sub-theme 2.2: Encouraging autonomy and professional growth

Category 2.2.1: Empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership

Category 2.2.2: Linking EI to teacher self-efficacy**,** stress management and positive reinforcement

- **Theme 3: Emotional intelligence in navigating rural school challenges**

*Sub-theme 3.1**:** Contextual sensitivity and cultural intelligence*

Category 3.1.1: Understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities

Category 3.1.2: Adapting leadership styles to local emotional norms and values

Sub-theme 3.2: Fostering collective resilience in a resource–constrained setting

Category 3.2.1: Using EI to build a sense of community and shared purpose

Category 3.2.2: Leaders' role in buffering stress and advocating for support

Category 3.2.3: Emotional toll of role overload on teachers

- **Theme 4: Emotional intelligence and teacher well-being outcomes**

Sub-theme 4.1: *Emotional climate and staff morale*

Category 4.1.1: How emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school's emotional tone

Category 4.1.2: Correlation with job satisfaction and reduced burnout.

Sub-theme 4.2: *Sustaining well-being practices by practising safety and emotional security*

Category 4.2.1: Long-term strategies informed by EI (e.g., peer support, wellness initiatives)

Category 4.2.2: Leadership's role in institutionalising emotional well-being

Verbatim quotations are reflected by the number of participants who made statements in the interview and individual questionnaires. Document analysis was also done through reviewing agendas and minutes for SMTs and staff meetings. The research, as indicated in Chapter 3, employed three data collection mechanisms. The researcher allocated codes that denote the school, participants, and data collection strategy.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Emotional intelligence as a catalyst for supportive leadership

The researcher discusses this theme in two sub-themes: 1.1 Knowledge, self-awareness and adaptability in leadership practices and 1.2 Emotional regulation in high-stress contexts. These sub-themes explore the SMT's understanding of interpersonal aspects of EI in the workplace.

Theme 1 highlights how emotionally attuned leadership fosters trust, empathy, and open communication in schools. The knowledge that school leadership (that is, the SMTs[2]) have on EI is explored. Having EI is critical in shaping their ability to support teachers effectively. In this study, SMTs' views, understanding, and knowledge of EI are broadly represented. Therefore, the first theme centres on exploring SMTs' knowledge of the concept of EI, approached from their perspective as school leaders. Leaders who are self-aware and empathetic can better respond to teachers' emotional and professional needs. This emotional insight helps manage stress, resolve conflict, and build morale. In rural schools, such leadership is essential for sustaining teacher well-being in challenging environments.

[2] The concepts of school leadership and SMT are used interchangeably in this study.

Table 5.1 presents a summary of the first theme with the related sub-themes, categories, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the theme:

Table 5.1: Overview of Theme 1

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">THEME 1
Emotional intelligence as a catalyst for supportive leadership
EI is generally concerned with how people comprehend, regulate, and express their feelings, as well as those of others. Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills are all components of EI, which is essential for successful relationship building, communication, and negotiating challenging social situations.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focuses on participating school leaders' (SMTs') general understanding of EI, self-awareness, and how they show adaptability in their leadership and their emotional regulation.</td><td colspan="3">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating school leaders' (SMTs') general understanding of EI, self-awareness, and how they show adaptability in their leadership and their emotional regulation.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 1.1
Knowledge, self-awareness and adaptability in leadership practices</td><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 1.2
Emotional regulation in high-stress contexts</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 1.1.1
School leaders' ability to understand the nature of EI and respond to teachers' emotional needs to foster emotional resilience</td><td>Category 1.1.2
Self-awareness and empathy as tools for conflict resolution and morale boosting</td><td>Category 1.1.3
Adaptability, reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making</td><td>Category 1.2.1
Managing emotional responses during crises (e.g., resource shortages, learner trauma)</td><td>Category 1.2.2
Leaders' recognition of their emotional states and their impact on staff</td><td>Category 1.2.3
Modelling conflict management and resilience for staff</td></tr>
</table>

5.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Knowledge, self-awareness and adaptability in leadership practices

This sub-theme explores the participating SMTs' knowledge, self-awareness, and adaptability in their leadership roles. The sub-themes are discussed in three categories. The first relates to the school leaders' ability to understand the nature of EI and respond to teachers' emotional needs to foster emotional resilience. The second category explores school leaders' self-awareness and empathy as tools for conflict resolution and morale boosting. Lastly, the third category explores school leaders' adaptability and reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making.

5.2.1.1.1 Category 1.1.1: School leaders' ability to understand the nature of EI and respond to teachers' emotional needs to foster emotional resilience

Participants' knowledge and understanding of the nature of EI were explored. Different views were expressed. For example, Participant 5 described emotional resilience as*:*

> *In defining emotional resilience, it is better to start by defining resilience…it is a state whereby a person can withstand challenging situations in life…emotional resilience refers to a mature state of emotions where a person remains composed emotionally even when the going gets tough* (SD, P5, Int. 5).

Participant 1 stated that emotional resilience is*:*

> *…being able to show strong emotions under difficult situations…having nerves of steel…to keep going when the going gets tough.* (SA, P1, Int. 1.)

Participants 2 and 10's responses were similar in their definition of emotional resilience. Both defined emotional resilience as the ability to adapt and flourish under stressful situations:

> …*emotional resilience has to do with the ability to adapt under stress and be able to flourish* (SA, P2, Int. 2).
>
> …*being able to manage stressful situations successfully and being able to adapt no matter how bad the conditions are* (SI, P10, Int. 10).

It is evident from the above participants' extracts that emotional resilience commonly refers to a situation in which individuals can adapt and prosper under stressful situations and be able to bounce back, no matter how challenging life may be.

With regard to EI, Participant 3 defined the concept as:

> *…the whole being of a person… it asks these questions: how motivated are you in what you are doing? What social skills one have, how empathetic are you towards other people, especially those you work with, and how do you manage your emotions?* (SB, P3, Qre. 3)

The paragraph highlights that EI has a holistic impact on individuals. According to Participant 3, EI affects motivation, social skills, the ability to handle daily challenges, and compassion in the workplace. It influences all aspects of a person's well-being—mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual, showing that EI plays a key role in overall life management and personal development. Participant 12 described EI as:

> *…when you deal with your own emotions and other people's emotions, and how to handle interpersonal relationships* (SF, P12, Qre. 12).

In his reflection, Participant 12 emphasised that knowledge of EI is crucial for managing interpersonal relationships by improving communication, fostering empathy, aiding conflict resolution, and helping people understand and regulate their own emotions as well as those of others, all of which can be utilised to strengthen emotional resilience.

Not all participants had a common understanding of EI. For example, Participant 15 understood EI:

> *…as a vital skill which is important in the workplace: emotional intelligence is a vital skill set for teachers, administrators and staff, to effectively support learners' academic, social and emotional growth* (SH, P15, Qre. 15).

Participant 15's understanding of EI differed the most, as it did not highlight the importance of an individual's capacity to understand and manage their own emotions and those of others.

According to participants' understanding of EI, it appears that being able to understand and manage individual emotions and those of others is the main component of EI. Participant 13's definition of EI ties well with those of other participants, especially in the individual aspect of EI:

> *…the ability to deal with one's emotions in different situations… control one's temper, and use acceptable language in responding to challenging situations* (SG, P13, Qre. 13).

Participant 13 highlights the importance of handling one's emotions as the core element of EI, which assists in dealing with challenging situations.

Participant 1 described EI as being able to understand oneself and the people around you:

> *Emotional intelligence is being able to understand yourself and the people around you…their thinking, skills, knowledge, and attitude, and utilise the information for the benefit of the institution to enhance performance and cohesion* (SA, P1, Qre. 1).

Participant 4's view is that EI is:

> *…the ability to understand and manage your own emotions and those of others…it means being resilient amid challenges and ensuring that employees feel supported emotionally and professionally…it is about compassion and relational strength* (SD, P4, Qre. 7).

Similarly, Participant 5 agreed that EI is:

> *…the ability to manage and understand your own emotions…the ability to understand and be able to influence other people's emotions* (SC, P6, Qre. 6).

Participants 4 and 7 emphasised the need not only for self-awareness but also for awareness of others' needs and for influencing them positively.

5.2.1.1.2 Category 1.1.2: Self-awareness and empathy as a tool for conflict resolution and morale boosting

This category focuses on participants' perceptions of self-awareness and empathy as elements of EI that are critical for school management to resolve conflicts and to raise teacher morale by understanding and putting the elements into practice at work.

Effective leadership and the cultivation of positive school environments are significantly influenced by school management's understanding and application of key EI components. These include self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation. By integrating these elements, school leaders can foster a more supportive and collaborative atmosphere for both staff and learners.

Participant 1 particularly emphasised the importance of self-awareness, identifying it as a fundamental EI component that school leaders should understand and implement within the professional setting:

> *…self-knowledge that is obtained through self-evaluation and introspection. It assists in the creation of self-perception to effect positive behavioural change* (SA, P1, Qre. 1).

Participant 13 explained self-awareness as:

> *…the ability to deal with one's emotions in different situations. Controlling your temper and using acceptable language in responding to different and challenging situations* (SG, P13, Qre, 13).

Participant 8 defined self-awareness as:

> *…an anchor of professional integrity. When teachers are conscious of their emotional triggers, they are less likely to let frustration and stress influence how they treat learners* (SD, P8, Qre. 8).

Participant 8 further explained that:

> *…in our rural context, where teachers are often emotionally drained due to personal stress, financial challenges, large classes and inconsistent learner attendance, being self-aware allows teachers and managers, in this case, to pause, assess their emotional state and choose constructive rather than reactive behaviour* (SD, P8, Qre. 8).

Most participants identified empathy as the most important component of EI, which school managers should understand and practice in the workplace. Participant 8 highlighted empathy as:

> *…important in handling daily challenges…it is important to be considerate and put yourself in the shoes of colleagues…colleagues have several challenges…it is important for us as managers to empathise and provide support from time to time* (SD, P8, Qre. 8).

Similar to the view above, Participant 13 highlighted empathy as:

> *… very important…enable managers to be more sensitive and understanding to others …understanding and accepting differences in other people* (SG, P13, Qre. 13).

Participant 16 also highlighted empathy as one component which is important for school managers in a way that:

> *…it shows compassion and creates a warm environment between the manager and colleagues… it encourages colleagues to open up about the challenges that they face daily* (SH, P16, Qre. 16).

According to participants' understanding of EI, it seems that being able to understand and manage individual emotions and those of others was the main component of EI. Participant 13's definition of EI ties well with those of other participants, especially in the individual aspect of EI:

> *…the ability to deal with one's emotions in different situations… control one's temper, and use acceptable language in responding to challenging situations* (SG, P13, Qre. 13).

Participant 13 highlights the importance of managing one's own emotions as a core element of EI, which helps deal with challenging situations. According to the above definition, it can therefore be argued that EI can be used to manage the daily challenges that individuals face.

With regard to the discussion of conflict management, most participants were eloquent as it relates more to situations they encounter on a daily basis in the workplace. Almost all the participants similarly defined conflict management. Participants 1, 5 and 8 defined conflict management as the ability to manage and handle conflict among colleagues, whether they are quarrelling or have personal differences:

> *…conflict management has to do with individuals being able to manage conflict among individuals…being able to successfully intervene under challenging situations between individuals or colleagues* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

Similar to the other participants, Participant 8 defined conflict management as:

> *…the ability of individuals or leaders to manage stress among people, or in this case, colleagues* (SG, P8, Int. 8).

Participants 4 and 9 described conflict management as an acquired skill that is learned (academically) rather than naturally occurring on an individual basis.

Participant 9 defined conflict management as:

> *…a set of skills which individuals acquire through academic institutions…help in managing or dealing with conflict among colleagues…it involves a high level of intelligence in managing conflict in the workplace, thus bringing peace and harmony* (SH, P9, Int. 9).

Participant 4 also agreed that:

> *…conflict management is a skill of managing conflict among individuals…this skill can be acquired through studies by managers on how to bring about harmony in the workplace for the organisation to function effectively* (SC, P4, Int. 4).

On their definition of conflict management, all participants agreed that the process involves managing conflict among individuals or groups, which works towards bringing harmony, particularly in the workplace.

5.2.1.1.3 Category 1.1.3: Adaptability and reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making

Both leaders and their employees need to be adaptable in the workplace. Effectively managing workplace changes, being more adaptable, and increasing productivity are critical for leaders and their employees. There are benefits to adaptability at both personal and professional levels. Adaptable people can deal with change with calmness, tenacity, and reason. Developing the ability to accept change can benefit people's mental and physical well-being.

Participant 4 defined adaptability as:

> *…considering different behaviours of staff and being able to adapt accordingly, accommodate and understand everyone regardless of their behaviour (*SC, P4, Int. 4).

Participant 10 defined adaptability as:

> *…being able to adapt and adjust to any kind of situation or challenges that one can encounter daily in the workplace…much as it is important for managers to*

be adaptable, it is also important for those who are led to be adaptable to thrive and rise above any challenge (SI, P10, Int. 10).

Participant 2, on the other hand, defined the concept as:

> *…the ability of an individual to adapt to changes in their surroundings…one's ability to be adaptable is directly impacted by changes when considering career goals…being able to react swiftly to changes is one way that people can demonstrate their adaptability* (SA, P2, Int. 2).

One could argue that managers and staff who are unable to adapt to organisational changes may harm any organisation, thereby reducing productivity. Participant 8 further highlighted the importance of adaptability in the workplace, indicating that:

> *… it is more about being flexible or versatile…allows managers or employees to continue and succeed under challenging or volatile situations* (SG, P8, Int. 8).

Working with co-workers allows managers to exchange knowledge that enhances their ability to adapt. It is possible to communicate support, direction, and advice, which fosters a positive work atmosphere.

Concerning reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making, Participant 1 indicated that one can develop emotionally intelligent decision-making skills:

> *…by observing a situation in its context and interacting with oneself and others…making some reflections on issues and flexibly developing strategies…to suit a particular circumstance* (SA, P1, Qre. 1).

In echoing the same views, Participant 7 indicated that one can develop EI and decision-making skills:

> *…through regular reflection and mentoring, and also by engaging in professional development on emotional intelligence…creating platforms for honest conversations and practising gratitude and peer recognition* (SD, P7, Qre. 7).

Participant 9 highlighted the importance of reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making:

> *…as fundamental in assisting school leaders to review their practices to self-correct and avoid practices that may lead to team members being demotivated* (SE, P9, Qre. 9).

Because it enables people to identify and understand their own emotions and how those emotions affect their behaviour and interactions with others, self-reflection is essential to EI. Without self-reflection, people find it difficult to control their emotions effectively, form enduring bonds with others, and comprehend how their actions affect other people.

Leaders who regularly reflect become more self-aware by identifying emotional patterns and triggers. Leaders can enhance their interpersonal effectiveness and self-regulation by engaging in intentional emotional learning through reflection.

5.2.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Emotional regulation in high stress contexts

The ability to effectively manage emotions (emotional regulation) is crucial for preserving mental well-being and overcoming obstacles in life – it is the capacity to control and react to emotional situations positively and healthily.

This sub-theme explores school leaders' understanding of emotional regulation in a high-stress context. The sub-theme is discussed in three categories: 1.2.1 Managing emotional responses during crises (e.g., resource shortages, learner trauma), 1.2.2 Leaders' recognition of their emotional states and their impact on staff, and 1.2.3 Modelling conflict management and resilience for staff.

5.2.1.2.1 Category 1.2.1: Managing emotional responses during crises (e.g., resource shortages, learner trauma)

In crisis management, EI is essential. It helps leaders build trust, collaborate effectively, and handle challenging circumstances. Emotionally intelligent leaders can manage their emotions and leverage the strengths of their team, and are able to make wise choices even amid chaos.

With regards to emotional regulation in high-stress contexts, Participant 1 indicated that:

> *…teachers in rural schools are often faced with situations related to a shortage of Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM), like textbooks and other teaching aids. When teachers are frustrated in class due to the shortage, which hinders effective learning and teaching, it is important that school leaders stay calm and provide support to teachers, either by improvising or mobilising resources from neighbouring schools* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

When faced with uncooperative parents, Participant 4's views were that:

> *…support from parents with regard to their child's education is minimal in our rural schools. As leaders frustrated as we may be, it is important to stay calm, in situations where there is poor attendance in parents' meetings or in situation where by a parent is invited to school to discuss issues related to their child's conduct, and doesn't show up as leaders it is important to absorb the stress and frustrations and look for alternatives and solutions to the challenges* (SC, P4, Int. 4).

In situations where teachers are faced with personal challenges, Participant 3 highlighted the importance of school leaders to stay calm no matter how bad the situation is:

> *…it is important for us as school leaders to stay calm at all times…in situations where a colleague is in distress, for example, when faced with relationship problems with a spouse, it is essential that as a leader, I rise above the occasion and provide support, comfort and guidance on how to manage the situation* (SB, P3, Int. 3).

Participant 5 highlighted:

> *…the ability to avoid being angry under volatile situations …not getting sad…being happy and cheerful all the time…it is important to know emotional intelligence as it enables you to fully understand your emotions…it helps in dealing with unwanted emotions which may negatively impact my life* (SD, P5, Int. 5).

While Participant 9 highlighted the importance of having:

> *…the ability to show all your emotions…of being happy, sad, angry…under different situations…it is about showing the correct emotion at the correct time…it is very important to know and practice it as it allows individuals to be able to deal with any kind of situation or difficulties that life may throw* (SG, P8, Int. 8).

5.2.1.2.2 Category 1.2.2: Leaders' recognition of their emotional states and their impact on staff

With regards to participants' recognition of their emotional states and their impact on staff, Participant 1 highlighted that:

> *Leadership's ability to recognise and regulate their emotions directly shapes the tone of the school day…if we are calm and constructive, staff feel safe and supported to do the same* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

While participant 3 further emphasised that:

> *Emotional self-awareness is more than just a soft skill; it is a leadership skill. Checking in with ourselves helps us respond to challenges and set a better example for staff. Staff take in our emotional signals…When we are consistently stressed or impatient, it depletes morale…Recognising our emotions allows us to lead with clarity and empathy* (SB, P3, Int. 3).

Participants 5 argued that:

> *Leadership is more than just making decisions; it is also about demonstrating emotional presence…recognising our emotional state allows us to better support staff, particularly during times of stress or change…it's about being aware of others, not just yourself* (SD, P5, Int. 5).

5.2.1.2.3 Category 1.2.3: Modelling conflict management and resilience for staff

Establishing a supportive, collaborative, and high-performing work environment necessitates leaders to demonstrate resilience and effective conflict resolution. Such behaviours contribute to the development of stronger interpersonal relationships, open communication, trust, and psychological safety, which are essential elements of team

cohesion. Furthermore, they promote a growth-oriented culture in which challenges are viewed as opportunities for learning. By embodying these qualities, leaders cultivate a resilient and adaptive team culture capable of enduring change and adversity, rather than merely implementing short-term solutions.

Participant 5 highlighted that modelling conflict management and resilience to staff:

> *…as important in a way that it places the leader in a position of a role model…it is very important…the old saying…practice what you preach. When a leader exhibits positive ways of handling conflict, it allows staff members to learn and be able to handle such future situations in an effective manner* (SD, P5, Int. 5).

Similar to the above, Participant 10 echoed the views that:

> *…it is important for leaders in schools to show acceptable ways of managing conflict. A majority of colleagues perform badly on issues related to conflict management; it is important for school leadership to model an acceptable way of conflict management. Being attentive, empathetic, and patient are some of the ways of managing conflict in the workplace* (SI, P10, Int. 10).

Participant 6's views on modelling conflict management and resilience to staff were that:

> *…a highly emotionally intelligent leader is more resilient and can handle any kind of situation or challenge. It is therefore important for leaders to model positive conflict management skills because they are role models to those they lead. So, it is important to lead by example* (SE, P6, Int. 6).

5.2.2 Theme 2: Emotional intelligence and teacher motivation

Theme 2 focuses on SMTs' drawing on EI skills to encourage teacher motivation. This theme is discussed in two sub-themes: Sub-theme 2.1: Fostering well-being through trust and meaningful acknowledgement, and Sub-theme 2.2: Encouraging Autonomy and Professional Growth.

Table 5.2 presents a summary of the second theme, including its related sub-themes and categories, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the theme.

Table 5.2: Overview of Theme 2

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">THEME 2
Emotional intelligence and teacher motivation
This theme focuses on school leaders’ ability to understand and manage emotions to promote teacher motivation. EI motivates teachers to build strong relationships, handle classroom challenges, and maintain enthusiasm for teaching, which, in turn, enhances their motivation.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focuses on participating SMTs' ability to understand and manage emotions to promote teacher motivation</td><td colspan="2">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating SMTs’ ability to understand and manage emotions to promote teacher motivation</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 2.1
Fostering well-being through trust and meaningful acknowledgement</td><td colspan="2">Sub-theme 2.2
Encouraging professional growth</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 2.1.1
The role of emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement</td><td>Category 2.1.2
Open, honest, and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers</td><td>Category 2.1.3
Trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale</td><td>Category 2.2.1
Empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership</td><td>Category 2.2.2
Linking EI to teacher self-efficacy, stress management and positive reinforcement</td></tr>
</table>

5.2.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Fostering well-being through trust and meaningful acknowledgement

This sub-theme concerns the participating SMT's ability to foster well-being through trust and meaningful acknowledgement. This sub-theme comprises three categories. Category 2.1.1: The role of emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement, Category 2.1.2: Open, honest, and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers, and Category 2.1.3: Trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale.

5.2.2.1.1 Category 2.1.1: The role of emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement

Verbal appraisals and tangible rewards are examples of positive reinforcement that can encourage employees to increase their output at work. The majority of participants felt that rewarding staff members is important and that it serves as a motivator for them to perform better and be more productive at work.

Participant 2 viewed emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement in the workplace as:

> *… an important form of motivation…to positively appraise or acknowledge employees either privately or publicly…it is a very important way of encouraging employees to be the best they can be…and be motivated to go an extra mile* (SA, P2, Int. 2).

Participant 5 had similar views, highlighting emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement as:

> *…an important workplace vehicle that can be used in motivating employees to do better and work harder…tokens of appreciation go a long way in motivating employees to work very hard and go an extra mile* (SD, P5, Int. 5).

Similar to the above participants, Participant 7 emphasised the role that tokens, such as certificates or trophies, play in motivating employees. These tokens, according to Participant 7, can:

> *…assist in motivating workers to give their all and be more than willing to always go the extra mile…though monetary rewards as another form of positive reinforcement can also go a long way in motivating people to work hard* (SF, P7, Int. 7).

Participant 10 also agreed on the importance of rewards as a form of positive reinforcement, which helps motivate staff to do well and stay at the top of their game. Participant 10 agreed that:

> *… this form of positive reinforcement (rewards or verbal appraisal) should be consistent and continuous to keep workers motivated from time to time* (SI, P10, Int. 10).

5.2.2.1.2 Category 2.1.2: Open, honest, and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers

A healthy, cooperative, and productive school environment depends on leaders and teachers having open, sincere, and emotionally sensitive conversations.

Participant 2 viewed open, honest and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers as:

> *…important in increasing psychological safety and trust…teachers are the impression that their opinions are respected and valued when school leadership respond to their comments with emotional intelligence and communicate honestly and openly…trust in leadership choices is increased as a result… it creates a sense of psychological safety, in which teachers can voice concerns, take chances, and innovate without worrying about criticism or* reprisals (SA, P2, Int. 2).

While Participant 8 viewed open, honest, and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers as:

> *…important in encouraging alignment and shared purpose…clear, emotionally intelligent communication ensures that everyone understands why certain decisions are made…There, it creates better alignment with the school's goals, values, and vision* (SG, P8, Int. 8).

Participant 10 also indicated that:

> *…the culture of the school is shaped by its leaders. Therefore, open, emotionally conscious communication sets an example for how staff members should interact with learners and one another. This makes the school environment more friendly and supportive…helps to promote effective teaching and learning* (SI, P10, Int. 10).

Participant 5 viewed open, honest, and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers as:

> *…important in improving employee morale and well-being…teachers frequently work under enormous pressure. When leaders interact with them genuinely, they feel seen, heard, and valued…this lowers burnout, increases job satisfaction, and strengthens commitment to the school's activities…open dialogue encourages teachers to share ideas and feedback, resulting in shared ownership of challenges and solutions… creates stronger collaboration across teams, and more informed and inclusive decision-making* processes (SD, P5, Int. 5).

According to the participants, teachers and leaders who engage in open, sincere, and emotionally sensitive conversations help foster psychological safety and trust,

promote alignment and a common goal, develop a school culture influenced by its leaders, and boost staff morale and well-being.

5.2.2.1.3 Category 2.1.3: Trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale

In a school setting, according to Participant 10:

> *…trust is demonstrated by teachers' belief that school leadership behave honourably and fairly…fulfil their commitments, and respect and value employees as professionals and also pay attention and react empathetically in situations where teachers need support.* (SI, P10, Int. 10).

Participant 1 acknowledged that:

> *Trust boosts morale and motivation among staff members…the high morale comes from feeling valued and supported by trusting that school leadership has their back…it connects leaders and teachers, which makes them feel part of a shared mission and culture…with strong trust, teachers are more engaged and committed…stress is reduced, and satisfaction increases, which, in turn, this improves staff retention.* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

Participant 3 indicated that:

> *… to create an environment that is characterised by trust, leaders need to be consistent…treat all employees equally, no matter what the situation* (SB, P3, Int. 3).

In her reflection, Participant 3 emphasised the importance of leaders to act and speak consistently in order to foster trust, keep their word, respond nondefensively, and communicate honestly, even when giving harsh criticism and news.

Participant 7 believed that trust creates psychological safety. Psychological safety is the belief that you can take risks, make mistakes, and speak up without fear of punishment or humiliation.

> *When trust exists, teachers feel safe to express ideas, ask questions, or admit when they're struggling* (SF, P7, Int. 7).

From the participants' views above, it was evident that building trust requires consistent, open, and courteous behaviour; it does not happen overnight. Building trust is an everyday process which requires active participation from leaders and those that they lead.

5.2.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Encouraging professional growth

This sub-theme explores the participating SMTs' views and experiences in encouraging the personal and professional growth of teachers in their care. Two categories inform the discussion on this Sub-theme 2.2.1: Empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership and Sub-theme 2.2.2: Linking EI to teacher self-efficacy, stress management and positive reinforcement.

5.2.2.2.1 Category 2.2.1: Empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership

Participant 1 indicated that, in addressing the unique challenges faced by teachers in the school, emotionally supportive leadership can:

> *…help to empower teachers to form and develop meaningful human relationships…This also helps in personal and professional success by influencing the decision-making process…a variety of complex issues, like direct conflict among managers and staff, can be well managed within the school* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

The above participant's views emphasise the value of social skills as a crucial aspect of EI that supports efficient communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution.

Participant 2 delved deeper into the issues faced by teachers in schools and indicated that:

> *…teachers, in the school, are faced with several challenges which include among others ill-health, financial problems, and family and relationship problems…an average of four teachers are absent at school per week mainly due to ill-health…absenteeism entries captured on the time-book are very much concerning as teaching and learning is always the victim…it is important as a manager to empathise with colleagues and offer support at all times…as a manager, it is not always easy to reach out and assist...some teachers seem*

reluctant in communicating about anything that affects them…when engaged, they shut down making it hard to assist and offer support where needed (SA, P2, Int. 2).

Regardless of the situation, according to the participant, school leadership needs to empower teachers through emotionally supportive leadership to equip them with the skills and resources that would help them face the challenges they encounter daily.

In using EI to address unique challenges faced by teachers in schools, Participant 6 highlighted the importance of self-awareness as:

…the most important thing…how do you present yourself when you are addressing your colleagues…have or show empathy when one of them has a challenge…life, family problems or chronic health issues…and listening to their advice or grievances and give feedback where necessary (SA, P6, Int. 6).

From the participants' interviews, it was evident that SMTs in rural schools are faced with similar challenges. Below follows an excerpt from the researcher's reflective journal.

As I continued with participants' interviews, it became evident that school managers, though implicitly or explicitly, do employ some degree of emotional intelligence in exercising their daily duties. As far as I wanted to shy away from reflecting on what was happening in my school (to avoid my biases as a researcher), in terms of teacher absenteeism, ill-health, financial problems and relationship challenges to mention a few, it became evident that SMTs in schools were faced with similar challenges and were trying hard to empower and offer support to teachers and the entire staff (04 June 2025).

Although implicit, some participants agreed on using EI to empower teachers in schools. Participant 8 argued that:

…although with no set of emotional intelligence skills in a box, I am more observant of teachers' attendance (as it is one of my main administrative responsibilities), their emotional state, as well as their general health and well-being (SG, P8, Int. 8).

It was evident from the above participant that each manager has a way of managing challenges that teachers face daily. The main difference lies in identifying their skills as belonging to or related to the concept of EI.

5.2.2.2.2 Category 2.2.2: Linking emotional intelligence to teacher self-efficacy, stress management and positive reinforcement

Employees can experience stress, frustration, and other negative feelings at work. There are goals and due dates to fulfil. Demands at work can also cause employees to feel overburdened by pressure, which, in turn, increases their stress levels. On the other hand, positive reinforcement as an act of recognising and rewarding desirable behaviours in education can encourage them to happen again and can be a powerful tool for boosting motivation, performance, and overall morale.

Participant 3's views were that:

> *…emotional intelligence supports self-efficacy by helping teachers reflect constructively on challenges that they face daily, rather than internalise them as failure* (SB, P2, Int. 3).

According to the participants' views, this was important in supporting resilience through emotional regulation and perspective-taking, as well as encouraging confidence through better interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues.

Participant 3 argued that teachers with high EI are more likely to see setbacks and challenges as opportunities for growth, not as personal failures.

In linking EI to teachers' self-efficacy, stress management, and positive reinforcement, Participant 1 agreed that:

> *Teachers and leaders who develop emotional intelligence strengthen self-efficacy by cultivating a growth mindset and inner resilience…this lessens burnout by controlling and managing stress better, which promotes an encouraging culture through emotionally intelligent, meaningful reinforcement* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

5.2.3 Theme 3: Emotional intelligence in navigating rural school challenges

Theme 3 focuses on SMTs' views on the importance of EI in navigating the challenges of rural schools. This theme is discussed in two sub-themes: Sub-theme 3.1: SMTs' views on contextual sensitivity and cultural intelligence, and Sub-theme 3.2: Fostering collective resilience in a resource-constrained setting.

Table 5.3 presents a summary of the third theme with the related sub-themes and categories, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the theme.

Table 5.3: Overview of Theme 3

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">THEME 3: Emotional intelligence in navigating rural school challenges
This theme focuses on SMTs' views on the importance of EI in navigating rural school challenges.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focused on participating SMTs' views on the importance of EI in navigating rural school challenges.</td><td colspan="3">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating SMTs' views on the importance of EI in navigating rural school challenges.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Sub-theme 3.1
Contextual sensitivity and cultural intelligence</td><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 3.2
Fostering collective resilience in a resource-constrained setting</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 3.1.1
Understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities</td><td>Category 3.1.2
Adapting leadership styles to local emotional norms and values</td><td>Category 3.2.1
Using EI to build a sense of community and shared purpose</td><td>Category 3.2.2
Leaders' role in buffering stress and advocating for support</td><td>Category 3.2.3
Emotional toll of role overload on teachers</td></tr>
</table>

5.2.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Contextual sensitivity and cultural intelligence

This sub-theme concerns the participating SMTs' views on the importance of EI in navigating rural school challenges. This sub-theme comprises two categories: Category 3.1.1: Understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities, and Category 3.1.2: Adapting leadership styles to local emotional norms and values.

5.2.3.1.1 Category 3.1.1: Understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities

Communities in rural South Africa have a strong, varied, and vibrant socio-cultural fabric. Understanding it entails recognising the historical legacies that still influence people's lives today, as well as the fusion of enduring traditions and the changing demands of modernisation.

On understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities, participant 4 highlighted poverty and a low socio-economic status as the challenges faced by many rural communities.

The participant indicated that:

> *…rural communities are plagued by poverty, a high rate of unemployment and poor living conditions…a significant number of communities do not have access to basics such as running water and reliable provision of electricity… these conditions place enormous strain on schools, as what happens in surrounding communities directly affects our schools* (SC, P4, Int. 4).

Participant 1 touched on the issue of broken families as having a direct impact on schools:

> *…data from the School-Based Support Team indicate that a large number of learners that attend our school are orphans…very few learners who stays with both parents…some learners, also a large number stay with relatives or grandparents…this put a strain on the work of mangers and teachers as in most instances parents are not available to support their children on the many challenges that they face* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

Minimal participation of parents in the education of their children was also highlighted by Participant 10:

> *…Teachers in our schools (rural), are faced with challenges which negatively impacts teaching and learning daily…as we are approaching winter, a significant numbers of learners attend the local initiation schools, this happens in the middle of June Examinations…those learners are left behind and end up failing as teachers, due to overcrowded classes are not able to offer catch-up classes when the learners return* (SI, P10, Int. 10).

5.2.3.1.2 Category 3.1.2: Adapting leadership styles to local emotional norms and values

On issues of adapting leadership styles to local norms and values, Participant 1 mentioned that:

> *…rural communities fall under traditional leaders. The community often prioritise close-knit relationships and interpersonal trust over formal authority…leaders who often do not rely on hierarchical style may be seen as impersonal or out of touch…it is important as school leaders, in everything that we do, to abide and be in line with traditional norms and values* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

Participant 3 indicated that:

> *…As managers, we are used to fast decision-making… we struggle in a rural setting where consensus and informal conversations are expected before action…we often feel like parents and guardians and local stakeholders often prioritise and value pertinent issues way above the education of their children*. (SB, P2, Int. 3).

The conservative social and cultural values of rural populations can occasionally clash with progressive leadership styles regarding diversity, innovation, or change.

Participant 5 highlighted the importance of carefully aligning changes with shared local values and demonstrated respect for tradition while making a case for evolution rather than revolution.

> *…as school leadership, it is crucial to understand an embrace the local cultural norms and values (e.g. initiation schools, and traditional customs that value early marriages: which mostly affects young girls) … and try to work around them as they directly affect effective and efficient management of our schools…it is important to be adaptable, understanding and accommodative as a leader…otherwise you won't survive…you will always clash with School Governing Body, parents and local traditional authorities* (SD, P5, Int. 5).

5.2.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Fostering collective resilience in a resource-constrained setting

This sub-theme concerns the participating SMTs' views on fostering collective resilience in a resource-constrained setting. This sub-theme comprises three categories: Category 3.2.1, Using EI to build a sense of community and shared purpose; Category 3.2.2, Leaders' role in buffering stress and advocating for support; and Category 3.2.3, the emotional toll of role overload on teachers.

5.2.3.2.1 Category 3.2.1: Using emotional intelligence to build a sense of community and shared purpose

In using EI by school leaders to build a sense of community and shared purpose, Participant 3 argued that:

> *…as managers, we should be in a position to understand the emotional burden and challenges that are carried by our teachers (personal and work related) …it is therefore important to take note of their struggles…make them feel acknowledged…this will help in creating trust and unity in our schools…it is tough because managers are faced with lot of issues to deal with daily* (SB, P3, Int. 3).

As school leadership, according to Participant 8:

> *…it is important to always listen to teachers…we understand that there is a lot to deal about, like learners' performance and school targets, it is also important to give yourself time as leaders to get into the lives of colleagues and know how they are doing as people…this allows them to be more committed to the team…and feel free to always go an extra mile when the need arises* (SG, P8, Int. 8).

Participant 9 further highlighted the idea that EI was about noticing when colleagues are stressed, withdrawn or facing other challenges:

> *…in most cases, they will respond that they are fine…but as a leader, it is important to notice and be readily available to offer support and guidance…it's a daily routine which needs us (leaders) to be observant all the time* (SH, P9, Int. 9).

5.2.3.2.2 Category 3.2.2: Leaders' role in buffering stress and advocating for support

On leaders' role in buffering stress and advocating for support, Participant 1 highlighted the challenges that school managers face daily:

> *…the district office has placed great pressure on teachers in township and rural schools to perform on par with their counterparts in urban schools…this causes*

> *a lot of stress as rural schools are often under-resourced and face many challenges that may hamper academic excellence…as a manager, I am often faced by teachers who are always ill, stressed, demotivated which result in regular absenteeism from time to time…as a manager, I find it very difficult to uplift the spirits of colleagues which further puts a lot of stress on myself and the entire management* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

Furthermore, Participants 3 and 5 highlighted the high level of stress in leading high-stress schools. Participant 3 argued that:

> *…no matter how resilient and mentally strong you are…it is difficult to be a manager in my school…the lack of resources and shortage of both teachers and poor infrastructure often lead to poor performance…I can have and utilise emotional intelligence skills, but it's an everyday struggle which comes at a high cost to my mental well-being…providing support to colleagues, under these circumstances, is very difficult* (SB, P3, Int. 3).

According to Participant 5:

> *…teachers in our schools are highly stressed due to the demands and workload from the department…these demands are accompanied by very little support concerning teacher well-being…I have several teachers who, at one point, have been admitted to Kiaat (a local private psychiatric hospital*) (SD, P4, Int. 5).

From the above extracts, it is evident that some school managers face difficulties in managing the challenges of high-stress rural schools, which often affect their ability to mitigate the stressful conditions.

5.2.3.2.3 Category 3.2.3: Emotional toll of role overload on teachers

The psychological effects of role overload are a challenge in South African rural schools, especially for both SMTs and teachers, who frequently have to do many tasks under trying conditions.

Participant 1 highlighted the pressures that teachers face daily:

> *Both ourselves as SMT and teachers always feel overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted…there is little time and never-ending duties and responsibilities which often lead to anxiety, physical fatigue and a feeling of helplessness…it's a vicious cycle of stress which we have to endure day by day* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

Participant 5 echoed the same sentiments:

> *Due to work overload, it is nearly impossible to attend to challenges that teachers face daily…it feels like there is not enough time to execute all duties in any given day…teachers often carry stress of school work home and come back to work with stress from home…it is a challenge to all of us (SMT and teachers)* (SD, P5, Int. 5).

Emotional toll of role overload on teachers, according to Participant 6, often:

> *…diminishes job satisfaction among teachers…teachers often lose interest and motivation to do their work…this may lead to conflict with SMT and tensions with colleagues and learners…many teachers see these failures as their own…and often blame themselves when things go wrong* (SE, P6, Int. 6).

5.2.4 Theme 4: Emotional intelligence and teacher well-being outcomes

Theme 4 focuses on SMTs' views on EI and teacher well-being outcomes. This theme is discussed in two sub-themes: Sub-theme 4.1: School's emotional climate and staff morale, and Sub-theme 4.2: Sustainable well-being practices by practising psychological safety and emotional security.

Table 5.4 presents a summary of the third theme with the related sub-themes and categories, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the theme.

Table 5.4: Overview of Theme 4

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">THEME 4: Emotional intelligence and teacher well-being outcomes
This theme focuses on SMTs' views on EI and teacher well-being outcomes.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focused on participating SMTs' views on EI and teacher well-being outcomes.</td><td colspan="3">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating SMTs’ views on EI and teacher well-being outcomes.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Sub-theme 4.1
School’s emotional climate and staff morale.</td><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 4.2
Sustainable well-being practices involve practising psychological safety and emotional security.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 4.1.1
How emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school’s emotional tone</td><td>Category 4.1.2
Correlation with job satisfaction and reduced burnout</td><td>Category 4.2.1
Long-term strategies informed by EI (e.g., peer support, wellness initiatives)</td><td>Category 4.2.2
Leadership’s role in institutionalising emotional well-being</td><td>Category 4.2.3
Creating environments where teachers feel safe to express concerns</td></tr>
</table>

5.2.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: School’s emotional climate and staff morale

This sub-theme concerns the participating SMTs’ views on the schools’ emotional climate and staff morale. This sub-theme comprises two categories: Category 4.1.1: How emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school’s emotional tone, and Category 4.1.2: EI’s Correlation with job satisfaction and reduced burnout.

5.2.4.1.1 Category 4.1.1: How emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school’s emotional tone

In exploring the importance of emotionally intelligent leadership in shaping the school's emotional tone, Participant 3 highlighted the importance of school managers remaining calm and being readily available to listen to teachers.

> *…it is important that as the head of the institution, I remain calm all the time…listening is also an important skill that school managers should possess…I believe that a principal with high emotional intelligence often leads by example and can manage stress and empathise with staff to help stabilise the emotional climate of the school…that is very important in our rural schools as they are mainly under-resourced* (SB, P3, Int. 3).

Participant 7 agreed with the above sentiments, indicating that:

> *…our schools are faced with systematic disadvantages characterised by scarce resources and so forth…it is important for me as a supportive leader…a leader who is emotionally intelligent to continue motivating teachers with kind words and positive encouragement* (SF, P7, Int. 7).

Participant 1 indicated that rural schools are faced with a shortage of resources and overcrowding in classrooms:

> *...this will always lead to conflict…it is important never to let conflict get out of hand…as a leader, it is important to be always on the lookout for emotional triggers and respond constructively, thus maintaining harmony among managers and teachers* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

5.2.4.1.2 Category 4.1.2: Correlation with job satisfaction and reduced burnout

EI is increasingly recognised as a key factor influencing job satisfaction and burnout, especially in high-stress settings like rural schools.

Participant 5 acknowledged the critical role that school leadership plays in influencing the school's emotional climate and staff morale in achieving job satisfaction and reducing burnout:

> *…as a manager, although I do not consciously practice a high level of emotional intelligence… I believe that if teachers are supported by managers, they tend to reach a high level of job satisfaction, thus leading to reduced burnout, which has a positive impact on teaching and learning* (SD, P5, Int. 5).

Participant 3 indicated that:

> *…both teachers' and managers' morale is very low in our schools…teachers are unhappy about the working conditions…it is true leaders there is correlation to leaders with high emotional intelligence with job satisfaction and reduced teacher burnout…but as the situation stands, teachers and managers are always stressed…with reduced job satisfaction and increased burnout* (SB, P3, Int. 3).

Participant 8 amplified the challenges faced by both teachers and leaders in rural schools. Indicating that:

> *…as managers and those we lead, we long for job satisfaction and reduced burnout…but the conditions that we work under are stressful…our classes are overcrowded, and we run short of teaching material* (SG, P8, Int. 8).

5.2.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Sustainable well-being practices by practising psychological safety and emotional security

This sub-theme concerns the participating school leadership's views on sustainable well-being practices by practising psychological safety and emotional security. This sub-theme comprises three categories: Category 4.2.1: Long-term strategies informed by EI (e.g., peer support, wellness initiatives); Category 4.2.2: Leadership's role in institutionalising emotional well-being; and Category 4.2.3: Creating environments where teachers feel safe to express concerns.

5.2.4.2.1 Category 4.2.1: Long-term strategies informed by EI (e.g., peer support, wellness initiatives)

In exploring SMTs' views on the availability and effectiveness of EI initiatives in schools, the majority of participants highlighted the absence of formal skill development initiatives or teacher development programmes aimed at fostering EI skills among teachers in rural schools.

Participant 6 indicated that, apart from the QMS, which is aimed at improving the general efficacy, efficiency, and consistency of educational delivery and institutional management in schools:

> *…there are no specific initiatives or programmes aimed at improving the emotional intelligence of both school managers and teachers in general* (SE, P6, Int. 6).

In line with the above views, apart from QMS, curriculum workshop, and staff meetings, Participant 10 indicated that:

> *…there are no initiatives or programmes aimed at developing emotional intelligence in schools…most programmes, like the QMS, are aimed at improving curriculum delivery and curriculum management on the side of School Management Teams* (SI, P10, Int. 10).

Participant 2 echoed the views above, highlighting that:

> *…most programmes which are school-based or those from the department, are mainly focused on curriculum support…mainly focus on curriculum delivery and content coverage…the challenges (emotional, physical, mental) that we face daily* (SA, P2, Int. 2).

By addressing different facets of physical, mental, and social health, wellness programmes in South African schools are intended to enhance the health, well-being, and academic performance of both staff and learners.

Apart from the wellness section in the District office, Participant 1 indicated that:

> *…although the wellness section exists, it is an office…from time to time, there is an indication that the section is understaffed and officials, as well as professionals, are not able to cover all schools in the districts…thus unable to offer any programmes or initiatives which can assist in developing emotional intelligence skills among teachers* (SA, P1, Int. 1).

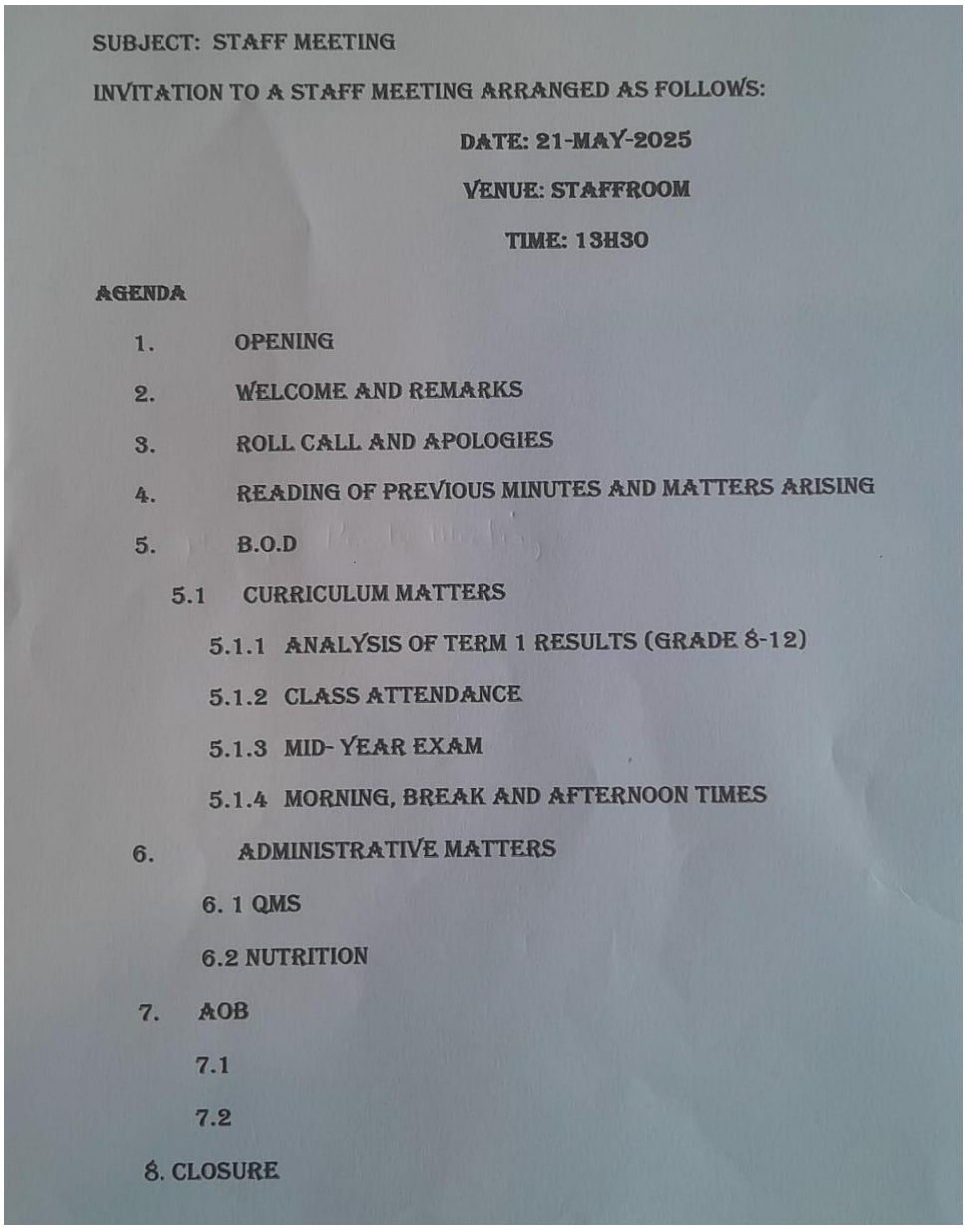
Participant 8 also highlighted the inaccessibility of the wellness programmes and indicated the unavailability of EI initiatives in schools:

> *Schools mainly have programmes like QMS, which mainly assist in developing teachers on curriculum delivery…the emotional aspect of teachers is often neglected…teachers receive very little from the department…there are no school-based initiatives which are aimed at developing the skills of emotional intelligence among teachers or SMT in this case* (SG, P8, Int. 8).

Evidence from the above participants' views indicates that there are minimal school-based initiatives or departmental programmes aimed at developing EI skills among teachers, particularly in rural South African schools.

Below is a sample of SMT and staff meeting agendas from two participating schools: School A and School E (refer to Figures 5.1 to 5.4). These samples are meant to reflect

some of the items that were prioritised in both SMT and staff meetings. During SMT meetings, the main items discussed focused on the Subject Performance Improvement Plan, which was implemented on a term-by-term basis after each learner's results were received. Other topics included adherence to the school's Operational Plan, the functionality of general school committees, extra classes, and subject allocation. On the other hand, staff meetings mainly focused, among other issues, on class attendance, signing of time books, capturing of e-leaves and movement registers, QMS, adherence to assessment programmes, performance review per term, curriculum coverage, and learner nutrition.



SUBJECT: STAFF MEETING

INVITATION TO A STAFF MEETING ARRANGED AS FOLLOWS:

DATE: 21-MAY-2025

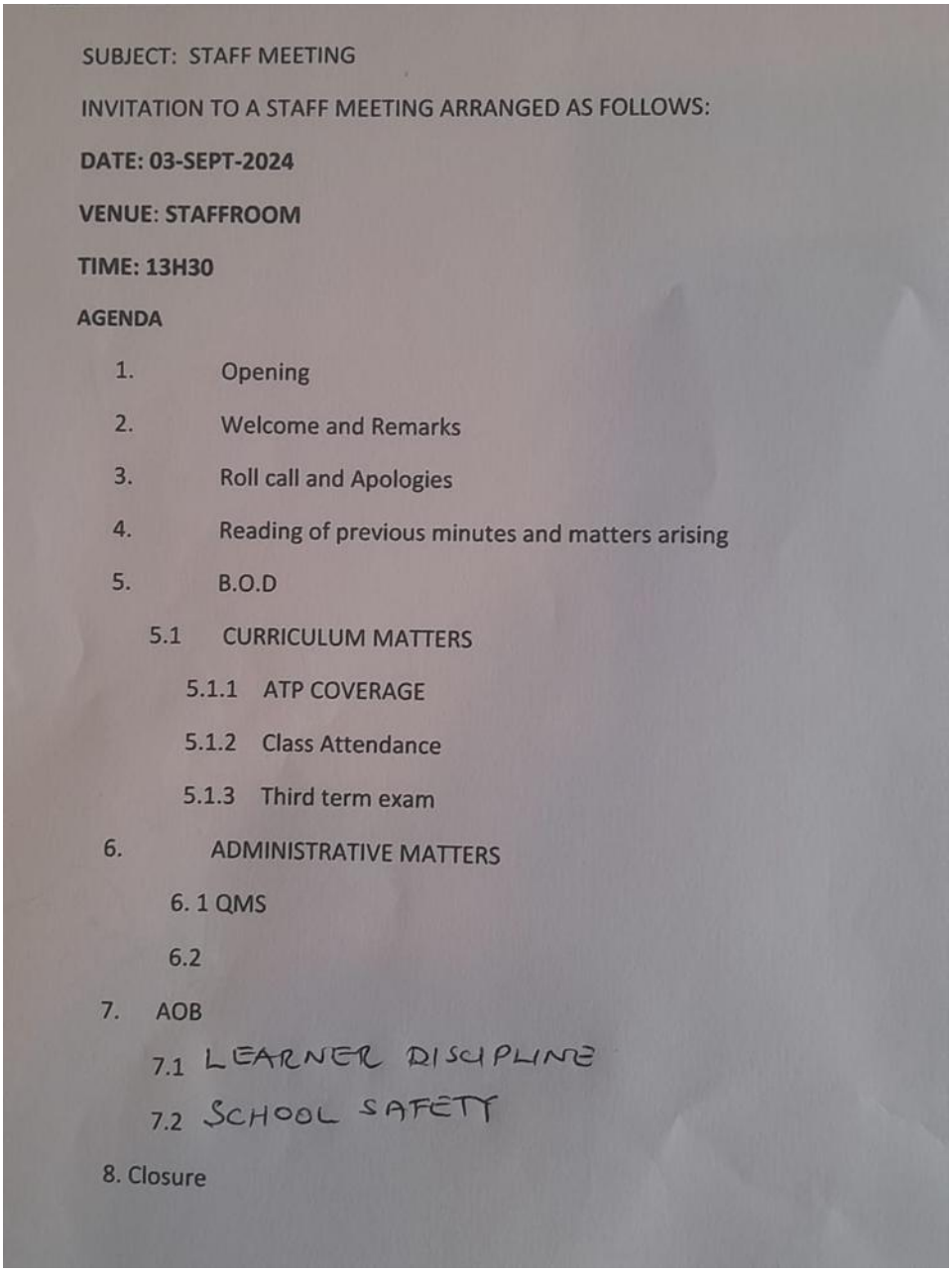
VENUE: STAFFROOM

TIME: 13H30

AGENDA

1. OPENING
2. WELCOME AND REMARKS
3. ROLL CALL AND APOLOGIES
4. READING OF PREVIOUS MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING
5. B.O.D
   - 5.1 CURRICULUM MATTERS
     - 5.1.1 ANALYSIS OF TERM 1 RESULTS (GRADE 8-12)
     - 5.1.2 CLASS ATTENDANCE
     - 5.1.3 MID- YEAR EXAM
     - 5.1.4 MORNING, BREAK AND AFTERNOON TIMES
6. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
   - 6. 1 QMS
   - 6.2 NUTRITION
7. AOB
   - 7.1
   - 7.2
8. CLOSURE

Figure 5.1: Agenda for staff meeting – School A



SUBJECT: STAFF MEETING

INVITATION TO A STAFF MEETING ARRANGED AS FOLLOWS:

DATE: 03-SEPT-2024

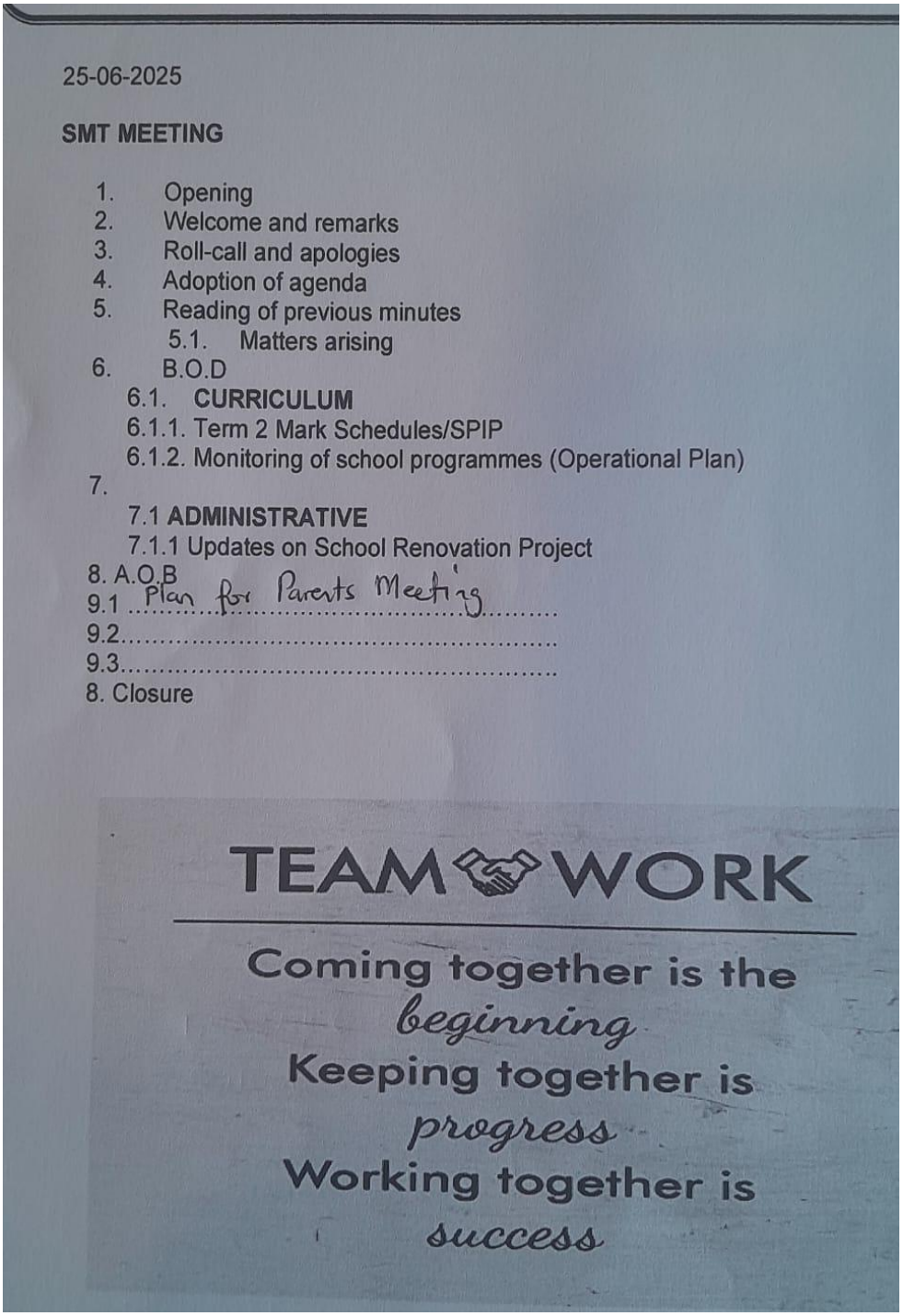
VENUE: STAFFROOM

TIME: 13H30

AGENDA

1. Opening
2. Welcome and Remarks
3. Roll call and Apologies
4. Reading of previous minutes and matters arising
5. B.O.D
   - 5.1 CURRICULUM MATTERS
     - 5.1.1 ATP COVERAGE
     - 5.1.2 Class Attendance
     - 5.1.3 Third term exam
6. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS
   - 6. 1 QMS
   - 6.2
7. AOB
   - 7.1 LEARNER DISCIPLINE
   - 7.2 SCHOOL SAFETY
8. Closure

Figure 5.2: Agenda for staff meeting – School E

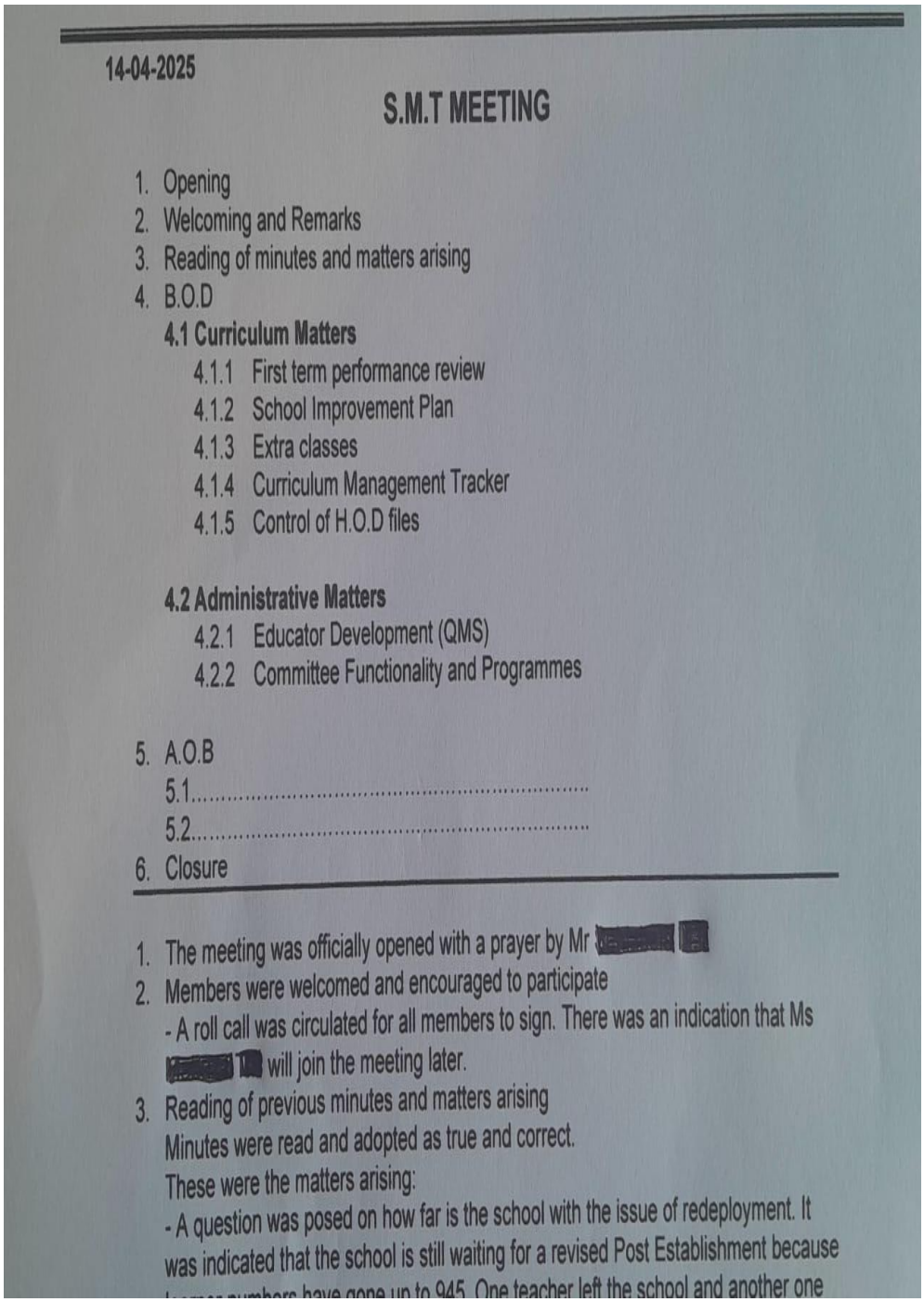


25-06-2025

SMT MEETING

1. Opening
2. Welcome and remarks
3. Roll-call and apologies
4. Adoption of agenda
5. Reading of previous minutes
   5.1. Matters arising
6. B.O.D
   6.1. **CURRICULUM**
   6.1.1. Term 2 Mark Schedules/SPIP
   6.1.2. Monitoring of school programmes (Operational Plan)
7. 7.1 **ADMINISTRATIVE**
   7.1.1 Updates on School Renovation Project
8. A.O.B
9. 9.1 Plan for Parents Meeting
   9.2.....
   9.3.....
8. Closure

Figure 5.3: Agenda for SMT meeting – School A



14-04-2025

S.M.T MEETING

1. Opening
2. Welcoming and Remarks
3. Reading of minutes and matters arising
4. B.O.D

4.1 Curriculum Matters

4.1.1 First term performance review
4.1.2 School Improvement Plan
4.1.3 Extra classes
4.1.4 Curriculum Management Tracker
4.1.5 Control of H.O.D files

4.2 Administrative Matters

4.2.1 Educator Development (QMS)
4.2.2 Committee Functionality and Programmes

5. A.O.B
   5.1.....
   5.2.....
6. Closure

1. The meeting was officially opened with a prayer by Mr [redacted]
2. Members were welcomed and encouraged to participate
   - A roll call was circulated for all members to sign. There was an indication that Ms [redacted] will join the meeting later.
3. Reading of previous minutes and matters arising
   Minutes were read and adopted as true and correct.
   These were the matters arising:
   - A question was posed on how far is the school with the issue of redeployment. It was indicated that the school is still waiting for a revised Post Establishment because learner numbers have gone up to 945. One teacher left the school and another one

Figure 5.4: Agenda for SMT meeting – School E

5.2.4.2.2 Category 4.2.2: Leadership's role in institutionalising emotional well-being

On the leadership's role in institutionalising emotional well-being, Participant 2 argued that:

School Management Teams who possess a high level of emotional intelligence are in a better position to understand themselves better and can handle situations, no matter how challenging they may be…teaching is among the very demanding jobs…often lead to stress and people leaving the system earlier than expected…managers with high emotional intelligence can provide support to teachers and other staff members who are faced with challenges…challenges can be personal or work-related…emotional intelligent leaders will always be there to support and create programmes which will offer support from time to time…teacher well-being is important for the overall functionality of the school (SA, P2, Int. 2.).

Also on the role of school leadership in institutionalising emotional well-being, Participant 7 argued that:

…emotional intelligence makes a big difference…it's not just about understanding others…it's about knowing yourself too…as a leader, I have learned that if I don't take time to understand how someone is feeling, I might misjudge their behaviour (SF, P7, Int. 7).

Understanding one's own emotions and the emotions and behaviour of colleagues is one important aspect of EI highlighted by the participant. Participant 7 further indicated that:

…in our schools, a teacher might be short-tempered not because they're rude, but because they're dealing with a lot outside of school…if we respond with kindness and understanding, things often get better…emotional intelligence helps us create that caring environment (SF, P7, Int. 7).

Empathic managers are more productive at work and foster greater trust and teamwork among their employees. Empathetic leadership is advantageous to organisations because it enhances performance and culture. This view is further echoed by Participant 2, who shared personal experience on the importance of empathy among SMT members:

I have noticed that when we, as SMT, show empathy and listen, teachers open up more…they feel safer. It makes the whole school environment more

positive…so yes, I believe emotional intelligence plays a role in helping teachers cope and stay well (SA, P2, Int. 2).

According to Participant 4, it is therefore important for school leaders to institutionalise emotional well-being to have teachers with high EI because it:

…creates a culture of healthy emotional well-being…teachers' positive emotional well-being, teachers are equipped to navigate the emotional complexities of the classroom, foster positive relationships with learners and create an environment conducive to learning (SC, P4, Int. 4).

5.2.4.2.3 Category 4.2.3: Creating environments where teachers feel safe to express concerns

There was a common consensus among participants on the unavailability of programmes deemed relevant by SMTs to improve EI and teacher well-being in rural South African schools. Participant 7 indicated:

…we don't always have access to fancy wellness programmes like city schools do…but we try our best with what we have…a few things that have worked for us (SF, P7, Int. 7).

Below is an excerpt of activities done by SMT in School F to support teacher well-being:

- We check on each other. Sometimes, just asking "How are you doing?" goes a long way.
- We have created time for informal wellness chats. Now and then, we just sit down and talk, not about work, but about how we are feeling.
- We invite local pastors or social workers to speak to staff when we can. It's comforting for many.
- We try to celebrate small wins. Birthdays, long service recognitions, and just saying "well done" after a tough week help boost morale.
- We talk about stress and mental health during our meetings, so that it's not a taboo topic.

- When possible, we let teachers take a breather, a few hours off, or even cover for one another when someone is not okay. It is not perfect, but it helps us to stay together as a team (SF, P7, Int. 7).

Final thoughts by Participant 7:

> *Honestly, being a teacher in our environment takes more than just qualifications; it takes heart. That is why well-being and emotional intelligence matter so much. We do not have all the resources, but we can control how we treat each other. If we lead with compassion and listen more, our teachers will stay motivated…and our learners will feel it too* (SF, P7, Int. 7).

Participant 10 highlighted the importance and efficient rolling out of the departmental skills development programme. According to the participant:

> *…teacher's skills development programme should be initiated…should focus on self-development by improving teacher well-being and self-esteem…programmes should also focus on creating environments where teachers feel safe to express their concerns* (SI, P10, Int. 10).

Apart from focusing more on curriculum, skills development programmes should also assist teachers with life skills, enabling them to cope with and manage the daily challenges they encounter, which can threaten their well-being. Challenges may be personal, financial or work-related.

Improving teacher well-being in rural South African schools is crucial for fostering a positive educational environment and enhancing learner outcomes. Participant 8 maintained that:

> *…they lag with practical initiatives aimed at creating environments where teachers feel safe to express their concerns…the reason being that we are always overwhelmed by work…this leaves us with little time and space as managers to reflect and create environments which enable teachers to flourish* (SG, P8, Int. 8).

5.3 CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 presented and discussed the results of this study. This study aimed to explore the views of school leadership on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. The findings were presented in the context of the themes, sub-themes, and categories that emerged from this study. The themes developed in this study included emotional intelligence as a catalyst for supportive leadership, emotional intelligence and teacher motivation, emotional intelligence in navigating rural school challenges, and emotional intelligence and teacher well-being outcomes. Verbatim quotations were used, analysed and discussed by relating them to the relevant literature. The discussions were linked to transformational leadership theory, and three selected models of EI: The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Ability Model, Goleman's Competency Model, and Bar-On's Mixed Model.

Chapter 6 presents the discussion of findings.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 presented and discussed the study's results after analysing and interpreting the data gathered from questionnaires, open-ended, semi-structured interviews, and the researcher's reflective journal. I used the conceptual framework and the results of the current literature as a lens through which to explore the views and experiences of school leadership on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools.

This chapter addresses the primary research question formulated in Chapter 1 and thereafter discusses the secondary research questions of the study.

6.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this section, I discuss my research findings, linking them to existing literature and the conceptual framework.

6.2.1 Discussion of findings for Theme 1: Emotional intelligence as a catalyst for supportive leadership

This theme focused on SMTs' views on EI as a catalyst for supportive leadership. This was achieved by exploring their understanding from the perspective of their profession as school leaders.

As a starting point, participants examined the concept of emotional resilience. When defining emotional resilience, some participants described it as a state of emotions where an individual remains composed even in challenging situations. This indicates being resilient and capable of managing stressful circumstances effectively, as well as adapting, regardless of how tough the conditions are. According to research, emotionally resilient people display the following traits: enthusiasm, optimism, hope, self-efficacy and self-esteem, openness to new experiences, a strong sense of identity, a positive self-image accompanied by a high level of independence, self-awareness, emotional intelligence with critical thinking skills, the ability for constructive reflection on practice and setting boundaries, strong social skills, as well as confidence to build and maintain successful relationships.

Emotionally resilient individuals are flexible and adaptable, able to use a variety of coping mechanisms and innovative approaches to problem-solving, have the capacity to locate and utilise both internal and external resources, and obtain assistance from a variety of sources (Grant & Kinman, 2015). Emotionally resilient people persevere in the face of adversity, disappointment, and misfortune. They can find meaning in challenges and adversity and have a sense of direction. The ability to learn from experience, a forward-thinking outlook, a sense of humour, and the ability to effectively manage and control one's own emotions as well as those of others, as well as the ability to draw distinct emotional and physical boundaries between one's personal and professional lives (Grant & Kinman, 2015).

EI is widely recognised as an umbrella term that encompasses both emotional and social problem-solving abilities. It entails the ability to perceive emotions, assimilate incoming information, use emotions in mental processes, comprehend and reason about emotions, and manage and regulate our own and others' emotions (Mayer et al., 2001). However, the overall concept of EI, as developed by Salovey and Mayer (1990), refers to the ability to perceive, express, and regulate one's own emotions, as well as understand the emotions of others.

EI is described as the capacity to identify both our own and other people's emotions (Goleman, 2020). It has an impact on motivation, communication, creativity, group dynamics, and individual and group performance. Reduced anxiety and stress are two benefits of having higher EI (Management & Self-awareness, 2023). The above definition aligned with some participants' views, who defined EI as the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and those of others. According to another participant's definition, understanding one's own thinking, skills, knowledge and attitude, as well as that of others, was important for an institution to enhance performance and cohesion. The overall concept of EI, a term coined by Salovey and Mayer (1990), refers to the ability to perceive, express, and regulate one's own emotions, and understand the emotions of others and includes self-control, zeal, and persistence, and the ability to motivate oneself (Goleman, 2020), is strongly encapsulated in the participant's definition.

Goleman's (2000) model is a well-known framework that includes the five essential elements of EI: motivation, self-regulation, self-awareness, empathy, and social skills.

In line with the above framework, some participants defined EI as the ability of individuals to be self-motivated, empathic, and to manage their own emotions. It is important to note that in the majority of participants' definitions of EI, the concept of emotions is at the core. Findings regarding the concept (EI) indicate that most participants in the study understood EI as related to a set of emotions, which is important for individuals to be aware of and manage.

In line with both Goleman's (2000) model and Salovey and Mayer's (1990) definitions of EI, the rest of the participants, similar to preceding participants, also placed emotions at the core by indicating that EI is a process whereby individuals deal with their emotions as well as other people's emotions and can be seen as essential in handling interpersonal relationships. Some participants viewed EI as the ability to manage different emotions in various situations, control one's temper, and use acceptable language in response to challenging situations. The study of organisational behaviour has increasingly focused on EI, particularly in relation to leadership effectiveness and conflict resolution (Babatunde, Sunday, & Adeshina, 2023). Highly emotionally intelligent people are better equipped to handle difficult social situations, form lasting bonds with others, and resolve disputes amicably (Babatunde et al., 2023).

Another significant finding from the study was the SMTs' perspectives on self-awareness and empathy as tools for conflict resolution and morale boosting. Among the five domains mentioned by Goleman (2000), Self-awareness was identified as the foundation of EI as it enables individuals to recognise their feelings as they occur. Monitoring feelings from moment to moment is critical for psychological insight and self-understanding. People's inability to recognise their true emotions places them at their mercy. People who are more certain about their feelings are better pilots of their lives, knowing how they feel about personal decisions ranging from whom to befriend to what job to take.

Self-awareness was also highlighted by some participants, indicating that EI involves being aware of and able to manage one's own emotions. Self-awareness, or the capacity to precisely identify and comprehend one's own feelings, thoughts, and behaviours, is a fundamental element of EI (Babatunde et al., 2023). This is significant because self-awareness enables people to control their emotions in a way that is

suitable for the circumstance. High levels of self-awareness have been linked to increased psychological flexibility and resilience, as they enable people to better control their emotions (Aparisi et al., 2020).

Some participants emphasised the importance of self-awareness, recognising it as a fundamental component of EI that school leaders should understand and embody within the professional environment. Others further highlighted the significance of self-knowledge, which influences self-perception and encourages positive change among individuals or staff in the workplace. According to some, self-awareness enables teachers to recognise their emotional triggers, making them less susceptible to stress regardless of daily challenges. They also noted that it helps both teachers and managers to reflect on their emotional states and select constructive behaviours in difficult situations.

Employees with high self-awareness have a positive attitude toward work situations, can handle difficult workplace situations, have higher self-confidence, and have better interactions with other employees (Papoutsi et al., 2019). Consequently, their cooperation is better, which in turn increases their job performance, satisfaction, and turnover intentions (Papoutsi et al., 2019).

The majority of participants identified empathy as the most important aspect of EI, which school leaders should understand and practise in the workplace. Participants emphasised the importance of empathy in dealing with daily workplace challenges, as teachers face challenges that affect their ability to carry out their daily duties and responsibilities efficiently. Participants emphasised the importance of creating a welcoming environment between school leadership and teachers to encourage open discussion about the challenges that teachers face daily. Empathy is another ability that builds on emotional self-awareness and is a basic character trait that anyone can have (Goleman, 2000). Empathic people are more sensitive to the subtle social cues that indicate what others require or desire (Goleman, 2000). As a result, they excel in fields such as nursing, teaching, and management.

On self-awareness and empathy as tools for conflict resolution and morale boosting, participants saw a clear link, as it relates more to situations they face daily in the workplace. They viewed conflict resolution from a management perspective as the ability of managers to intervene and handle conflict by using a specific set of skills that

allow institutions to run smoothly in terms of human relations. With the complexity of the school education ecology growing in modern society, schools are no longer closed systems comprising principals, teachers, learners, and other staff members but rather open systems intimately linked to the social external environment (Zhou et al., 2025). According to participants, self-awareness and empathy can assist in defusing tension in the workplace. When people feel truly heard and understood, they become less defensive and more willing to compromise. It can also help identify the root issues, enabling individuals to discover deeper emotions or unmet needs beneath superficial disagreements, thereby promoting solutions-driven working relationships.

Through the unique organisational structure of schools, people with diverse cultural and social characteristics come together to interact as participants in school-related activities. As a result, it is challenging to prevent conflicts resulting from disparities in participant roles in both the coordination of organisational relations inside the school and interactions with the external environment (Zhou et al., 2025). A previous study indicated a strong correlation between managers' conflict management style and EI, including social responsibility, problem-solving skills, and impulse control (Winardi, Prentice, & Weaven, 2022). Additionally, managers with high EI are better equipped to handle conflict in the workplace. In terms of boosting morale, some participants argued that self-awareness and empathy allow individuals to feel valued when their experiences are acknowledged and validated, resulting in higher job satisfaction and lower burnout. This, in turn, promotes psychological safety, where individuals feel safe to express themselves.

The majority of participants in this study shared a common understanding of adaptability as a component that supports emotionally intelligent decision-making. The concept, according to the majority of participants, is the ability to adapt or adjust to difficult situations that arise in the workplace daily and then flourish as a result. According to the opinions of the participants, emotionally intelligent leaders should be adaptable, just as those they are leading should be. In a changing world where intelligence is frequently viewed as the key to success, EI and adaptability are becoming increasingly important. EI, resilience, and their combined influence on decision-making and school leadership success are intricately related. In similar terms, EI and adaptability are critical in the pursuit of notable accolades for academic

achievement, which represent a high-stakes environment characterised by a high level of excellence (Kukreja, Das, & Balsara, 2024).

Concerning reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making skills, participants indicated that one can develop these skills by observing situations in their context, interacting with oneself and others, and reflecting on issues to develop effective strategies. Participants highlighted the importance of creating platforms for creative conversations. Through self-reflection, according to some participants, individuals will find it easier to control their emotions, form enduring bonds with others, and comprehend how their emotions affect other people. According to some participants, leaders who regularly reflect become more self-aware by identifying emotional patterns and triggers. According to some participants, learning self-reflection can help enhance leaders' interpersonal effectiveness and self-regulation. Regular self-reflection can influence both individuals' internal and external environments (Jewish Leadership Academy, 2021). According to some participants, learning self-reflection, awareness, and thoughtfulness allows individuals to observe how their internal dialogue influences their actions (Jewish Leadership Academy, 2021).

Participants acknowledged that managing emotional responses during crises posed a number of challenges for teachers in rural schools. Challenges include, among others, a lack of LTSM, uncooperative parents, and personal issues such as financial difficulties and family conflicts. They emphasised the importance of school leaders having high EI because it allows them to identify challenges and provide support and guidance (to teachers) on how to handle situations. Crisis leadership is an essential component of EI because it deals with a leader's ability to effectively manage, guide, and influence their organisation during times of upheaval (Robertson, 2024). This requires quick decision-making, clear communication, and the ability to stay calm under pressure. This leadership style is essential for responding quickly to crises, protecting employee well-being, and enhancing organisational adaptability (Kalambayi et al., 2021).

Leaders' recognition of their own emotional states, also known as emotional self-awareness, is critical in educational settings, especially for those in leadership roles, such as principals, deputy principals, and departmental heads. Their emotional

regulation (or lack thereof) has a significant impact on the school climate, staff morale, and even teacher retention. Participants highlighted the importance of emotional self-awareness in leadership. One participant emphasised that a leader's ability to recognise and regulate their emotions sets the emotional tone for the school, helping to create a safe and supportive environment for staff. While another participant emphasised emotional self-awareness as an important leadership skill, not a soft one, noting that unchecked stress or impatience in leaders can lower employee morale.

In contrast, emotional clarity fosters empathy and positive role modelling. Another participant added that leadership requires emotional presence, particularly during times of stress or change, and that being aware of one's own emotions allows leaders to be more attuned to the needs of others, thereby increasing staff support. Leaders with high EI can recognise their own emotional state, which makes them sensitive to the emotional needs of others, promoting professionalism and minimising interpersonal conflicts (Rosak-Szyrocka & Öberg, 2025).

In modelling conflict management and resilience for staff, participants consistently emphasised the importance of demonstrating these behaviours as part of effective leadership. Some emphasised the leader's role as a role model, noting that demonstrating healthy conflict-resolution strategies encourages employees to use similar approaches. Others echoed this sentiment, stressing that many staff members struggle with conflict management and look to school leaders for guidance and support. They underscored the importance of leaders showing acceptable and emotionally intelligent ways of resolving conflict through attentiveness, empathy, and patience. Similarly, some participants directly linked resilience and EI, asserting that leaders with high EI are better equipped to manage conflict and overcome challenges. They emphasised that by modelling positive conflict resolution skills, leaders reinforce their role as examples to follow, helping staff build their own emotional resilience.

In summary, participants underscored that resilient leadership and visible conflict management are not only critical for maintaining a positive working environment but also important mechanisms for shaping the professional behaviours and emotional competencies of their teams. Modelling and prioritising EI development among leaders and employees can lead to better communication, reduced conflict, increased engagement, and productivity (Babatunde et al., 2023).

6.2.2 Discussion of findings for Theme 2: Emotional intelligence and teacher motivation

This theme focused on school leaders' ability to understand and manage emotions to promote teacher motivation. Regarding the role of EI, praise and acknowledgement in the form of rewards or verbal appraisal, the majority of participants believed that rewarding employees was important because it served as a motivator to perform better and be more productive at work. Participants emphasised the importance of positive employee feedback, both private and public, as a key way to encourage employees to do their best and go beyond expectations. They identified EI praise as a valuable workplace tool for motivating employees to perform better and work harder. Participants emphasised the role of tokens, such as certificates and trophies, in motivating employees to do their best, as well as the importance of consistency in maintaining employee motivation. Emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement can help organisations maximise the potential of their employees (Hamidi, 2023).

A healthy, cooperative, and productive school environment requires leaders and teachers to engage in open, genuine, and emotionally sensitive conversations. Participants viewed open, honest, and emotionally charged dialogue between leaders and teachers as critical to increasing psychological safety and trust. Some participants believe that when school leadership responds to teachers' comments with EI, they feel respected and valued. To establish effective communication practices in schools, school leadership needs to understand the benefits and barriers to communication (Cline, 2023). At the same time, some participants believed that open, honest, and emotionally charged dialogue between school leadership and teachers was essential to fostering alignment and a shared purpose, which, in turn, leads to better alignment with the school's goals, values, and vision.

Participants emphasised the importance of school leadership in shaping the school's culture. They also emphasised the importance of open and emotionally conscious communication in setting a good example for staff members when interacting with colleagues and learners. According to some participants, open, sincere, and emotionally sensitive conversations between teachers and leaders promote psychological safety and trust, alignment and a common goal, the development of a school culture influenced by its leaders, and a boost of staff morale and well-being.

Successful educational leadership relies on effective communication among school leaders, teachers, learners, parents, and the community (Peace, 2024).

Building trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale in a school setting was seen by some participants as essential to boosting teachers' morale and motivation. Some participants believed that trust is demonstrated by teachers' belief that school leadership behave honourably, fairly, and respects and values employees as professionals. One important characteristic of effective leadership is the ability to maintain the trust of those they lead (Jack, 2023). Besides boosting morale and motivation among teachers, some participants also believed that trust connects leaders and teachers, which makes them feel part of a shared mission and culture. This leads to reduced stress and increased job satisfaction, which improves staff retention. To foster trust, some participants emphasised the importance of leaders acting and speaking consistently and communicating honestly, even when delivering harsh criticism. Other participants perceived trust as an everyday process that creates psychological safety and requires participation from leaders and those they lead.

From the participants' perspectives, emotionally supportive leadership plays a central role in addressing the complex and often personal challenges faced by teachers in rural schools. Participants emphasised that fostering meaningful human relationships within the school setting strengthens both personal and professional success by enabling collaborative decision-making and effective conflict resolution. This underscores the role of social skills as a core element of EI, facilitating open communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Participants expanded on these challenges, noting the prevalence of teacher absenteeism often linked to ill health, financial strain, and family difficulties, which negatively impacts teaching and learning. For them, empathy and consistent managerial support were essential, though they acknowledged the difficulty in assisting teachers who are reluctant to communicate their struggles. Teacher empowerment mediates the relationship between teacher effectiveness and its various dimensions, including effective communication, learning environment, assessment, subject matter knowledge, and instructional planning (Nasir et al., 2023).

Participants further highlighted self-awareness as a key leadership trait, emphasising the importance of professional conduct, empathy towards personal hardships, and

active listening, followed by constructive feedback. Collectively, these accounts reveal that SMTs in rural schools face recurrent and overlapping challenges, requiring leadership that blends EI with practical support strategies. Such leadership not only addresses immediate crises but also equips teachers with the resilience and resources needed to navigate ongoing difficulties. The participants' insights point to the necessity of cultivating an empathetic, communicative, and self-aware leadership style as a sustainable approach to enhancing teacher well-being and overall school performance.

The findings suggest that, although not always explicitly articulated, some participants recognised the role of EI in empowering teachers. Participants explained that, while they do not operate from a defined “set” of EI skills, they remain highly observant of teachers’ attendance, emotional state, and overall health and well-being as part of their administrative responsibilities. This suggests that school managers adopt varied approaches to addressing the daily challenges faced by teachers, with the key distinction lying in whether they consciously identify their practices as aligning with the principles of EI.

With regard to linking EI to teacher self-efficacy, stress management, and positive reinforcement, it was evident from the participants' views that stress and frustration were common experiences resulting from demanding goals and deadlines, leading to increased pressure. Positive reinforcement, defined as recognising and rewarding desirable behaviours, emerges as a key strategy in education to boost motivation, performance, and morale. Participants emphasised that EI supports teachers' self-efficacy by enabling them to reflect constructively on daily challenges instead of internalising setbacks as failures. This reflective capacity promotes resilience through emotional regulation and perspective-taking, fostering confidence via improved interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues. According to some participants, teachers with high EI are more likely to perceive difficulties as growth opportunities rather than personal shortcomings. Teachers who excel at managing emotions showed higher levels of efficacy (Valente et al., 2020).

Linking EI to stress management and self-efficacy, participants agreed that both teachers and leaders who cultivate EI develop a growth mind-set and inner resilience that help mitigate burnout. This ability to control and manage stress effectively creates

a supportive and encouraging school culture, reinforced through meaningful, emotionally intelligent, positive feedback. Together, these insights demonstrate how EI contributes to teachers' well-being by enhancing their capacity to cope with stress, maintain motivation, and foster an environment where positive reinforcement strengthens both individual and collective resilience. Understanding the impact of EI and self-efficacy on teacher stress can inform preventive interventions to improve their ability to manage academic stress (Wapaño, 2021).

6.2.3 Discussion of findings for Theme 3: Emotional intelligence in navigating rural school challenges

This theme focused on SMTs' views on the significance of EI in navigating rural school challenges. Rural communities in South Africa have a strong, diverse, and vibrant socio-cultural fabric. Understanding it requires acknowledging the historical legacies that continue to influence people's lives today, as well as the fusion of enduring traditions and the changing demands of modernisation. South Africa's rural landscapes are particularly diverse. The term 'rural' refers to large commercial agricultural lands with freehold tenure, reflecting a traditional Western view of rural areas (Mubangizi, 2023). However, it also includes scattered settlements spread across communal lands, forming a distinct rural identity. These communal areas differ significantly from commercial farms in terms of population density, land ownership, and socioeconomic factors (Mubangizi, 2023).

The diversity of South Africa's rural tapestry defies simple categorisation. It captures a diverse range of rural experiences, from mechanised agriculture to community-driven subsistence living. Each community's "rurality" is influenced by history, economics, and its connection to the land (Mubangizi, 2023, p. 1). With regards to their understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities, participants highlighted several socio-cultural challenges impacting rural schools, with poverty and low socioeconomic status being the primary concerns. They noted that rural communities face high unemployment, poor living conditions, and lack access to basic services such as running water and reliable electricity, all of which place significant strain on schools as community hardships directly affect learning environments. Additionally, participants pointed out the prevalence of broken families, with many learners being orphans or living with extended relatives, limiting parental support and

increasing the burden on school leadership and teachers to address learners' complex needs.

Moreover, other participants emphasised the minimal parental involvement in children's education, further complicating teaching and learning processes. They highlighted how cultural practices, such as local initiation schools occurring during critical examination periods, cause learners to miss important classes and struggle to catch up, especially in overcrowded classrooms where individualised attention is limited. Collectively, these insights reveal how socio-cultural and economic factors in rural communities create multifaceted challenges for schools, affecting learner participation, academic outcomes, and the capacity of teachers to provide effective support.

Leadership style influences organisational behaviour and performance (Gholamzadeh, Khazaneh, & Nabi, 2014). On issues of adapting leadership styles to local emotional norms and values, participants emphasised the critical need for school leaders to adapt their leadership styles to align with the traditional norms and values prevalent in rural communities. Participants highlighted that rural settings often prioritise close-knit interpersonal relationships and trust over formal hierarchical authority, suggesting that leaders who rely solely on hierarchical approaches may be perceived as disconnected or impersonal. This underscores the importance of respecting and abiding by local traditional customs and authority structures to effectively lead schools in these contexts. Participants further illustrated the challenge managers face when transitioning from fast-paced decision-making environments to rural settings, where consensus-building and informal dialogue are vital. They also pointed out the tension between conservative rural values and progressive leadership ideals, noting that community stakeholders may prioritise issues other than education, complicating leadership efforts.

Participants stressed the importance of carefully integrating change initiatives with local values, advocating for evolutionary rather than revolutionary approaches to leadership in rural schools. They noted that understanding and respecting cultural practices, such as initiation rites and customs like early marriages, is essential for effective school management. Participants highlighted the necessity of adaptability and accommodation to avoid conflicts with local traditional authorities, parents, and

governing bodies. Collectively, the insights suggest that successful rural school leadership requires a nuanced balance between respecting entrenched cultural traditions and gently guiding communities towards constructive change, emphasising cultural sensitivity and collaborative engagement as key leadership competencies.

Participants argued that school leaders should use EI to foster a sense of community and shared purpose. The participants emphasised the critical role of EI among school leaders in fostering a cohesive school community and shared purpose. Participants also highlighted the necessity for leaders to recognise and empathise with the emotional and personal challenges faced by teachers, asserting that acknowledging these struggles builds trust and unity within the school environment despite leaders' multiple daily pressures. Some participants underscored the importance of active listening and investing time to understand teachers beyond professional responsibilities, which enhances their commitment and willingness to contribute beyond expectations. Participants reinforced the idea that emotionally intelligent leadership involves ongoing attentiveness to subtle signs of stress or withdrawal among staff, requiring leaders to be observant and readily available to provide support and guidance as part of their daily practice. Leaders with high EI understand and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, and can empathise with employees (Paschal et al., 2024). This allows them to develop strong relationships with learners, teachers, and staff, promoting open communication and collaboration (Paschal et al., 2024). Collectively, insights illustrate how EI facilitates stronger relational bonds and promotes a supportive, unified school culture.

On leaders' roles in buffering stress and advocating for support, participants highlighted the significant challenges faced by school leaders in managing stress within under-resourced rural and township schools. Participants described the pressure exerted by district offices on rural schools to match urban schools' performance despite disparities in resources, resulting in teacher stress, absenteeism, and demotivation that negatively affect both staff and leadership morale. Participants further emphasised the high-stress nature of leading such schools, noting the daily mental and emotional toll on managers who should provide support amid persistent staff shortages, poor infrastructure, and heavy workloads. There are numerous detailed descriptions of work-related stressors in South African schools. They include issues such as new curricula, teacher shortages, increasing changes in education and

society, and teachers burdened with having to make a variety of changes in their personal and professional lives, as well as inadequate or irrelevant educator training programmes (Pelser & Van Wyk, 2016). Participants acknowledged the limitations of EI under these conditions, underscoring the impact on leaders' own well-being. Participants pointed to a lack of systemic support for teacher well-being, with some staff requiring psychiatric intervention. Collectively, these accounts reveal that school managers in high-stress rural contexts struggle to effectively buffer stress and advocate for support, which compromises their capacity to alleviate stressful conditions within their schools.

Role overload presents a significant psychological challenge for both SMTs and teachers in South African rural schools. Participants described the overwhelming and emotionally exhausting nature of their work, characterised by continuous duties and responsibilities that generate anxiety, physical fatigue, and feelings of helplessness, creating a persistent cycle of stress. Teachers in South African rural schools often report unsatisfactory working conditions and a lack of control over stressful situations (Asoba & Mefi, 2020). Participants similarly emphasised the difficulty of managing multiple demands within a limited time, noting that teachers often carry work-related stress home, which compounds their emotional burden. Participants also highlighted the detrimental impact of role overload on teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, and interpersonal relationships, often leading to increased conflict with management, colleagues, and learners. Furthermore, teachers internalise these challenges, frequently blaming themselves for failures, which exacerbates their emotional strain. Collectively, these findings underscore the pervasive and detrimental psychological effects of role overload on teachers in rural schools.

6.2.4 Discussion of findings for Theme 4: Emotional intelligence and teacher well-being outcomes

This theme focused on SMTs' views on EI and teacher well-being outcomes. In responding to how emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school's emotional tone, the findings suggest that EI is viewed by some participants as an essential leadership trait for managing stress, fostering empathy, and maintaining a stable emotional climate in rural schools. Participants emphasised the importance of remaining calm, listening attentively, and leading by example to support teachers in

under-resourced environments. They also reinforced these views, highlighting the role of emotionally intelligent leadership in offering motivation, encouragement, and emotional support to staff working under systemic disadvantages. EI can be applied to educational leadership because school leaders should constantly collaborate with various individuals and groups, such as teachers, other administrators, learners, and parents (Pellitteri, 2022). Similarly, other participants underlined the importance of conflict management skills, noting that leaders should be aware of emotional triggers to prevent disputes from escalating and to maintain harmony between managers and teachers in overcrowded, resource-constrained schools.

In relation to job satisfaction and burnout, the data indicate a strong perceived correlation between emotionally intelligent leadership and improved staff morale, reduced burnout, and greater job satisfaction. Participants noted that while they may not deliberately apply EI, the act of supporting teachers has a direct positive impact on their professional satisfaction and resilience. According to Pellitteri (2022), EI is essential for building strong relationships and creating an emotionally supportive school environment. Participants affirmed this connection but observed that, in reality, low morale and high stress remain prevalent in rural schools due to challenging working conditions. Participants also echoed these challenges, stating that despite the shared desire for improved job satisfaction, overcrowding and shortages of teaching materials continue to undermine teacher well-being.

Overall, the perspectives of participants illustrate that while EI in school leadership is seen as a critical enabler for managing stress, resolving conflict, and fostering motivation, structural challenges in rural schools limit its effectiveness. Effective leaders can manage their own emotions and empathise with those around them (Paschal et al., 2024). This allows them to develop strong relationships with learners, teachers, and staff, promoting open communication and collaboration (Paschal et al., 2024). Furthermore, EI provides leaders with the ability to manage conflicts and make informed decisions in a calm manner. Leaders promote emotional well-being and growth by modelling EI in their learners and staff. Leaders may possess the skills to empathise, listen, and encourage staff, but persistent issues such as resource shortages, overcrowding, and systemic inequities create barriers to achieving sustained job satisfaction and reducing burnout. The findings indicate that EI can help

mitigate the negative effects of such challenges, but cannot entirely offset the impact of deep-rooted contextual constraints.

Given the global challenge of rising teacher attrition and turnover rates, investigating factors and mechanisms that improve teachers' organisational commitment has emerged as a critical topic in educational research (Li, Liu, & Yang, 2024). The findings reveal a widespread perception among SMT members that there are no formalised or targeted programmes aimed at developing EI skills among teachers in rural South African schools. Most participants indicated that existing initiatives, such as the QMS, curriculum workshops, and staff meetings, primarily focus on improving curriculum delivery, management efficiency, and institutional operations rather than on enhancing the emotional and interpersonal competencies of teachers. Participants noted that beyond QMS, there are no specific interventions to build EI among managers or teachers, a view echoed by other participants, who stressed that current programmes are curriculum-centric. Participants further confirmed that both school-based and departmental initiatives overlook the daily emotional, physical, and mental challenges faced by teachers.

Although wellness programmes exist within the Department of Education, their accessibility and reach are limited. Participants pointed out that the district wellness office is understaffed and unable to adequately support all schools, resulting in the absence of initiatives to develop EI in rural contexts. Participants reinforced this by stating that emotional well-being is often neglected, with departmental support heavily weighted towards academic and administrative performance rather than teacher well-being. This lack of targeted interventions was seen as a missed opportunity to strengthen resilience, empathy, and stress management among teachers and SMT members, particularly in high-pressure environments.

An analysis of SMT and staff meeting agendas from participating schools further illustrates this gap. Key priorities in SMT meetings included the Subject Performance Improvement Plan, adherence to operational plans, committee functionality, and subject allocation. Staff meetings similarly focused on administrative and curriculum-related issues, such as attendance registers, time book signing, e-leave capturing, and curriculum coverage. No agenda items specifically addressed EI development, teacher well-being, or stress management. This evidence supports the participants'

views that EI skills are not being systematically developed or prioritised in rural school leadership and teacher development structures, despite the clear challenges faced by teachers in such settings.

Teaching is a stressful occupation with numerous challenges that can harm school teachers' psychological well-being and their ability to provide quality basic education (Fourie & de Klerk, 2024). The findings highlight that emotionally intelligent leadership plays a pivotal role in institutionalising emotional well-being within rural schools. Participants emphasised that SMTs with high EI are better equipped to understand themselves, manage challenging situations, and provide ongoing personal and professional support to teachers. This is particularly important in a profession as demanding as teaching, where stress often leads to early attrition. Participants reinforced the need for leaders to understand both their own emotions and those of their colleagues, noting that behavioural issues are sometimes rooted in external pressures rather than intentional misconduct. Responding with empathy and understanding can diffuse tension and foster a more supportive school climate.

Participants linked empathetic leadership to increased trust, teamwork, and overall school performance. Leaders who demonstrate empathy can create a space where diverse groups feel accepted, supported, and able to contribute (Zivkovic, 2022). Participants reported that when SMT members demonstrate empathy and actively listen, teachers feel safer and more willing to express their concerns, resulting in a more positive environment. Participants extended this view, stating that fostering high EI among teachers helps cultivate a culture of healthy emotional well-being, enabling teachers to manage classroom emotional complexities, build strong learner relationships, and create an environment conducive to effective learning. Collectively, the findings suggest that institutionalising emotional well-being is not just beneficial for staff retention and morale but also central to sustaining a healthy and productive educational environment.

The findings indicate a clear consensus among SMTs in rural South African schools regarding the scarcity of structured programmes aimed at enhancing EI and teacher well-being. Rural schools face significant challenges that are specific to their environment (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Participants observed that, in contrast to urban schools with access to formal wellness initiatives, rural contexts often rely on

informal, context-specific approaches. In one participating school, for instance, strategies include regular peer check-ins, designated time for informal wellness conversations, inviting local pastors or social workers for staff support sessions, celebrating personal and professional milestones, and integrating open discussions on mental health into staff meetings. Although these measures are modest and constrained by resource limitations, they play a pivotal role in cultivating solidarity, empathy, and mutual support among teachers, thereby mitigating some of the pressures inherent in the rural educational environment.

Participants further stressed the need to embed teacher well-being into formalised professional development initiatives. Participants, for example, highlighted that departmental skills development programmes should move beyond an exclusive focus on curriculum delivery to include dimensions of self-development, self-esteem enhancement, and life skills training. Such initiatives would strengthen teachers' capacity to manage personal, financial, and occupational challenges that threaten their well-being. The DBE should support teachers through wellness programmes, increased funding for resources and technology, and initiatives aimed at improving their well-being (Maharaj & Chauke, 2025). This aligns with the notion that professional competence in teaching extends beyond subject knowledge, encompassing emotional resilience and interpersonal skills essential for sustained motivation and performance.

Despite this recognition, the practical implementation of well-being initiatives faces significant barriers. Participants noted that SMTs are frequently consumed by administrative and instructional duties, leaving little scope for reflective practice or the design of environments conducive to teacher flourishing. This workload burden constrains the ability of school leaders to create safe and supportive spaces where staff can openly share concerns without fear of judgment. Consequently, there is a persistent gap between the acknowledged importance of well-being support and the operational capacity to provide it, one that requires targeted, systemic intervention from the Department of Education to address entrenched rural–urban disparities in resources and programme availability.

Collectively, the above findings (Theme 4) underscore that while SMTs in rural schools demonstrate strong commitment to teacher well-being through creative, informal strategies, the absence of structured, resource-supported programmes limits the

scalability and long-term impact of these efforts. Participants advocate for the integration of EI training, life skills development, and holistic well-being support into formal departmental programmes. Addressing these gaps is not only essential for improving teacher morale and retention but also for fostering positive learner outcomes, as emotionally supported teachers are better positioned to create engaging and supportive classroom environments.

6.3 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER AND CONCLUSION

This chapter contextualises the findings of the study on school leaders' views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. Most of the findings from this study align with the existing body of international and local literature with regard to the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being. However, it is important to note that there was limited localised insight from the majority of participants on how EI is perceived and applied by school leadership in rural South African schools.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that there is limited research into how school leadership (SMTs) in rural South African schools view and interpret the role of EI in their leadership, particularly in managing challenges faced by teachers, which, amongst others, include stress, burnout, and teacher morale. Consequently, the study has the potential to offer intervention recommendations to various stakeholders involved in managing and supporting teachers, as well as guidelines for future research, as elaborated upon in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 7 addresses the secondary research questions and then responds to the primary research question. An overview of the study is presented, followed by a review of the conceptual framework underpinning this study. The study's limitations and potential contributions are also highlighted. The chapter concludes by offering recommendations for practice, research, and policy-making.

7.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perspectives of school leadership regarding the role of EI in promoting teacher well-being in rural South African schools. To achieve this, the study examined the perspectives of SMTs regarding the role of EI in supporting teacher well-being in selected primary and secondary schools in rural South Africa. Chapter 1 provided a general overview of the study, which started with an introduction and rationale of the study, followed by a description of the problem statement.

Chapter 2 examined leadership perspectives on how school leadership might promote teacher well-being in rural South African schools by understanding and employing EI. The literature review comprised seven sections. The first section provided an overview of the South African educational system, the importance of teacher well-being, the particular difficulties faced by South African rural schools, and the applicability of EI in educational contexts. The subsequent section covered the topic of leadership, its applicability to educational environments, and the connection between EI and leadership. The difficulties experienced by South African rural school teachers and school leadership were the focus of the final section.

Chapter 3 focused on the conceptual framework by exploring the idea of EI, looking at its models, theoretical underpinnings, historical evolution, as well as the relationship between leadership (in schools) and EI, with special reference to rural South African schools. Criticisms and discussions on EI, teacher well-being, and their relationship to EI and school leadership were also examined.

Chapter 4 discussed the research methodology, processes, and strategies used in the study. Both interpretivism as a meta-theoretical paradigm and the qualitative research

technique as a methodological paradigm were validated as starting points. The chapter then provided in-depth details on participant selection, sampling techniques, and research design selection, followed by an explanation of the advantages and disadvantages of the decisions made, the methods used for data collection, recording, analysis, and interpretation, as well as the various stages of the study. The chapter ended with a summary of the study's quality standards and ethical considerations.

The themes, sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the thematic analysis and interpretation phase were discussed in Chapter 5, which presented the study's findings. The classification of data was driven by inclusion and exclusion criteria for each theme. Additionally, verbatim quotations were provided from the participating SMTs' questionnaires, interviews, and other data sources, including the researcher's research journal and official school administrative documents, to support the study's conclusions.

The main research topic discussed in Chapter 1 was discussed in Chapter 6, along with the secondary research questions. The primary research question follows after responding to the secondary research questions in Chapter 7. An outline of the study was provided, the conceptual framework underpinning this study was reviewed, and the study's limitations and potential contributions were highlighted, along with how it will support future practice, policy, and research.

7.3 FINDINGS ACCORDING TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to explore school leaders' views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. Chapter 1 outlined the research questions and objectives that motivated this study. In this section, the secondary research questions are addressed, followed by the primary research question.

7.3.1 Secondary research question 1: How does emotional intelligence influence school leaders' ability to practise supportive leadership through self-awareness, adaptability, and effective emotional regulation in high-stress contexts?

Objective: To examine the role of EI in shaping how school leaders demonstrate supportive leadership, specifically how dimensions of EI, such as self-awareness,

adaptability, and emotional regulation, influence their ability to lead effectively in high-stress situations.

With regards to self-awareness as the foundation of supportive leadership, participants consistently highlighted self-awareness as the core of EI (in line with Goleman, 2000). Self-aware leaders can recognise their emotional triggers, control their responses, and reflect constructively on challenges. This enables them to model calmness, avoid reactive behaviours, and create an emotionally safe environment for teachers, a hallmark of supportive leadership. Participants noted that leaders' emotional tone influences school climate; unchecked stress lowers morale, while emotional clarity fosters empathy and support.

In response to adaptability in high-stress contexts, participants saw emotional resilience as closely linked with EI, defining it as the capacity to remain composed and flexible in challenging situations. According to participants, leaders who demonstrate adaptability use creative problem-solving, draw on internal and external resources, and adjust their approach depending on staff needs. Adaptability allows school leaders to continue providing support despite resource shortages, conflict, or community pressures. This aligns with findings that resilience and EI are interdependent in enabling effective leadership during crises.

In terms of emotional regulation for conflict resolution and morale boosting, participants stressed that emotionally intelligent leaders manage their emotions constructively, even under pressure. Leaders who regulate their emotions, according to participants, are better able to:

- Resolve conflicts fairly and calmly,
- Reduce defensiveness and tension among staff, and
- Promote a climate of trust and collaboration.

By modelling emotionally intelligent conflict resolution, leaders also teach staff healthier coping strategies, building a culture of resilience.

In exploring empathy as a core of supportive leadership, participants ranked empathy as one of the most important EI competencies for school leaders. Empathy, in participants' views, allows leaders to understand teachers' struggles, validate their

experiences, and provide support that boosts morale. This fosters psychological safety, reduces burnout, and strengthens professional relationships, which is central to supportive leadership.

With regards to reflective practice as a mechanism for growth, participants linked EI to reflective practices, noting that leaders who reflect on their emotions and behaviours become more self-aware and better at regulating themselves. Reflection supports adaptability, as leaders learn from past experiences and adjust future responses, which is crucial in dynamic, high-stress school environments.

On EI as a buffer in high-stress contexts, participants underscored that emotionally intelligent leaders can maintain composure and optimism in the face of adversity, set clear boundaries, and provide clear direction. This buffering effect helps them protect staff well-being, sustain morale, and maintain productivity even when facing systemic challenges such as resource shortages, parental conflict, or crises.

In summary, participants' responses to secondary research question 1 highlight that EI equips school leaders with self-awareness, adaptability, and emotional regulation skills that directly shape their ability to practise supportive leadership. Through empathy, reflection, and resilience, emotionally intelligent leaders can maintain composure in crises, foster open communication, manage conflict constructively, and boost morale, thereby sustaining staff well-being and performance in high-stress school contexts.

7.3.2 Secondary research question 2: In what ways does emotionally intelligent leadership foster teacher motivation, well-being, and professional growth through trust, acknowledgement, and empowerment?

Objective: To investigate how emotionally intelligent leadership affects teacher motivation, well-being, and professional development, with an emphasis on the mediating roles of trust, acknowledgement, and empowerment.

With regard to acknowledgement as a driver of motivation and growth, the findings show that emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement (verbal, written, or token-based) serve as *powerful motivators*. Teachers, according to participants' views, reported that consistent, positive feedback, whether private or public, encourages them to exceed expectations, feel valued, and remain committed. This directly

answers the *acknowledgement* part of the research question, demonstrating that EI leadership fosters motivation and professional growth by recognising contributions in meaningful ways.

Participants in this study highlighted that open, honest, and empathetic conversations between leaders and teachers build *psychological safety and trust*. They further indicated that trust is strengthened when leaders act consistently, communicate transparently (even with difficult feedback), and respect teachers as professionals. The above relates to the *trust* dimension in the research question: trust fosters morale, reduces stress, and improves job satisfaction, which supports well-being and retention.

Findings emphasised that emotionally intelligent leadership empowers teachers by addressing personal and professional challenges with empathy and support. Findings of the study indicated that leaders who demonstrate *self-awareness, active listening, and empathy* foster collaborative decision-making and conflict resolution. Empowerment here is linked to teacher self-efficacy: teachers with supportive leaders feel confident, resilient, and capable of growth.

This study underscores that EI leadership helps teachers manage stress and build resilience. Leaders who provide positive reinforcement and emotionally supportive feedback enable teachers to reflect constructively on challenges instead of internalising them as failures. This contributes directly to *teacher well-being*, as teachers feel less burnout, are more balanced, and are more capable of managing pressure.

With regards to professional growth through modelling and culture-building, participants highlighted that leaders who demonstrate EI model emotionally sensitive behaviour for staff, shaping a school culture of collaboration and respect. By aligning teachers with the school's shared vision and values, EI leadership, according to participants, promotes a sense of purpose that contributes to professional growth.

In summary, participants' response to secondary research question 2 highlights that emotionally intelligent leadership fosters: Motivation through acknowledgement (praise, rewards, recognition), well-being through trust, stress management, and empathetic support, as well as professional growth through empowerment, positive role modelling, and cultivating resilience. Thus, the discussion directly answers the

research question by demonstrating *how trust, acknowledgement, and empowerment, when rooted in EI, serve as mechanisms through which leadership enhances teacher motivation, well-being, and professional growth.*

7.3.3 Secondary research question 3: How do school leaders apply emotional intelligence to navigate the unique socio-cultural and resource-based challenges of rural schools?

Objective: To examine the role of EI in rural school leadership, specifically focusing on how school leaders understand, manage, and apply emotions (their own and that of others) to address challenges that are unique to rural contexts.

This study connects to the research question by showing *how* school leaders actively apply EI to address the socio-cultural and resource-based challenges of rural schools. The findings highlight that rural schools exist within a complex socio-cultural fabric where traditions, customs, and community dynamics shape school functioning. Participants highlighted that leaders apply EI through empathy and adaptability, respecting cultural practices (e.g., initiation schools, traditional authority structures, conservative values) while gently guiding communities toward constructive educational goals. This directly addresses the research question by demonstrating that EI allows leaders to navigate tensions between modern educational demands and entrenched cultural norms without alienating stakeholders.

On building trust and community cohesion, leaders emphasised that EI, especially empathy, active listening, and relational sensitivity, helps build trust with teachers, learners, and parents in environments where families are fragmented (orphans, extended relatives, absent parents). This use of EI fosters a sense of shared purpose and unity, strengthening school-community collaboration despite limited parental involvement and cultural disruptions. Participants agreed that EI is applied to bridge social fragmentation and sustain educational continuity in rural contexts.

This study explored mechanisms by which SMTs manage resource-based stress in their schools. Participants highlighted that rural schools face severe material shortages, overwork, and pressure to perform at the same level as urban schools despite resource gaps. Findings show leaders use EI to a certain degree to recognise and respond to staff emotional needs, buffering stress, providing encouragement, and

creating spaces for emotional support. While school leadership acknowledge EI cannot solve systemic underfunding, it softens the psychological impact of resource scarcity, enabling staff to stay engaged. This demonstrates EI's practical role in sustaining morale when structural conditions are beyond leaders' control.

On balancing leadership styles with emotional awareness, participants stressed that rural leadership cannot rely on formal authority alone; it requires emotionally intelligent adaptation to informal dialogue, consensus-building, and trust-driven leadership. This demonstrates how EI guides leaders in shaping their leadership style to fit local values, ensuring that decisions resonate with the community and reduce resistance to change.

Importantly, the findings also highlight that EI has limitations under conditions of chronic role overload and inadequate systemic support. While EI helps leaders manage emotions and relationships, the findings show its effectiveness is constrained when resource scarcity and stress are overwhelming. This complex insight connects back to the research question by showing not only *how* EI is applied, but also *how far it can realistically take leaders* in rural school contexts.

In summary, participants' responses connect directly to the research question by showing that school leaders apply EI as a strategic tool to navigate rural challenges, empathise with community struggles, adapt to cultural norms, build relational trust, buffer stress amid resource constraints, and sustain cohesion in fragmented contexts. However, it also reveals that while EI is powerful, it cannot fully overcome structural inequalities, pointing to the need for systemic support alongside emotionally intelligent leadership.

7.3.4 Secondary research question 4: What is the relationship between emotionally intelligent leadership and teacher well-being outcomes, particularly regarding staff morale, psychological safety, and reduced burnout?

Objective: To examine whether, and in what ways, emotionally intelligent leadership practices influence teachers' well-being in the school environment.

With regards to the relationship between emotionally intelligent leadership and teacher well-being outcomes, particularly in terms of staff morale, the findings of this study show that emotionally intelligent leadership fosters motivation, encouragement, and

empathy, which directly support staff morale. Participants in this context highlighted the importance of leaders listening attentively, remaining calm, and providing encouragement to help teachers feel valued and supported in stressful, under-resourced environments. Participants agreed that morale is also undermined by structural issues, such as overcrowding, a lack of resources, and excessive administrative workload. Thus, emotionally intelligent leadership improves morale but cannot fully counteract systemic challenges. This demonstrates that EI leadership positively correlates with higher staff morale, but broader contextual factors constrain its impact.

Participants emphasised that emotionally intelligent leaders build trust, manage conflict constructively, and foster open communication. According to participants, teachers reported feeling safer to express concerns when leaders demonstrate empathy and active listening, creating a psychologically secure climate. This study further highlighted the impact of informal support strategies in schools. Informal support strategies, such as peer check-ins and wellness conversations, further enhance psychological safety, even in the absence of structured departmental programmes. Findings confirm that emotionally intelligent leadership enhances psychological safety, as leaders' empathy and conflict management skills reduce fear of judgment and support openness.

This study revealed a strong perceived link between emotionally intelligent leadership and reduced burnout, as leaders provide emotional support and help buffer stress. EI leadership, in participants' views, was associated with improved job satisfaction and resilience, even though high stress and burnout remain widespread due to systemic disadvantages. This study indicated the absence of formalised EI and wellness programmes, which weakens long-term efforts to prevent burnout, placing additional pressure on informal coping strategies. This shows that EI leadership can mitigate burnout through empathy, stress management, and motivation, but without systemic support, its protective effects are limited.

This study demonstrates that emotionally intelligent leadership is seen as a critical enabler for staff well-being outcomes (higher morale, psychological safety, reduced burnout). However, the findings also highlight a dual reality: while EI leadership strengthens well-being, systemic and structural barriers (resource shortages,

administrative burdens, limited departmental wellness initiatives) restrict the extent of these positive outcomes. This underscores the interdependent relationship between individual leadership practices (EI) and institutional support (policies, programmes, resources).

In summary, this study addresses the question by showing that emotionally intelligent leadership significantly enhances morale, psychological safety, and resilience against burnout, but structural challenges and the lack of formalised well-being programmes dampen its effectiveness. Thus, the relationship is positive but conditional, requiring both emotionally intelligent leaders and systemic interventions to sustain teacher well-being in rural schools.

7.3.5 Secondary research question 5: How can emotionally intelligent leadership practices be leveraged to create resilient, supportive school environments that enhance both teacher performance and institutional sustainability?

Objective: To explore how emotionally intelligent leadership can be applied in practice to strengthen schools as supportive, resilient institutions.

The above is an integrative question that ties together Themes 1 to 4 into practical, systemic contributions. The study across Themes 1 to 4 collectively demonstrates that emotionally intelligent leadership can be systematically leveraged to cultivate resilient, supportive school environments, thereby enhancing teacher performance and institutional sustainability. SMT members in Theme 1 revealed that SMTs conceptualised EI as central to resilient leadership, particularly through self-awareness, empathy, adaptability, and reflective practice. This study reported that leaders who model EI in their daily interactions were perceived as setting the emotional tone for schools, fostering constructive conflict resolution, and strengthening morale. The study, therefore, affirms that EI is not only an individual competency but a relational resource that supports cohesion, trust, and professional identity, which are essential for sustaining performance in contexts marked by adversity.

Theme 2 extended these insights by highlighting how emotionally intelligent leadership practices directly influence teacher motivation. Leaders' use of emotionally intelligent

praise, acknowledgement, and open communication was identified as a means of boosting psychological safety, trust, and morale among teachers. This theme underscores that emotionally attuned feedback and trust-building practices serve as motivational levers, enhancing teachers' self-efficacy, stress management, and resilience. The evidence suggests that systematic incorporation of emotionally intelligent practices, such as positive reinforcement, empathetic listening, and fair communication, can strengthen teacher commitment, reduce turnover, and reinforce institutional sustainability.

Theme 3 focused on the contextual challenges of rural schools, where socio-economic deprivation, cultural complexities, and systemic inequalities intensify the challenges faced by teachers and leaders. This study highlighted the importance of leaders adapting their leadership styles to align with local cultural norms and values while simultaneously promoting change through collaboration and empathy. EI emerged as a critical mechanism for navigating these challenges, enabling leaders to foster unity, buffer stress, and maintain relational harmony despite scarce resources. However, participants also emphasised the limits of individual EI in addressing systemic constraints, pointing to the need for broader institutional and policy-level support to complement emotionally intelligent leadership.

Theme 4 examined the relationship between emotionally intelligent leadership and teacher well-being outcomes. This study indicated that EI is perceived as integral to shaping the school’s emotional climate, improving job satisfaction, and mitigating burnout. Leaders who demonstrated empathy, active listening, and effective conflict management were found to create emotionally safe spaces conducive to teacher flourishing. Nevertheless, the findings revealed a persistent gap. While SMTs often improvise informal well-being initiatives, there is little systemic provision for structured EI training or professional development centred on teacher well-being. This lack of formalised support diminishes the scalability and sustainability of emotionally intelligent leadership practices.

Taken together, the study suggests that emotionally intelligent leadership can significantly enhance teacher performance by fostering trust, motivation, and resilience, while also contributing to institutional sustainability through improved retention, morale, and organisational cohesion. However, the systemic neglect of EI

development and teacher well-being programmes undermines these gains. Addressing this gap requires embedding EI competencies into formal professional development, ensuring leaders and teachers alike are equipped with the emotional and interpersonal skills needed to navigate both pedagogical and contextual challenges.

In conclusion, Themes 1 to 4 demonstrate that emotionally intelligent leadership practices serve as both an individual and organisational resource for resilience in rural schools. While school leaders already apply EI in informal and context-specific ways, their efforts need systematic reinforcement through departmental policies, well-structured well-being programmes, and professional training. By institutionalising emotionally intelligent practices, education systems can foster supportive environments that enable teachers to thrive despite contextual challenges, thereby ensuring both enhanced performance and long-term sustainability of schools.

7.3.6 Responding to the primary research question

This study was guided by the following primary research question: *What are school leadership's views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools?* As mentioned before, this study set out with the aim of providing a rich, in-depth description of rural school leadership's views on the role of EI in supporting teacher well-being in rural South African schools.

Below follows a discussion of findings in relation to the primary research question:

(i) The findings across the four themes indicate that SMTs in rural South African schools strongly associate **EI** with supportive leadership practices that foster teacher well-being. Theme 1 demonstrated that leaders understood EI primarily through the lenses of **emotional resilience, self-awareness, empathy, adaptability, and conflict management**. By recognising the role of EI in addressing emotional and interpersonal challenges, SMTs positioned EI as a leadership catalyst for building healthier, more collaborative school environments, which is central to supporting teacher well-being.

(ii) In Theme 1, SMTs emphasised **self-awareness and empathy** as foundational leadership tools. They highlighted that emotionally intelligent leaders can model

constructive behaviours, resolve conflicts amicably, and maintain resilience in the face of adversity. This suggests that EI enables leaders to create a climate where teachers feel valued, understood, and less burdened by workplace stress. By prioritising empathy and reflective practices, school leaders enhance psychological safety—an essential precursor to teacher motivation and well-being.

(iii) Theme 2 revealed that SMTs connect EI to **teacher motivation** through emotionally intelligent praise, recognition, and communication. Leaders believed that **positive reinforcement**, whether through verbal acknowledgement or symbolic rewards, motivates teachers to persevere despite challenging rural conditions. Furthermore, participants linked **open, honest, and emotionally sensitive communication** to the development of trust, which they viewed as vital for sustaining morale. In this way, EI supports both the emotional climate of schools and the intrinsic motivation of teachers.

(iv) The findings also demonstrated that EI-based leadership practices contribute to **psychological safety**. Teachers are more likely to share difficulties when they feel respected and supported by empathetic leaders. This reduces the sense of isolation often experienced in under-resourced rural schools. In turn, leaders who integrate EI principles into their communication help foster a **supportive culture of collaboration** that mitigates stress and builds resilience among teachers.

(v) A further dimension of Theme 2 was the recognition of EI in promoting **teacher self-efficacy and stress management**. Leaders noted that emotionally intelligent responses, such as constructive feedback, reflective conversations, and empathy, enable teachers to reframe challenges as growth opportunities rather than failures. In this way, EI strengthens teachers' resilience, allowing them to better manage stress and avoid burnout, directly linking leadership practices to improved teacher well-being.

(vi) Theme 3 expanded on these insights by situating EI within the **unique socio-cultural and contextual challenges of rural South African schools**. Participants highlighted poverty, unemployment, limited parental involvement, and traditional cultural practices as major pressures on teaching and learning.

Leaders stressed the need for adaptability and cultural sensitivity, underscoring that effective school leadership in rural areas requires aligning EI with community norms while balancing modern educational goals.

(vii) Within Theme 3, SMTs explained that leaders who practice EI foster a **sense of community and shared purpose**. By listening attentively, showing empathy, and understanding staff members' personal struggles, leaders strengthen relational bonds, which help teachers feel less overwhelmed. This reflects how EI serves as a **buffer against the emotional toll of rural school stressors**, even though systemic barriers persist.

(viii) However, participants also acknowledged the **limitations of EI** in contexts of systemic under-resourcing. While emotionally intelligent leadership can mitigate stress and support teachers emotionally, SMTs recognised that EI cannot fully compensate for structural inequities such as staff shortages, overcrowding, and poor infrastructure. This indicates a dual reality: EI is a crucial leadership resource, but without broader systemic support, its effectiveness in promoting teacher well-being is constrained.

(ix) Role overload emerged in Theme 3 as another critical challenge. Both SMTs and teachers reported being emotionally and physically drained due to continuous responsibilities. Leaders viewed EI as valuable in helping staff manage interpersonal conflicts and stress, yet they also noted their own vulnerability to exhaustion. Thus, EI is not only a tool for supporting teachers but also a **protective factor for leaders themselves**, sustaining their capacity to lead under difficult conditions.

(x) Theme 4 further consolidated these findings by focusing on the outcomes of emotionally intelligent leadership for teacher well-being. Participants strongly linked EI to **job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and morale boosting**. Leaders observed that when empathy, calmness, and encouragement were practised, teachers were more likely to remain committed and motivated despite limited resources. This shows that EI helps sustain teacher engagement and resilience.

(xi) Importantly, Theme 4 highlighted a major **gap in formalised EI and well-being initiatives**. SMTs confirmed that departmental and school-based programmes

predominantly focus on curriculum and administration, neglecting teacher emotional well-being. In rural contexts, where stressors are intensified, this omission means that teachers often rely on informal peer support and context-specific coping strategies. The absence of structured EI development represents a systemic shortfall that undermines the sustainability of teacher well-being efforts.

(xii) Participants also emphasised that emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the **school's emotional tone**, influencing daily staff interactions and long-term morale. Leaders who model empathy, regulate their emotions, and approach conflict constructively set the tone for a positive school climate. This climate, in turn, enhances trust, reduces defensiveness, and promotes collaboration. Thus, EI is not only an individual trait but also a **collective resource that shapes organisational culture**.

(xiii) Despite contextual barriers, SMTs expressed a strong commitment to embedding EI into school practices. Informal strategies such as staff check-ins, peer support sessions, and wellness discussions illustrate leadership efforts to sustain teacher morale within resource limitations. While modest, these practices foster a sense of solidarity and belonging, contributing to teacher well-being and retention. They demonstrate that EI-driven practices are adaptable and can thrive even in resource-constrained environments.

(xiv) Across the four themes, it becomes evident that SMTs in rural South African schools view EI as integral to fostering teacher well-being. Through empathy, self-awareness, conflict management, motivation, and supportive communication, leaders create conditions that buffer stress and nurture resilience. However, systemic and structural constraints limit the full realisation of EI's potential, pointing to the need for formalised well-being programmes and departmental support to complement emotionally intelligent leadership.

7.4 CONCLUSION

The findings collectively affirm that school leaders in rural South African schools perceive EI as a critical enabler of teacher well-being. EI helps leaders manage interpersonal dynamics, promote motivation, resolve conflicts, and buffer stress in

resource-constrained contexts. It allows them to shape a supportive school climate that enhances morale and reduces burnout. However, while EI provides important relational and emotional tools, its impact is restricted by systemic challenges such as underfunding, overcrowding, and inadequate institutionalised well-being support. The study, therefore, highlights a dual imperative: strengthening the EI of school leaders while simultaneously advocating for structural interventions that prioritise teacher well-being in rural education policy and practice.

7.5 REVISITING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In addition to demonstrating how the study design (including data collection and analytic techniques) appropriately and thoroughly addresses the research questions, a conceptual framework advocates for the significance and relevance of a study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). The general methodological approach used and the position of the researcher in relation to the research are also contextualised by a conceptual framework. Understanding the nature of the phenomenon being studied was guided by the conceptual framework that was discussed in Chapter 3.

This study explored how **school leadership's views on EI** shaped and fostered **teacher well-being** in rural South African schools. The framework was built on three interrelated concepts: (i) **school leadership** and its role in shaping the organisational and instructional climate, (ii) **EI** as a set of skills that allow leaders to manage themselves and others effectively, and (iii) **teacher well-being** as both an outcome and determinant of effective teaching and learning. The framework assumed that emotionally intelligent leadership can mitigate the challenges of rural schooling, enhance teacher support, and create an enabling environment for professional growth.

As illustrated in Chapter 3, Figure 3.1, the framework integrates **transformational leadership theory** with **EI models**, positioning teacher well-being as a key outcome of effective leadership practices

7.5.1 School leadership

In South Africa, school leadership typically comprises the Principal, Deputy Principal, Departmental Heads, and Senior Teachers, collectively forming the SMT (Department of Education, 1999). SMTs hold statutory responsibilities for curriculum delivery, teacher support, and governance (Department of Education, 2023). Leadership thus

plays a decisive role in shaping teaching quality, learner outcomes, and teacher well-being.

7.5.1.1 Transformational leadership theory

Transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1990) underpins this study's conceptualisation of school leadership. Transformational leaders inspire followers by articulating vision, modelling integrity, stimulating intellectual engagement, and recognising individual needs (Flyn, 2019). In education, this model emphasises collaboration, motivation, and commitment to shared goals (Bush, 2007; Prestiadi et al., 2020).

South African principals and SMT members who demonstrate transformational leadership are better placed to address contextual challenges, such as resource shortages, high workloads, and teacher burnout (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Leadership behaviours, such as teamwork, open communication, and distributed authority (Bipath, 2007; Coleman, 2000), are crucial for creating positive school climates.

7.5.2 Emotional intelligence

7.5.2.1 Conceptualisation and models

EI refers to the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions effectively in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). Its development has followed two main streams:

- **Ability EI** (Mayer et al., 2019): cognitive skills for emotion recognition, understanding, and regulation.
- **Trait EI** (Petrides & Furnham, 2001): personality-based dispositions, such as emotionality, sociability, and self-control.

Three major EI models frame the discourse:

1. **Ability model** (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997): conceptualises EI as a mental ability.

2. **Goleman's competency model** (Goleman, 1998; Goleman, 2002) emphasises four clusters: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.
3. **Bar-On's mixed model** (Bar-On, 1997): links EI to well-being, adaptability, and stress tolerance.

This study adopts **Goleman's competency framework** due to its applicability in the workplace and leadership contexts.

7.5.2.2 EI in educational leadership

Research highlights EI as a **critical leadership competency**. Principals and SMTs with high EI are better equipped to:

- Manage complex relationships and conflicts with empathy (Bahshwan, 2024).
- Motivate teachers and learners even in adverse conditions (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).
- Foster positive climates that support professional growth (Amiruddin, 2018).

Thus, EI not only enhances leaders' personal effectiveness but also enables them to create conditions conducive to teacher well-being and effective pedagogy.

7.5.3 Teacher well-being

7.5.3.1 Definition and dimensions

Teacher well-being is a multifaceted construct encompassing psychological, emotional, physical, social, and professional domains (Ozturk et al., 2024; Viac & Fraser, 2020). It includes both positive dimensions (flourishing, optimism, job satisfaction) and negative dimensions (stress, burnout, attrition).

Montoya and Summerd (2021) describe eight interrelated dimensions of teacher well-being: emotional, environmental, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, occupational, and financial. Together, these dimensions shape teachers' capacity to perform effectively and remain resilient in challenging contexts.

7.5.3.2 Challenges in the South African context

Teachers in rural schools face systemic stressors, including poor infrastructure, limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and community-level socio-economic hardships (Zakaria et al., 2021). These conditions exacerbate stress, undermine motivation, and contribute to attrition. Teacher well-being is, therefore, a critical concern for sustaining quality education in disadvantaged contexts.

7.5.4 Linking school leadership, emotional intelligence, and teacher well-being

The conceptual framework proposes that school leadership exerts its influence on teacher well-being primarily through the application of EI skills:

- Transformational leadership provides vision, collaboration, and motivation.
- EI equips leaders to recognise and respond to teachers' needs empathetically.
- Together, they create supportive climates that foster teacher resilience, engagement, and professional growth.

This relationship is cyclical: emotionally intelligent leadership enhances teacher well-being, which in turn strengthens instructional quality and learner outcomes, reinforcing the leadership mandate. Conversely, low EI and ineffective leadership exacerbate stress and burnout, undermining both teachers' well-being and school performance.

7.5.5 Critiques and debates

While EI has gained traction, critics caution against its overextension. Locke (2005) argues that EI lacks definitional clarity and should be treated as an aptitude rather than intelligence. Others question the validity of EI measures and warn against its potential misuse for manipulation (Grant, 2014; Murphy & Sideman, 2006). Nonetheless, empirical evidence increasingly supports EI's relevance in educational leadership, particularly when combined with transformational practices (Zeidner et al., 2012).

In conclusion, the conceptual framework integrates transformational leadership theory with EI models to explain how school leadership influences teacher well-being in rural South African schools. It highlights that effective leadership is not merely a matter of authority or administrative compliance, but also of emotional competence and relational capacity. By adopting emotionally intelligent leadership practices, SMTs can

foster supportive environments that enhance teacher well-being, sustain professional engagement, and ultimately improve learner outcomes.

7.6 POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

In this section, the potential contributions of the study are discussed, expanding upon the study's contributions to the existing body of knowledge and theory of school leadership's views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools, and then the potential contributions of this study in terms of the research methodology used.

7.6.1 Theoretical contribution

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending the application of **transformational leadership theory** to the context of school leadership, particularly in environments characterised by limited resources and complex challenges. While transformational leadership has been widely studied in corporate and organisational contexts (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Burns, 1978), its role in education, especially in rural and under-resourced schools, remains less explored. By drawing on Burns' foundational principles of inspiring, motivating, and elevating followers (Metwally et al., 2014; Flyn, 2019), this study highlights how transformational leadership can foster collaboration and commitment among teachers, thereby addressing systemic challenges in schooling. In doing so, it contributes to the body of knowledge by contextualising transformational leadership within South African educational realities.

This study further contributes theoretically by integrating **EI** into transformational leadership, proposing a complementary lens through which school leadership effectiveness can be examined. EI models (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Bar-On, 1997) emphasise self-awareness, empathy, and relationship management, which align closely with transformational leadership components such as individualised consideration and inspirational motivation. Prior studies have suggested overlaps between EI and transformational leadership (Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 1999; Bahshwan, 2024), but the intersection remains under-theorised in education. This research, therefore, expands leadership theory by positioning EI not only as a personal skill but also as a mediating mechanism that strengthens transformational leadership practices in schools (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

Finally, the study offers a theoretical contribution by linking **teacher well-being** to transformational leadership and EI frameworks. Leadership theories often focus on performance outcomes (Bush, 2007; Bipath, 2008), but this study foregrounds the well-being of teachers as an essential construct that mediates the effectiveness of leadership in schools. By demonstrating how emotionally intelligent, transformational leaders can foster environments that promote teacher resilience, creativity, and motivation (Amiruddin, 2018; Gómez-Leal et al., 2022), this study extends transformational leadership theory beyond organisational effectiveness to encompass the holistic flourishing of teachers. This integration positions teacher well-being as a vital theoretical outcome of leadership, thus contributing to a richer, more human-centred understanding of leadership in education.

7.6.2 Methodological contribution

This research study used the case study research design to ascertain school leadership's views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. The case study research design enabled the researcher to gather in-depth information about the school leadership's views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being. Participants freely discussed their understanding of EI and its role in supporting teacher well-being in their schools. The research proposes that future studies should consider gathering information from rural, primary, and secondary schools in different provinces of South Africa, using a mixed-methods approach to expand on the understanding of school leadership's views on the role of EI in supporting teacher well-being.

7.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like any other study, this study has its own limitations, which are expanded upon below.

7.7.1 Transferability of the study

This study focused on school leadership's views and experiences on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. It aimed at gaining insight into SMTs' experiences at specific schools in a specific context. Thus, one of the limitations of the transferability of this study relates to the sampling strategy

(Stalmeijer, Brown, & O'Brien, 2024). The present study was limited in scope, since only 20 primary and secondary school SMT members employed at ten different schools within the local circuit office were selected. As the findings were based on the opinions of participating SMTs, they could not be generalised because they did not necessarily correspond with the opinions of other SMT members who are part of the total teaching community (Yin, 2015).

The results cannot be applied to all SMT members in various schools because they were based on the opinions of the participating SMT members. As a result, the findings and conclusions may not apply to other SMT members in different geographic areas. However, by adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach, the goal was to present a viewpoint and examine the issue being studied to provide insight into how a specific set of individuals might interpret their circumstances or the phenomena they come across (Maree, 2017).

Furthermore, the present qualitative study's framework could be broadened if other SMT members from different geographic locations were included. Due to the case study's boundaries (Yin, 2015) of time and place, it would, however, be beyond the scope of the present study to involve SMT members managing in the urban areas. Rural schools are generally known for the poor quality of education and for the shortage of essential LTSM (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This study's data could be richer if schools in urban areas were involved; this would determine whether there is a difference between the rural SMT members' views and the urban SMT members' views about the role of EI in supporting the well-being of teachers. The purpose of the present research was to select rural primary and secondary schools based on the geographical accessibility within the Mpumalanga province.

Although the researcher is not asserting a gender bias, the demographic composition of the present study was heavily skewed towards the black female teaching population. Future studies should consider balancing the representation of all racial groups in South Africa and including more male teachers in their samples to achieve greater equity. This study, along with the participating SMTs' views and experiences, may inspire other school managers to increase their awareness of issues related to EI and its role in fostering teacher well-being. SMT members from different contexts need to decide to what extent the results from this study are applicable in their specific

schools or their work in general. This study, however, could be transferable to SMT members in other similar contexts and circumstances.

7.7.2 Response of participating School Management Team members

The school principals from selected schools functioned as gatekeepers to the participating SMT members, as they assisted in setting up interviews with their selected SMT members. This could have led to a possible Hawthorne effect in the sense that some participants might have felt compelled to work harder, thus changing their behaviour due to the attention they were receiving from the researcher (Cherry, 2018).

Another limitation is the participating SMT members' response bias, which is similar to the Hawthorne effect (Olivier, 2017). Although it was assumed that the participating SMT members would answer the interview questions truthfully, it was possible that they might be unwilling to reveal their true feelings about their perception of the role of EI in supporting teacher well-being because they did not wish to appear intolerant. Moreover, the participating SMT members could have responded to the questions in the semi-structured interview in such a way that they believed the researcher wanted them to respond. To overcome this limitation, the researcher attempted to establish rapport with each participating SMT member and encouraged openness by promising them complete confidentiality and not to discuss their responses with the gatekeeper or any other colleagues at their schools.

7.8 RESEARCHER REFLEXIVITY

The researcher of this study is also a school Principal, a member of the School Management and a member of the CMT. Thus, it was important to distinguish between these various roles and that of being a researcher. As reflexivity emphasises a shared and cooperative nature (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023) in qualitative research, the researcher established a research partnership with the participating school leadership by sharing their views and experiences regarding EI and teacher well-being in their schools. It was important for the researcher to be aware of his own subjective opinions and to avoid influencing the participating school leadership's views on EI in supporting teacher well-being. The researcher interviewed and observed them without intervention or manipulation within their school settings. The researcher held regular

meetings with his supervisor for guidance and advice, and recorded his thoughts in a research journal to negate potential bias and subjectivity.

7.9 REFLECTING ON THE ASSUMPTIONS BROUGHT BY THIS STUDY

At the beginning of the research, the researcher assumed that SMT members were not that familiar with the concept of EI. Through this study, the opposite was discovered, as most participants had a fair grasp of the concept and how it influences the execution of their daily managerial duties. This study was shaped by several underlying assumptions. It was also presumed that leadership plays a decisive role in influencing the emotional climate of rural schools, potentially overlooking broader systemic and structural challenges such as government policies, resource constraints, or community dynamics. The study rested on the belief that teacher well-being is both a priority and an outcome that can be significantly enhanced through emotionally intelligent leadership practices.

Furthermore, the research assumed that the rural South African context magnifies the need for emotionally attuned leadership, given the resource constraints and socio-economic challenges facing teachers. Finally, the interpretation of findings was shaped by the researcher's belief in the value of EI, which may have emphasised the interpersonal dimensions of leadership over institutional and policy-level dynamics. Acknowledging these assumptions is important in understanding both the scope and limitations of the study.

It is important to note that the researcher's own background as a teacher and principal in a rural school, his perspective on leadership, and beliefs regarding the importance of EI in supporting teacher well-being, may have shaped the way the study was designed, findings were interpreted, and certain themes were emphasised. While the study highlights EI, it may underplay structural inequalities such as funding shortages from the Department of Education, infrastructural challenges, and policy implementation that also strongly influence teacher well-being.

7.10 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations for policy, practice, and future research on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being are based on the research findings.

7.10.1 Recommendations for policy

Several policy recommendations are made in light of the study's findings to enhance the role of school leadership in promoting teachers' EI and overall well-being in rural South African schools:

- **Integration of EI in leadership training:** Current training largely emphasises administrative and instructional leadership, often overlooking relational and emotional dimensions. Incorporating EI would prepare principals and SMTs to cultivate supportive school climates that enhance teacher well-being. The DBE should embed EI competencies into all school leadership preparation and professional development programmes.
- **Establishment of well-being frameworks for teachers:** While teacher well-being is acknowledged in policy documents, there is no structured framework guiding its promotion. A well-being framework would institutionalise support practices and reduce reliance on individual leaders' goodwill or capacity. Therefore, national and provincial policies should mandate a teacher well-being framework that includes emotional support mechanisms, such as peer mentoring, counselling services, and stress management programmes. These programmes can be implemented at a school or circuit level, for easy accessibility by teachers.
- **Context-sensitive support for rural schools:** Uniform national policies often fail to account for the unique challenges in rural schools. Tailored interventions would better address stressors that undermine well-being and create conditions where emotionally intelligent leadership can thrive. Policy should differentiate support for rural schools by recognising the combined challenges of isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to resources. Specific funding and development programmes should target the socio-emotional needs of teachers in rural contexts.
- **Embedding teacher well-being in national education strategy:** Elevating teacher well-being to a policy priority would institutionalise its importance and ensure sustained investment in leadership development, support structures, and monitoring mechanisms. The DBE should explicitly include teacher well-

being in the national education strategy as a key pillar of school improvement, alongside curriculum delivery and learner performance.

7.10.2 Recommendations for practice

National and provincial laws establish the framework for promoting teacher well-being in rural schools; however, school managers are ultimately responsible for its daily operations. Several useful suggestions are offered for school leadership practice in light of the study's findings:

- **Embedding EI in daily leadership**: School leadership should consciously apply EI skills like empathy, active listening, and emotional regulation when interacting with teachers. Leadership practice should move beyond administrative oversight to include relational care, building trust, and fostering a safe emotional climate.
- **Creating supportive spaces for teachers**: Principals should establish regular forums, staff circles, or well-being workshops where teachers can share experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. Recognition practices, such as acknowledging teachers' efforts publicly and privately, can help counter feelings of neglect and burnout.
- **Integrating well-being into school development plans**: School leadership should explicitly include teacher well-being goals in School Improvement Plans (SIPs). This ensures that well-being initiatives are systematically monitored, rather than being treated as optional or secondary to learner performance outcomes.
- **Building external support networks**: In resource-constrained rural contexts, principals should actively seek partnerships with non-governmental organisations, local health professionals, universities, and community organisations to provide counselling, wellness workshops, or stress-management training for teachers. Future local research in the field of emotional intelligence and school leadership can expand research on the following:

7.10.3 Recommendations for future research

Future local research in the field of emotional intelligence and school leadership can expand research on the following:

- Comparative research across rural, urban, and regional schools can be conducted to examine how contextual factors (resources, infrastructure, community expectations) influence the relationship between leadership EI and teacher well-being. For example, Teacher well-being in rural, regional, and metropolitan schools has shown that resources and demands differ across location types and affect job satisfaction and strain (Kingsford-Smith et al., 2023).
- Interventions (e.g., training for principals in EI skills, emotional regulation workshops, peer coaching) can be designed and tested in rural South African schools to measure their impact on teacher well-being and school climate. These should include control or comparison groups, where possible, to strengthen claims of efficacy.
- Mixed methods can be used to include not just school leadership's views but also teachers' perspectives, possibly even learners' perspectives, to understand how EI in leadership is experienced and perceived. Qualitative data (e.g., interviews/focus groups) can uncover what EI means locally in rural South Africa, what practices are expected, and how cultural or language factors influence EI.
- Future research can also explore how teacher resilience develops in rural environments and the cultural factors that influence how both leaders and teachers respond to adversity. The "Teacher resilience development in rural Chinese schools" study provides a model for understanding cultural influences on resilience trajectories (Sun et al., 2024, pp. 1-10).
- Future research can also validate EI measures and well-being scales in rural South African settings, ensuring they are culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate. This could include developing or adapting tools that capture EI in local languages or cultural idioms.

7.11 PERSONAL REFLECTION

7.11.1 Researcher’s aim of the study

As a researcher and an SMT member, the researcher was motivated to conduct this study because of awareness of the challenges that school leadership and teachers face in relation to their physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Seeing school leadership struggling in dealing with issues related to their well-being and that of teachers, the researcher was inspired to conduct this research to explore school leadership's views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being, particularly in rural South African schools. Thus, the study aimed to explore the school leadership's views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools. It also looked at how school leadership can use their capacity through EI to support teachers who are faced with challenges daily.

The present study not only contributes to the existing literature on EI and teacher well-being, but also positively impacted both participating school leadership and the researcher, as both became aware of the nature of challenges school leadership face and the kind of support needed to address these challenges. The participants and researcher became aware of the importance of EI and how it can be channelled to address challenges teachers experience in the workplace on a day-to-day basis.

7.11.2 What excited the researcher?

The interviewing process expanded the researcher’s perspective, as participants candidly shared their opinions on the importance of EI in promoting teacher well-being in rural South African schools. It was the ideal chance to hear what the school leadership had to say. Additionally, it was encouraging to witness the level of enthusiasm and dedication they displayed in sharing their positive attitudes and resilience-building programmes to address and overcome the daily challenges they face, both personally and professionally.

7.11.3 Avenues for future exploration

Through this study, the researcher had to ask more questions concerning the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in schools: How do school leadership and teachers from previously advantaged schools and other schools in urban areas channel EI

practices to manage the well-being of teachers? What can the Department do to empower school leadership's EI skills to support the well-being of teachers? As described in the previous section, more studies could be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the well-being of employees across the spectrum.

7.12 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER AND CONCLUSION

In this study, the views of twenty rural primary and secondary school leaders were analysed, and a case study design was used and compared to relevant research and expert opinion. The research uncovered important information on the challenges rural school SMTs and teachers face in terms of personal and workplace well-being. From a transformational leadership perspective, the findings of the present study may contribute further to understanding the everyday experiences of rural school leaders and teachers facing challenges related to their general well-being. The results also pointed to the necessity of implementing programmes that integrate teacher well-being with EI development.

In conclusion, the researcher hopes that increased awareness of EI initiatives among SMTs, the District-Based Support Teams, and the School-Based Support Teams will assist school leadership and teachers with practical management strategies and easily accessible, effective programmes to enhance the teaching community in rural South African schools. This is because school leadership faces challenges in managing schools, and teachers encounter difficulties related to their well-being.

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APPENDIX A: PROOF OF REGISTRATION

1713 M1RST

MADUNA N S MR
P O BOX 340
KABOKWENI
1245

STUDENT NUMBER : 6086-296-3

ENQUIRIES NAME : MAPONYA PP
ENQUIRIES TEL : 0124415702

DATE : 2025-04-23

Dear Student

I wish to inform you that your registration has been accepted for the academic year indicated below. Kindly activate your Unisa mylife (https://myunisa.ac.za/portal) account for future communication purposes and access to research resources.

DEGREE : PHD (PSYCHOLOGY) (90058)

TITLE : School leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools

SUPERVISOR : Prof K MOHANGI (mohank@unisa.ac.za)

ACADEMIC YEAR : 2025

TYPE: THESIS

SUBJECTS REGISTERED: TFPSY02 PhD - Psychology of Education

A statement of account will be sent to you shortly.

You must re-register and pay annually between January and March of each year until such time that you can submit your dissertation/thesis for examination. Students registering for the first time for a dissertation or thesis must complete a research proposal in their first year of study. Contact your supervisor(s) immediately after registration.

If you intend submitting your dissertation/thesis for examination please refer to the link: https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Apply-for-admission/Master%27s-&-doctoral-degrees/Master%27s-&-doctoral-research-examination-process for the process you need to follow and the relevant dates to tak into consideration. Should you submit for examination after end of February, you must reregister and pay your fees for the current academic year.

Please access the information with regard to your personal librarian on the following link: https://bit.ly/3hxNqVr

Information on the compulsory online African Academic Student Development programme is available on: https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Apply-for-admission/Master%27s-&-doctoral-degrees/Academic-research-support

Yours faithfully,

Prof MM Sepota
Acting Registrar

UNIVERSITEIT VAN SUID-AFRIKA
PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
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APPENDIX B: ETHICS CERTIFICATE

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 12 October 2024

Ref: **2024/10/12/000000270/05/RB**

Name: **Mr Nhlanhla Sylvester Maduna**

Student No.: **Mr Nhlanhla Sylvester Maduna**

Decision: Ethics Approval form

Dear **Mr Nhlanhla Sylvester Maduna**

Researcher(s): Name: **Mr Nhlanhla Sylvester Maduna**
E-mail address: 60862963@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: **0827190720**

Supervisor: Name: **Prof K Mohangi**
E-mail address: mohank@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: **012 3376169**

Title of research: ***School leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools.***

Qualification: **PhD (Psychology of Education)**

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above-mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period **2024/10/12** to **2029/10/12**.

*The **write risk level** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on **12 September 2024** in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

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3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. The study's risk level is Category 2- Low risk: Human participants are involved and there is foreseeable risk of inconvenience. Non-vulnerable adult participants and non-sensitive information is involved.
9. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2029/10/12.** Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2024/10/12/00000270/05/RB** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,

Prof RB Monyai
Acting Head: CEDU Research
monyarb@unisa.ac.za

Prof Mpine Makoe
Executive Dean: CEDU
gakisme@unisa.ac.za

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APPENDIX C: TURNITIN REPORT

Similarity Report

PAPER NAME	AUTHOR
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255 Pages	1.5MB

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Summary

APPENDIX D: PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING

Le Roux Academic Consulting
Editing & Proofreading Services

Dr Suzaan le Roux
Artillery Road
Door De Kraal
Bellville
7530
proofreading@mweb.co.za
+27 (0)82 3210 484

08 December 2025

To whom it may concern

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING: NHLANHLA SYLVESTER MADUNA (60862963)

This letter confirms that I have proofread/edited the doctoral dissertation of Mr Nhlanhla Maduna titled "School leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools".

The editing service focused on improving the accuracy of language, overall readability, structure, and style, as well as checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

The editing service excluded re-writing any part of the dissertation or re-editing after editor comments were addressed.

Yours sincerely

Dr mult Suzaan le Roux

Contributing towards your success

Moneyline 1838 CC, Reg. No. 1999/056460/23, trading as *Le Roux Academic Consulting*
Members: S le Roux, PD le Roux

APPENDIX E: PROOF OF PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

education
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ikhamanga Building, Government Boulevard, Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province
Private Bag X11341, Mbombela, 1200.
Tel: 013 766 5552/5115, Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

Litiko le Temfundvo, Umnyango we Fundo | Departement van Onderwys | Ndzawulo ya Dyondzo

Mr Nhlanhla Sylvester Maduna
UNISA
Cell No. 082 719 0720
Email: 60862963@mylife.unisa.ac.za / Ndduna@outlook.com

RE: "SCHOOL LEADERSHIP VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN FOSTERING TEACHER WELL-BEING IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS".

Your application to conduct a research study has been received and is therefore acknowledged. The title of your research project reads: **"School Leadership Views on The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Fostering Teacher Well-Being in Rural South African Schools".** I trust that the aims and the objectives of the study will benefit the whole department especially the beneficiaries. Your request is approved subject to you observing the provisions of the departmental research policy which is available in the department website. You are requested to adhere to your university's research ethics as spelt out in your research ethics.

In terms of the research policy, data or any research activity can be conducted after school hours as per appointment with affected participants. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of the department. To this effect, your final approved research report (both soft and hard copy) should be submitted to the department so that your recommendations could be implemented. You may be required to prepare a presentation and present at the departments' annual research dialogue.

For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5015 / 5124 Or c.maphanga@mpuedu.gov.za
The department wishes you well in this important project and pledges to give you the necessary support you may need.

Moyane
MRS LH MOYANE
HEAD: EDUCATION

09 / 01 / 2025
DATE

MPUMALANGA
THE PLACE OF THE RISING SUN

APPENDIX F: PROOF OF CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

education
DEPARTMENT: EDUCATION
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Ikhamanga Building, Government Boulevard, Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province
Private bag x11341, Mbombela, 1200
Tel: 013 765 555/5115.Toll Free line: 0800 203 116

LitikoleTemfundvo Umnyango we Fundo DepartementvanOnderwys Ndzawulolayadyondzo

Enq: Ms Mlimi AA Tel: 013 798 2900 Email: whitehazy02@gmail.com

TO : MR NHLANHLA SYLVESTER MADUNA

FROM: MS MLIMI AA
CIRCUIT MANAGER
WHITE HAZY 02

DATE : 07 FEBRUARY 2025

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO YOUR REQUEST TO DO RESEARCH STUDY IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN FOSTERING TEACHER WELL-BEING IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL

1. The Circuit Office has received your application to conduct your research study in **School Leadership Views on The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Fostering Teacher Well-Being in Rural South African Schools** at Ehlanzeni District in White Hazy 2.
2. The Cicuit approves your request to do your research study and therefore you are requested to observe the provisions of the departmental research policy.

3. The circuit wishes you all the best and hope your research findings will be in the best interest for our schools and the community.

Hope you will find the above in order.

Thanks.

WHITE HAZY 2 CIRCUIT MANAGER
MRS MLIMI

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
WHITE - HAZY 2 CIRCUIT
07/02/2025
DATE
PO BOX 700 WHITE RIVER 1240
LITIKO LETEMFUNDVO

MPUMALANGA
THE PLACE OF THE RISING SUN

APPENDIX G: PROOF OF INFORMED CONSENT

Date: 03-03-2025

Title: School leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is NHLANHLA SYLVESTER MADUNA and I am doing research under the supervision of PROFESSOR K. MOHANGI, a professor, in the Department of Education (Psychology of education) towards a PHD at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled **School leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools**

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could assist in enhancing the role of school leadership in promoting teachers' EI and overall well-being in rural South African schools:

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because you are a member of the School Management Team, in a rural South African school.

I obtained your contact details from the White Hazy 2 Circuit SMT database for all schools in the circuit. Indicate the approximate number of participants. The study will consist of 20 participants who are all SMT members in the circuit. **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

Describe the participant's actual role in the study.

The study involves *questionnaires / semi-structured interviews and analysis of school documents*. Indicate what sort of questions will be asked or show the questions in this document. Describe the The expected duration of participation will be three months including the time needed to complete specific research activities like questionnaires, or interviews. The time allocated to conduct interviews will be 1 hours to 1 ½ hours.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

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The study aims to bring awareness among SMT members on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Describe any potential level of inconvenience and/or discomfort to the participant. List all possible or reasonably foreseeable risks of harm or side-effects to the potential participants *[outlining likely incidence and severity]*. Include any risk that may come from others identifying the person's participation in the research. Describe the measures that will be taken if injury or harm attributable to the study occurs.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research *(this measure refers to confidentiality)* **OR** Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give *(this measure refers to anonymity)*. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings *(this measure refers to confidentiality)*.

If relevant, identify who will have access to the data *[transcriber/external coder]* and how these individuals will maintain confidentiality *(e.g. by signing a confidentiality agreement). Please note that confidentiality agreements should be submitted to the Research Ethics Review Committee for consideration]*. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Create a sentence to inform participants that their anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Also indicate how privacy will be protected in any publication of the information. *A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report*. Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity, e.g. when focus groups are used as a data collection method.

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Include a description of what a focus group is and state: *While every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure that you will not be connected to the information that you share during the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat information confidentially. I shall, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason, I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group.*

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in my office and supervisor's office for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. *hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme).*

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no payment, reward, or financial incentives for participation in this research.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the *(identify the relevant ERC),* Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Mr. Maduna Nhlanhla Sylvester on _____or email _____(insert email address or fax number) or website_____ (insert URL). The findings are accessible for _____ (insert time frame).

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact _____ (insert principle researcher's contact details here, including email, internal phone number and fax number).

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact_____ (insert supervisor's contact details here, including email, internal phone number and fax number).

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

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(insert signature)

Maduna Nhlanhla Sylvester

(type your name)

Email: 60862963@mylife.unisa.ac.za or Ndduna@vodamail.co.za
082 719 0720

Supervisor details:
Prof K Mohangi
mohank@unisa.ac.za
012 337 6169

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APPENDIX H: QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE·ON·EMOTIONAL·INTELLIGENCE·AND·TEACHER·WELL-BEING¶

School·leadership·must·comprehend·their·own·emotions·and·the·feelings·of·the·people·they·oversee·as·the·educational·landscape·gets·more·complicated·and·competitive.·Teachers·must·be·able·to·handle·obstacles,·setbacks,·and·little·resources;·otherwise,·they·risk·quitting·or·giving·up·easily·(Sencio·et·al.,·2020).·It·is·important·for·school·leadership·(School·Management·Team)·to·encourage·and·support·teachers·in·all·aspects·of·their·work·environment·for·them·to·be·able·to·cope.¶

What·follows·are·questions·on·Emotional·Intelligence·(EI)·and·its·importance·in·fostering·teacher·well-being·in·rural·South·African·schools.·¶

This·questionnaire·consists·of·3·parts:·**Part·i,·Part·ii**·and·**Part·iii.**·Please·answer·all·questions·in·a·best·way·possible.·¶

Part·i:·**Biographical·information.¶**

Gender¤	Male¤	Female¤

¤
¶

Age·range¤	20-29¤	30-39¤	40-49¤	50-59¤	60-69¤

¤
¶

REQV¤	10¤	11¤	12¤	13¤	14¤	15¤	16¤	17¤

¤
¶

Teaching·experience¤	¤	**Number·of·years·in·Management·(SMT)¤**	¤

¤
¶

Part·ii:·**Understanding·of·emotional·intelligence¶**

1.→As·a·member·of·the·School·Management·Team,·what·is·your·understanding·of·the·concept·of·Emotional·Intelligence.·Please·elaborate.¶

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____¶

2.→Explain·your·understanding·of·the·following·components·of·EI:·What·does·it·mean·and·why·is·it·important-·how·can·one·develop·these·skills?¶

(a)→Self-awareness:¶

_____
_____
_____¶

(b)→Self-regulation:¶

_____¶

1¶

¶

(c) Empathy:

(d) Social skills:

(e) Motivation:

3. Why are the above-mentioned components of Emotional Intelligence important? Please elaborate.

4. How can one develop these above-mentioned skills (components) of emotional intelligence? Please elaborate.

5. How important is emotional intelligence in executing your daily duties in the workplace? Please elaborate.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. What are the components of emotional intelligence do you think are important for management and for teachers to understand in the workplace? Elaborate, why is it important?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. How often do you encounter or deal with the following matter pertaining to emotional intelligence? Give examples of each. Please tick and mention examples.

	Daily	**Several times a week**	**Not at all**	**Give examples**
Conflict management				
Stress management				
Positive reinforcement				
Active listening				
adaptability				

Self-awareness				
Self-regulation				
empathy				
Social skills				
Motivation				
Cultural sensitivity				

Part iii: **Understanding well-being and its relationship to emotional intelligence.**

1. What is your understanding of the concept of well-being? Please elaborate.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Why is teacher personal well-being important in the workplace? Please elaborate.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. As a member of the SMT, what are your views on the role of EI in fostering teacher well-being in your school? Please elaborate.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Which programmes (If any), are deemed relevant by SMT's to improve the well-being of teachers in rural South African Schools? Please elaborate.

End of Questionnaire. Thank you.

Sencio, MSLT, F. C., & Magallanes, C. I. (2020). Emotional Intelligence and Resilience of High School Teachers in Diocesan Schools in Antique. *Philippine Social Science Journal*, *3*(2), 105–106. https://doi.org/10.52006/main.v3i2.25

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION
(Introduce yourself, thank the participants, explain the purpose etc.)
Purpose

- The interview seeks to elicit information from you pertaining **School leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools**
- The information you provide will help in the development of a framework to guide the **development or mobilisation of programmes that cater for SMTs use of Emotional intelligence in supporting teacher well-being particularly in rural South African schools.**
- **Time line**
  The interview should take about 60 MINUTES

1. What is your understanding of key emotional intelligence, related concepts (e.g., emotional resilience, conflict management, adaptability, active listening, stress management, positive reinforcement and emotional regulation)?
2. Why is it important for leaders to recognise their emotional states, what impact does it have on staff's management of their emotions?
3. Why is it important for school leadership to model conflict management and resilience to staff?
4. Explore the role of emotional intelligence praise and acknowledgement on staff (By SMT).
5. Highlight the importance of open, honest and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers.
6. Highlight the importance of trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale.
7. Highlight the importance of empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership.
8. Establish the link between emotional intelligence and teacher self-efficacy, stress management and positive reinforcement.
9. What is your understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities?
10. Why is it important to adapt leadership styles to local norms and values?
11. How can emotional intelligence be utilised in building a sense of community and shared purpose?
12. As a leader, what is your role in buffering stress and advocating for support towards your staff members?
13. What is the emotional toll of role overload on teachers?
14. How emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school's emotional tone?
15. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence, job satisfaction and reduced burnout?
16. Does your school have any long-term strategies informed by emotional intelligence (e.g. peer support, wellness initiatives)?
17. What is your role as a leader in institutionalising emotional well-being?
18. Highlight the importance of creating environments where teachers feel safe to express concern.

Closing

Interviewer: Thank you very much for sparing your time for this interview. If you feel like sharing more information, please be free to contact me. This is the end of our interview. Thank you very much.

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APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Appendix J: Interview schedule

PLANNED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (adjusted during data collection to suit the participant)

Number of candidates	10 (1 from each school)
Activity	One-on-One semi-structured Interview
Duration	Approximately 1 hour per participant

Participants	Date	Time (duration)	Activity	Person responsible	Venue/ ZOOM (wherever needed)
Candidate A	Day 1	14h30 - 15h30	Interview candidate A	Researcher	School A office
Candidate B	Day 2	14h10 - 15h40	Interview candidate B	Researcher	School B office
Candidate C	Day 3	14h30 - 15h30	Interview candidate C	Researcher	School C office
Candidate D	Day 4	14h30 - 15h30	Interview candidate D	Researcher	School D office
Candidate E	Day 5	14h30 - 15h30	Interview candidate E	Researcher	School E office
Candidate F	Day 6	14h30 - 15h30	Interview candidate F	Researcher	School F office
Candidate G	Day 7	14h30 - 15h30	Interview candidate G	Researcher	School G office
Candidate H	Day 8	14h30 - 15h30	Interview candidate H	Researcher	School H office
Candidate I	Day 9	14h30 - 15h30	Interview candidate I	Researcher	School I office
Candidate J	Day 10	14h30 - 15h30	Interview candidate J	Researcher	School J office

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APPENDIX K: LIST OF DOCUMENTS ANALYSED

Appendix K: List of Documents Analysed

Documents Analysed

1. Agenda and Minutes of School Management Team Meetings
2. Agenda and Minutes of Staff Meetings

(Documents Analysed were from the 10 participating schools)

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APPENDIX L: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION
(Introduce yourself, thank the participants, explain the purpose etc.)
Purpose

- The interview seeks to elicit information from you pertaining **School leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools**
- The information you provide will help in the development of a framework to guide the **development or mobilisation of programmes that cater for SMTs use of Emotional intelligence in supporting teacher well-being particularly in rural South African schools.**
- **Time line**
  The interview should take about 60 MINUTES

1. **What is your understanding of key emotional intelligence, related concepts (e.g., emotional resilience, conflict management, adaptability, active listening, stress management, positive reinforcement and emotional regulation)?**

   Interviewer: We will start by exploring the various concepts that underpins emotional intelligence. What is your understanding of the concept emotional resilience?

   P1: Mhh…Emotional resilience according to my understanding means being able to show strong emotions under difficult situations…having nerves of steel…to keep going when the going gets tough.

   Interviewer: Nodding a head…Yes continue…

   P1: … it means being strong and to keep going even when the going gets tough.

   Interviewer: Explain your understanding of conflict management.

   P1: …conflict management has to do with individuals being able to manage conflict among individuals…being able to successfully intervene under challenging situations between individuals or colleagues.

   Interviewer: Can we continue? Can we explore your understanding of the concept, adaptability as a concept that underpins emotional intelligence? Why is it important in promoting emotionally intelligent decision-making?

   P1: Adaptability means being able to thrive and survive under challenging situations…it means being able to adjust over and over according to the demands of task at hand.

   Interviewer: When managing emotional responses during crises like resource shortage or learner trauma, what is your understanding of the concept emotional regulation?

   P1: …teachers in rural schools are often faced with situations related to a shortage of Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM), like textbooks and other teaching aids. When teachers are frustrated in class due to the shortage, which hinders effective learning and teaching, it is important that school leaders stay calm and provide support to teachers, either by improvising or mobilising resources from neighbouring schools.

   Interviewer: Can we explore the concept of active listening, why is it important to you as a leader?

   P1: …active listening means living in the moment, being here and now. Being able to listen and track the conversation thoroughly and carefully…it means being attentive when having conversation with people…it is important as it assures a person that you are paying attention to what they are saying, which makes them feel good.

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Interviewer: That is interesting. Can we move on to the next aspect?

2. **Why is it important for leaders to recognise their emotional states, what impact does it have on staff's management of their emotions?**

P1: Leaderships' ability to recognize and regulate their emotions directly shapes the tone of the school day…if we are calm and constructive, staff feel safe and supported to do the same

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

3. **Why is it important for school leadership to model conflict management and resilience to staff?**

P1: As school leaders we are role models…it is very important at all times to be level headed and remain calm under any challenging situation…as a leader, it is important to always exhibit good practices of managing conflict and also being resilient and strong no matter how tough the situation is.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

4. **Explore the role of emotional intelligence praise and acknowledgement on staff (By SMT).**

P1: It is very important to always motivate, give praise and acknowledge good deeds by staff members. It motivates staff to be the best they can be. To always do their best and go an extra mile.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

5. **Highlight the importance of open, honest and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers.**

P1: It is important for us as school leaders to be open, honest and be emotionally attuned …it creates trust and promote a healthy working environment where everyone feels that their opinion is valued and appreciated. As indicated, it encourages staff to always do their best and excel.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

6. **Highlight the importance of trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale.**

P1: … Trust boosts morale and motivation among staff members…the high morale comes from feeling valued and supported by trusting that school leadership has their back…it connects leaders and Teachers which makes them feel part of a shared mission and culture…with strong trust, teachers are more engaged and committed…stress is reduced, and satisfaction increases which in turn this improves staff retention.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

7. **Highlight the importance of empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership.**

P1: It helps to empower teachers to form and develop meaningful human relationships…this also helps in personal and professional success by influencing the decision-making process…a variety of complex issues like direct conflict among managers and staff can be well managed within the school.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

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8. **Establish the link between emotional intelligence and teacher self-efficacy, stress management and positive reinforcement.**

P1: Teachers and leaders who develop emotional intelligence strengthen self-efficacy by cultivating a growth mind-set and inner resilience…this lessens burnout by controlling and managing stress better, which promotes an encouraging culture through emotionally intelligent, meaningful reinforcement.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

9. **What is your understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities?**

P1: (*Thinking deeply…)* data from the School-Based Support Team indicate that a large number of learners that attend our school are orphans…very few learners who stays with both parents…some learners, also a large number stay with relatives or grandparents…this put a strain on the work of mangers and teachers as in most instances parents are not available to support their children on the many challenges that they face.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

10. **Why is it important to adapt leadership styles to local norms and values?**

P1: Rural communities fall under traditional leaders. The community often prioritise close-knit relationships and interpersonal trust over formal authority…leaders who often do not rely on hierarchical style may be seen as impersonal or out of touch…it is important as school leaders, in everything that we do, to abide and be in line with traditional norms and values.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

11. **How can emotional intelligence be utilised in building a sense of community and shared purpose?**

P1: as leaders, it is important to be inclusive, to involve all stakeholders in our schools. As an emotional intelligent leader, I can influence all stakeholders to get more involved in education

Interviewer: Can you elaborate more?

P1: It is important to encourage stakeholders like churches, clinics and police and other community based organisations to support schools in every way possible

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

12. **As a leader, what is your role in buffering stress and advocating for support towards your staff members?**

P1: The district office has placed great pressure on teachers in township and rural schools to perform on par with their counterparts in urban schools…this causes a lot of stress as rural schools are often under-resourced and face many challenges that may hamper academic excellence…as a manager, I am often faced by teachers who are always ill, stressed, demotivated which result in regular absenteeism from time to time…as a manager, I find it very difficult to uplift the spirits of colleagues which further puts a lot of stress on myself and the entire management.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

13. **What is the emotional toll of role overload on teachers?**

P1: Both ourselves as SMT and teachers always feel overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted…there is little time and never-ending duties and responsibilities which often lead to anxiety, physical fatigue and feeling of helplessness…it's a vicious cycle of stress which we have to endure day by day.

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Interviewer: Thank you. Can we move to the next item?

14. How emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school's emotional tone?

P1: Shortage of resources will always lead to conflict…it is important never to let conflict get out of hand…as a leader, it is important to be always on the lookout for emotional triggers and respond constructively, thus maintaining harmony among managers and teachers.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate more on this aspect?

P1: Emotional intelligent leaders will always model set the tone of calmness and tolerance among staff members

Interviewer: Thank you for the response. Let us move onto the next item.

15. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence, job satisfaction and reduced burnout?

P1: Emotional intelligent people possess skills that helps them overcome any challenging situations at work. They are less prone to stress and burnout.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate more on this aspect?

P1: It is important to acknowledge that stress is part of us, what is important is how to manage it. With high level of emotional intelligence, stress is easily manageable.

Interviewer: Thank you for the response. Let us move onto the next item.

16. Does your school have any long-term strategies informed by emotional intelligence (e.g. peer support, wellness initiatives)?

P1: I don't think so. We have the wellness section situated at the District office. although the wellness section exists, it is at the District office…from time to time, there is an indication that the section is understaffed and officials, as well as professionals, are not able to cover all schools in the districts…thus unable to offer any programmes or initiatives which can assist in developing emotional intelligence skills among teachers.

Interviewer: Thank you for the response. Let us move onto the next item.

17. What is your role as a leader in institutionalising emotional well-being?

P1: as a leader, I should use my emotional intelligence to be aware of all issues that trouble our staff. It is important to initiate functional and effective programmes in schools to support well-being of staff members, including teachers. Teachers are important assets in schools, therefore it is important to take care of their well-being.

Interviewer: Yes… (nodding head)

P1: Emotions can make or break any school. Taking care of emotional well-being will certainly make schools succeed in everything, academically and with teachers performing at their best.

Interviewer: Thank you for the detailed response. Let us move onto the next item.

18. Highlight the importance of creating environments where teachers feel safe to express concern.

P1: Creating a healthy school environment encourage teachers to feel more important. When they feel important, they are able to express their concerns in every aspect that impacts the running of the school

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Interviewer: Thank you for the response.

Closing

Interviewer: Thank you very much for sparing your time for this interview. If you feel like sharing more information, please be free to contact me. This is the end of our interview. Thank you very much.

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APPENDIX M: TRANSCRIPTION AND DATA ANALYSIS SCHEDULE

Month-by-Month Schedule

Month	Phase	Key Activities	Outputs
Month 1	Data Preparation & Transcription	Organisation and labeling of verbatim transcription; anonymisation of participant identities	Clean, anonymised transcripts
Month 2	Familiarisation	Repeated reading of transcripts; note-taking; reflective memo writing	Familiarisation notes and memos
Month 3	Initial Coding	Systematic open coding across the dataset using qualitative analysis software	Initial code list
Month 4	Theme Development	Collapsing codes into potential themes; reviewing coherence within and across themes	Preliminary themes
Month 5	Theme Refinement & Definition	Reviewing themes against research questions; defining and naming final themes	Finalised themes
Month 6	Interpretation & Validation	Theoretical interpretation; integration with literature; credibility checks (peer debriefing/audit trail)	Analytic narrative

INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT: SCHOOL A, PARTICIPANT 1, INTERVIEW 1

INTERVIEWER: **NSM**

INTERVIEWEE: **(P1)**

DATE OF INTERVIEW: **24-04-2025**
START TIME OF INTERVIEW: **14H30**
END TIME OF INTERVIEW: **16H00**
LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: **(SCHOOL A)**

INTERVIEW TOPIC: School leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools

INTRODUCTION
(Introduce yourself, thank the participants, explain the purpose, etc.)

Purpose
The interview seeks to elicit information from you pertaining to **school leadership views on the role of emotional intelligence in fostering teacher well-being in rural South African schools.**

The information you provide will help in the development of a framework to guide the **development or mobilisation of programmes that cater for SMTs' use of emotional intelligence in supporting teacher well-being, particularly in rural South African schools.**

Time line
The interview should take about 01H30 minutes.

Transition
For how long have you been an SMT member?

- This is my 10th year as a member and as Principal of the school. I have been an SMT member since the beginning of 2010.

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
What is your understanding of key emotional intelligence, related concepts (emotional resilience, conflict management, adaptability, active listening, stress management, positive reinforcement and emotional regulation)?	**P1:** Mhh…Emotional resilience, according to my understanding, means being able to show strong emotions under difficult situations…having nerves of steel…to keep going when the going gets tough. **Interviewer:** Nodding a head…Yes continue… **P1:** … it means being strong and to keep going even when the going gets tough. **Interviewer:** Explain your understanding of conflict management. **P1: …**conflict management has to do with individuals being able to manage conflict among individuals…being able to successfully intervene under challenging situations between individuals or colleagues. **Interviewer:** Can we continue? Can we explore your understanding of the of concept, adaptability as a concept that underpins emotional intelligence? Why is it important in promoting emotionally intelligent decision-making? **P1:** Adaptability means being able to thrive and survive under challenging situations…it means being able to adjust over and over according to the demands of the task at hand. **Interviewer:** When managing emotional responses during crises like resource shortage or learner trauma, what is your	**Emotional intelligence as a catalyst for supportive leadership**	Knowledge, self-awareness and adaptability in leadership practices Emotional Regulation in High-Stress Contexts	Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: 1.1.1 School leaders' ability to understand the nature of emotional intelligence and respond to teachers' emotional needs to foster emotional resilience. 1.1.2 Self-awareness and empathy as tools for conflict resolution and morale boosting. 1.1.3 Adaptability, reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making.	Bahshwan (2024)

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
	understanding of the concept of emotional regulation? **P1:** …teachers in rural schools are often faced with situations related to a shortage of Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM), like textbooks and other teaching aids. When teachers are frustrated in class due to the shortage, which hinders effective learning and teaching, it is important that school leaders stay calm and provide support to teachers, either by improvising or mobilising resources from neighbouring schools. Interviewer: Can we explore the concept of active listening? Why is it important to you as a leader? **P1:** …active listening means living in the moment, being here and now. Being able to listen and track the conversation thoroughly and carefully…it means being attentive when having a conversation with people…it is important as it assures a person that you are paying attention to what they are saying, which makes them feel good. **Interviewer:** That is interesting. Can we move on to the next aspect?				
Why is it important for leaders to recognise their emotional states? what impact does it have on	**P1:** Leaderships' ability to recognise and regulate their emotions directly shapes the tone of the school day…if we are calm and				

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
staff's management of their emotions?	constructive, staff feel safe and supported to do the same **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?				
Why is it important for school leadership to model conflict management and resilience to staff?	**P1:** As school leaders, we are role models…it is very important at all times to be level-headed and remain calm under any challenging situation…as a leader, it is important to always exhibit good practices of managing conflict and also being resilient and strong no matter how tough the situation is. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?				
Explore the role of emotional intelligence, praise, and acknowledgement on staff (by SMT).	**P1:** It is very important to always motivate, give praise and acknowledge good deeds by staff members. It motivates staff to be the best they can be. To always do their best and go an extra mile. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?	**Emotional intelligence and teacher motivation**	Fostering well-being through trust and meaningful acknowledgement. Encouraging Autonomy and Professional Growth	Emotionally Attuned Leadership Communication for Trust and Teacher Well-Being: 2.1.1 The role of emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement on staff. 2.1.2 Open, honest, and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers. 2.1.3 Trust as a Foundation for Psychological Safety and Teacher Morale.	(Louren co et al., 2024).

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
Highlight the importance of open, honest and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers.	**P1:** It is important for us as school leaders to be open, honest and be emotionally attuned …it creates trust and promotes a healthy working environment where everyone feels that their opinion is valued and appreciated. As indicated, it encourages staff to always do their best and excel. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?				
Highlight the importance of trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale.	**P1:** … Trust boosts morale and motivation among staff members…the high morale comes from feeling valued and supported by trusting that school leadership has their back…it connects leaders and teachers which makes them feel part of a shared mission and culture…with strong trust, teachers are more engaged and committed…stress is reduced, and satisfaction increases, which, in turn, this improves staff retention. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?				

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
Highlight the importance of empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership.	**P1:** It helps to empower teachers to form and develop meaningful human relationships…This also helps in personal and professional success by influencing the decision-making process…a variety of complex issues, like direct conflict among managers and staff, can be well managed within the school. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?			Emotionally Intelligent Leadership as a Catalyst for Teacher Empowerment and Well-Being: 2.2.1 Empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership. 2.2.2 Linking EI to teacher self-efficacy, stress management and positive reinforcement.	
Establish the link between emotional intelligence and teacher self-efficacy, stress management and positive reinforcement.	**P1:** Teachers and leaders who develop emotional intelligence strengthen self-efficacy by cultivating a growth mind-set and inner resilience…this lessens burnout by controlling and managing stress better, which promotes an encouraging culture through emotionally intelligent, meaningful reinforcement. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?				
What is your understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities?	**P1**: (*Thinking deeply…)* data from the School-Based Support Team indicate that a large number of learners that attend our school are orphans…very few learners who stays with both parents…some learners, also a large number stay with relatives or grandparents…this put a strain on the work of mangers and teachers as in most	**Emotional intelligence in navigating rural school challenges**	Contextual Sensitivity and Cultural Intelligence Fostering Collective Resilience in a resource-constrained setting.	Culturally Responsive Leadership: 3.1.1 Understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities. 3.1.2 Adapting leadership styles to local	(Shikalepo, 2020).

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
	instances parents are not available to support their children on the many challenges that they face. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?			emotional norms and values.	
Why is it important to adapt leadership styles to local norms and values?	**P1:** Rural communities fall under traditional leaders. The community often prioritise close-knit relationships and interpersonal trust over formal authority…leaders who often do not rely on hierarchical style may be seen as impersonal or out of touch…it is important as school leaders, in everything that we do, to abide and be in line with traditional norms and values. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?				
How can emotional intelligence be utilised in building a sense of community and shared purpose?	**P1:** As leaders, it is important to be inclusive, to involve all stakeholders in our schools. As an emotionally intelligent leader, I can influence all stakeholders to get more involved in education. **Interviewer:** Can you elaborate more? **P1:** It is important to encourage stakeholders like churches, clinics, and police and other community-based organisations to support schools in every way possible **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?			Emotionally Intelligent Leadership for Strengthening Community, Mitigating Teacher Stress, and Advocating for Supportive School Environments: 3.2.1 Using EI to build a sense of community and shared purpose. 3.2.2 Leaders' role in buffering stress and advocating for support.	

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
				3.2.3T The Emotional Toll of Role Overload on Teachers.	
As a leader, what is your role in buffering stress and advocating for support towards your staff members?	**P1:** The district office has placed great pressure on teachers in township and rural schools to perform on par with their counterparts in urban schools…this causes a lot of stress as rural schools are often under-resourced and face many challenges that may hamper academic excellence…as a manager, I am often faced by teachers who are always ill, stressed, demotivated which result in regular absenteeism from time to time…as a manager, I find it very difficult to uplift the spirits of colleagues which further puts a lot of stress on myself and the entire management. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?				
What is the emotional toll of role overload on teachers?	**P1:** Both ourselves as SMT and teachers always feel overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted…there is little time and never-ending duties and responsibilities which often lead to anxiety, physical fatigue and a feeling of helplessness…it's a vicious cycle of stress which we have to endure day by day. **Interviewer:** Thank you. Can we move to the next item?				

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
How does emotionally intelligent leadership shape the school's emotional tone?	**P1:** Shortage of resources will always lead to conflict…it is important never to let conflict get out of hand…as a leader, it is important to be always on the lookout for emotional triggers and respond constructively, thus maintaining harmony among managers and teachers. **Interviewer:** Can you elaborate more on this aspect? **P1:** Emotionally intelligent leaders will always model and set the tone of calmness and tolerance among staff members **Interviewer:** Thank you for the response. Let us move on to the next item.	**Emotional intelligence and teacher well-being outcomes**	Emotional Climate and Staff Morale Sustainable Well-being Practices by practising psychological safety and emotional security	The Influence of Emotionally Intelligent Leadership on School Climate, Job Satisfaction, and Burnout Reduction: 4.1.1 How emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school's emotional tone. 4.1.2 Correlation with job satisfaction and reduced burnout.	(Lourenco et al., 2024).
What is the relationship between emotional intelligence, job satisfaction and reduced burnout?	**P1:** Emotionally intelligent people possess skills that help them overcome any challenging situations at work. They are less prone to stress and burnout. **Interviewer:** Can you elaborate more on this aspect? **P1:** It is important to acknowledge that stress is part of us; what is important is how to manage it. With a high level of emotional intelligence, stress is easily manageable. **Interviewer:** Thank you for the response. Let us move on to the next item.				
Does your school have any long-term strategies informed by emotional intelligence (e.g. peer	**P1: I** don't think so. We have the wellness section situated at the District office. Although the wellness section exists, it is at the District office…from time to time, there			Emotionally Intelligent Leadership for Institutionalising Teacher Well-Being Through	

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
support, wellness initiatives)?	is an indication that the section is understaffed and officials, as well as professionals, are not able to cover all schools in the districts…thus unable to offer any programmes or initiatives which can assist in developing emotional intelligence skills among teachers. **Interviewer:** Thank you for the response. Let us move on to the next item.			Sustainable Support Strategies and Psychologically Safe Environments: 4.2.1 Long-term strategies informed by EI (e.g., peer support, wellness initiatives). 4.2.2 Leadership's Role in Institutionalising Emotional Well-being. 4.2.3 Creating environments where teachers feel safe to express concerns.	
What is your role as a leader in institutionalising emotional well-being?	**P1:** As a leader, I should use my emotional intelligence to be aware of all issues that trouble our staff. It is important to initiate functional and effective programmes in schools to support the well-being of staff members, including teachers. Teachers are important assets in schools; therefore, it is important to take care of their well-being. **Interviewer:** Yes... (nodding head) **P1:** Emotions can make or break any school. Taking care of emotional well-being will certainly make schools succeed in				

RESEARCH QUESTION (examples)	EXCERPTS	THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORY	LINK TO LITERATURE
	everything, academically and with teachers performing at their best. **Interviewer:** Thank you for the detailed response. Let us move on to the next item.				
Highlight the importance of creating environments where teachers feel safe to express concern.	**P1:** Creating a healthy school environment encourages teachers to feel more important. When they feel important, they are able to express their concerns in every aspect that impacts the running of the school **Interviewer:** Thank you for the response.				

CLOSING

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much for sparing your time for this interview. If you feel like sharing more information, please be free to contact me. This is the end of our interview. Thank you very much.

Coding: TURQUOISE (Theme), GREY (sub-theme), ORANGE (Categories)

APPENDIX N: TABLE OF THEMES

Table 5.1: Overview of Theme 1

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">THEME 1
Emotional intelligence as a catalyst for supportive leadership
EI is generally concerned with how people comprehend, regulate, and express their feelings, as well as those of others. Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills are all components of EI, which is essential for successful relationship building, communication, and negotiating challenging social situations.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focuses on participating school leaders' (SMTs') general understanding of EI, self-awareness, and how they show adaptability in their leadership and their emotional regulation.</td><td colspan="4">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating school leaders' (SMTs') general understanding of EI, self-awareness, and how they show adaptability in their leadership and their emotional regulation.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 1.1
Knowledge, self-awareness and adaptability in leadership practices</td><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 1.2
Emotional regulation in high-stress contexts</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 1.1.1
School leaders’ ability to understand the nature of EI and respond to teachers’ emotional needs to foster emotional resilience</td><td>Category 1.1.2
Self-awareness and empathy as tools for conflict resolution and morale boosting</td><td>Category 1.1.3
Adaptability, reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making</td><td>Category 1.2.1
Managing emotional responses during crises (e.g., resource shortages, learner trauma)</td><td>Category 1.2.2
Leaders' recognition of their emotional states and their impact on staff</td><td>Category 1.2.3
Modelling conflict management and resilience for staff</td></tr>
</table>

Table 5.2: Overview of Theme 2

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">THEME 2
Emotional intelligence and teacher motivation
This theme focuses on school leaders’ ability to understand and manage emotions to promote teacher motivation. EI motivates teachers to build strong relationships, handle classroom challenges, and maintain enthusiasm for teaching, which, in turn, enhances their motivation.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focuses on participating SMTs' ability to understand and manage emotions to promote teacher motivation</td><td colspan="2">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating SMTs’ ability to understand and manage emotions to promote teacher motivation</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 2.1
Fostering well-being through trust and meaningful acknowledgement</td><td colspan="2">Sub-theme 2.2
Encouraging professional growth</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 2.1.1
The role of emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement</td><td>Category 2.1.2
Open, honest, and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers</td><td>Category 2.1.3
Trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale</td><td>Category 2.2.1
Empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership</td><td>Category 2.2.2
Linking EI to teacher self-efficacy, stress management and positive reinforcement</td></tr>
</table>

Table 5.3: Overview of Theme 3

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">THEME 3: Emotional intelligence in navigating rural school challenges
This theme focuses on SMTs' views on the importance of EI in navigating rural school challenges.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focused on participating SMTs' views on the importance of EI in navigating rural school challenges.</td><td colspan="3">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating SMTs’ views on the importance of EI in navigating rural school challenges.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Sub-theme 3.1
Contextual sensitivity and cultural intelligence</td><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 3.2
Fostering collective resilience in a resource-constrained setting</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 3.1.1
Understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities</td><td>Category 3.1.2
Adapting leadership styles to local emotional norms and values</td><td>Category 3.2.1
Using EI to build a sense of community and shared purpose</td><td>Category 3.2.2
Leaders' role in buffering stress and advocating for support</td><td>Category 3.2.3
Emotional toll of role overload on teachers</td></tr>
</table>

Table 5.4: Overview of Theme 4

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">THEME 4: Emotional intelligence and teacher well-being outcomes
This theme focuses on SMTs' views on EI and teacher well-being outcomes.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focused on participating SMTs' views on EI and teacher well-being outcomes.</td><td colspan="3">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating SMTs’ views on EI and teacher well-being outcomes.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Sub-theme 4.1
School’s emotional climate and staff morale.</td><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 4.2
Sustainable well-being practices involve practising psychological safety and emotional security.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 4.1.1
How emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school’s emotional tone</td><td>Category 4.1.2
Correlation with job satisfaction and reduced burnout</td><td>Category 4.2.1
Long-term strategies informed by EI (e.g., peer support, wellness initiatives)</td><td>Category 4.2.2
Leadership’s role in institutionalising emotional well-being</td><td>Category 4.2.3
Creating environments where teachers feel safe to express concerns</td></tr>
</table>

APPENDIX O: ROUGH WORK DONE TO ARRIVE AT THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES

APPENDIX O: Rough work done to arrive at themes, sub-themes and categories)

OUTLINE OF THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES (INITIAL VERSION WITH 2 THEMES)

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">THEME 1
Emotional intelligence
Emotional intelligence is generally concerned with how people comprehend, regulate, and express their feelings as well as those of others.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focuses on participating SMTs' general understanding of emotional intelligence, their emotional intelligence, and emotional intelligence in the workplace.</td><td colspan="3">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating SMTs' general understanding of emotional intelligence, their own emotional intelligence and emotional intelligence in the workplace.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Sub-theme 1
SMTs' understanding of emotional intelligence.</td><td colspan="3">Sub-theme 1
SMTs' emotional intelligence in the workplace.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 1
Understanding individual (own) emotions and those of other people (emotional intelligence).</td><td>Category 2
SMTs' understanding of concepts underpinning emotional intelligence.</td><td>Category 1
Meaning of emotional intelligence to SMTs (Importance of knowing and practising it)</td><td>Category 2
Importance of SMTs' emotional intelligence in the workplace</td><td>Category 3
Components of emotional intelligence that are important for school management to understand and practice in the workplace</td></tr>
</table>

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<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">THEME 2
Development and fostering of Emotional intelligence skills
Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills are all components of emotional intelligence, which is essential for successful relationship building, communication, and negotiating challenging social situations.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Inclusion criteria:
This theme includes all data that focused on participating SMTs' fostering of skills in emotional intelligence in their schools</td><td colspan="2">Exclusion criteria:
Any reference not related to the participating SMTs' views on fostering skills in emotional intelligence in their schools</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Sub-theme 1
SMTs' fostering of skills in emotional intelligence</td><td colspan="2">Sub-theme 2
Frequency by SMTs in dealing with matters pertaining to emotional intelligence in schools</td></tr>
<tr><td>Category 1
SMT's development of (own) emotional intelligence skills</td><td>Category 2
Emotional intelligence initiatives and effectiveness in schools (Training)</td><td>Category 1
Role (If any) SMTs' emotional intelligence plays in addressing unique challenges faced by teachers in schools</td><td>Category 2
Challenges of leading with emotional intelligence in high-stress schools</td></tr>
</table>

OUTLINE OF THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES (REFORMUATED VERSION WITH 4 THEMES)

Theme 1: Emotional Intelligence as a Catalyst for Supportive Leadership

Sub-theme 1.1: Knowledge, self-awareness and adaptability in leadership practices

1.1.1 School leaders' ability to understand the nature of emotional intelligence and respond to teachers' emotional needs to foster emotional resilience.

1.1.2 Self-awareness and empathy as a tool for conflict resolution and morale boosting.

1.1.3 Adaptability, reflective practices that promote emotionally intelligent decision-making.

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Sub-theme 1.2: Emotional Regulation in High-Stress Contexts

- 1.2.1 Managing emotional responses during crises (e.g., resource shortages, learner trauma).
- 1.2.2 Leaders' recognition of their personal emotional states and their impact on staff.
- 1.2.3 Modelling conflict management and resilience for staff.

Theme 2: Emotional Intelligence and Teacher Motivation

Sub-theme 2.1: Fostering well-being through trust and meaningful acknowledgement.

- 2.1.1 The role of emotionally intelligent praise and acknowledgement.
- 2.1.2 Open, honest, and emotionally attuned dialogue between leaders and teachers.
- 2.1.3 Trust as a foundation for psychological safety and teacher morale.

Sub-theme 2.2: Encouraging Autonomy and Professional Growth

- 2.2.1 Empowering teachers through emotionally supportive leadership.
- 2.2.2 Linking EI to teacher self-efficacy, stress management and positive reinforcement

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Theme 3: Emotional Intelligence in Navigating Rural School Challenges

Sub-theme 3.1: Contextual Sensitivity and Cultural Intelligence

- 3.1.1 Understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of rural communities.
- 3.1.2 Adapting leadership styles to local emotional norms and values.

Sub-theme 3.2: Fostering Collective Resilience in a resource-constrained setting

- 3.2.1 Using EI to build a sense of community and shared purpose.
- 3.2.2 Leaders' role in buffering stress and advocating for support.
- 3.2.3 Emotional toll of role overload on teachers.

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Theme 4: Emotional Intelligence and Teacher Well-being Outcomes

Sub-theme 4.1: Emotional Climate and Staff Morale

- How emotionally intelligent leadership shapes the school's emotional tone.
- Correlation with job satisfaction and reduced burnout.

Sub-theme 4.2: Sustainable Well-being Practices by practising psychological safety and emotional security

4.2.1 Long-term strategies informed by EI (e.g., peer support, wellness initiatives).
4.2.2 Leadership's role in institutionalising emotional well-being.
4.2.3 Creating environments where teachers feel safe to express concerns.

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APPENDIX P: FIELD NOTES

Appendix P: Field Notes

These are excerpts from my reflective journal (Reflexive Notes).

As I continued with participants' interviews, it became evident that school managers, though implicitly or explicitly, do employ some degree of emotional intelligence in exercising their daily duties. As far as I wanted to shy away from reflecting on what was happening in my school (to avoid my biases as a researcher), in terms of teacher absenteeism, ill-health, financial problems and relationship challenges to mention a few, it became evident that SMTs in schools were faced with similar challenges and were trying hard to empower and offer support to teachers and the entire staff (04 June 2025).

(Researcher's Positionality & Emotional Response) As a school principal, I noticed I felt sympathetic toward this particular participant's concern concerns about challenges related to teacher well-being. I felt mild discomfort during the interview as it made me reflect on the challenges that I face in my school. Reminder: stay attentive to silences: There were moments of thinking and lot of silences from the side of the participant. (23 June 2025).

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