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Exemplary Elementary School Principals' Use of Emotional Intelligence as They Lead Their Organizations in Rural Areas

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Exemplary Elementary School Principals' Use of Emotional Intelligence as They Lead

Their Organizations in Rural Areas

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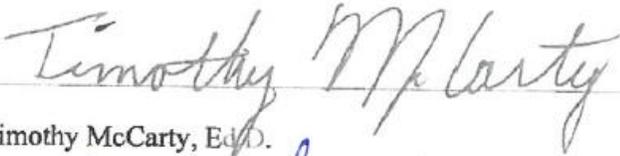
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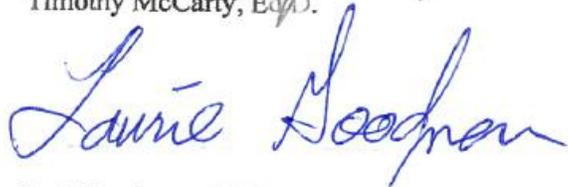
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ABSTRACT

Exemplary Elementary School Principals' Use of Emotional Intelligence as They Lead

Their Organizations in Rural Areas

by William Cook

The roles of school leaders have evolved from a more conventional focus, one

encompassing independent leadership, to a relational leadership approach that is more

open and personable (Hoyle et al., 2005). The purpose of this qualitative multicase study

was to describe the emotional intelligence strategies that exemplary elementary principals

in rural areas use as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations

based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-

management, social awareness, and relationship management). A secondary purpose of

the study was for exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics to explain how

their use of emotional intelligence strategies supported their success and tenure as they

responded to leadership challenges in their school organizations. This study used a

multicase research design to understand how exemplary elementary principals in rural

California school districts use their emotional intelligence (EI) to respond to leadership

challenges in their school organizations. Data were collected through semistructured

interview questions and artifact collection. Responses from participants were coded and

analyzed for themes to identify the relationship between data patterns, themes, and

categories. The key findings from the study were that all four domains of emotional

intelligence are essential strategies for responding to leadership challenges. Relationship

management and social awareness were identified as more critical when responding to

leadership challenges in their school organization. Self-awareness and self-management

were identified as less important when responding to leadership challenges in their school organization. The significance of the study is that modeling emotional intelligence strategies is essential in responding to leadership challenges. Additionally, relationship management and social awareness are crucial to support success and tenure in principalship in a rural area.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The concept of leadership has been around for centuries, and many attempts to define it stretch back to Plato. Plato indicated that the actions of good done by one can inspire others to commit good actions (Tenenbaum, 2010). Bennis (2009) expressed that leadership is the least understood topic in the social sciences although being the most studied. Stogdill (1950) described leadership as the influencing process of others and the direct application, affecting a specific group of people to complete an objective. Cross-referencing Stogdill's ideas on leadership, Kouzes and Posner (1995) believed leadership is the art of influencing others into a struggle for a shared purpose. Maxwell (1993) also felt that leadership is controllable because it is fluid and leadership skills developed over time.

Principals face many roles and responsibilities serving as primary leaders at school sites. A principal is accountable for the school's academic performance and holds high standards for all stakeholders (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The culture and climate of the organization fall upon the leadership (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). A positive culture in which safety and cooperation among all stakeholders are prevalent is ideal (Positive Adventures, 2019). Additionally, principals are responsible for building a system that empowers others to take on a leadership role within the organization (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The systems created by the principal have to account for supporting educators to elevate their practices to grow student achievement and make data-informed decisions.

The role of the principal in a rural school district is considered one of the most demanding administrative roles (McCormick, 2016). The principal is accountable for the

school's academic performance of all students regardless of their challenges. Principals face limited resources and conflicting priorities while attempting to manage, sustain change, and promote student learning intentionally (Hamilton, 2020). The role of the principal is continually changing with additional responsibilities, such as when the state added a massive undertaking in the Local Control Accountability Plan while the schools were trying to adapt to the new Common Core State Standards. Furthermore, the global pandemic has added challenges and responsibilities to principals and teachers.

Ford (2010) deduced that there is a relationship between job satisfaction and emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and understand emotions in others and oneself (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). When leaders possess emotional intelligence, the relationships created increase job satisfaction. As Gardner (1976) reinforced, when there is an understanding of the emotions of others, one can discover what motivates people and their points of view.

The emotional intelligence (EI) of principals has been explored extensively in the literature as an indicator of success whereas little research has examined whether EI contributes to longevity or retention. Many studies have shown positive correlations between EI and leadership, but some discrepancies exist. For example, fewer conflicts arose when working with a charismatic leader with a high EI level (Labby et al., 2012). However, another study found contrasting beliefs showing no effect of EI on leadership (Hall, 2007).

Principals who displayed emotionally intelligent behaviors created trust in their staff, cultivating a favorable environment (Brinia et al., 2014). Fulcher Gutierrez (2017) solidified this thought by concluding that EI presented opportunities that fostered an

openness to learn, supportive reactions and responses, effective relationships, and a safe environment. Therefore, further research on the EI of rural principals may provide a deeper understanding of how they effectively respond to the unique challenges they face in leading their schools.

Background

History of the Evolution of Schools

The Puritans of New England created the first available public education establishment in America in the 17th century to spread a theocratic mission. With an influx of new cultures coming to America, the education system's goals shifted to support democratic principles (Schul, 2019). As the nation grew, so did the ideas of education and its importance to the citizens. Education has a massive influence on today's society. Education establishments are unique because their purpose is to help teach the skills of the upcoming generations so they become more productive members of society. Specifically, as the nation grew, the influx of immigrants came to the country, and an important goal was to help educate new U.S. residents. Educating the masses was seen as necessary. The creator of the typical school, Horace Mann, indicated that school provided tools essential to create economic opportunities to promote self-sufficiency, foster civic duty, and teach democratic principles and was intended to be the great equalizer (Mathis, 2019). Schools have altered their appearance and who they serve over time. Schools in urban demographics are grade specific such as kindergarten through third grade whereas some schools in rural can look vastly different to accommodate the population of the area for example, kindergarten to eighth grade, kindergarten to sixth grade, and fourth to eighth grade.

History of Principals in Public Education

Leaders of the first schools were teachers who accepted increased administrative duties (Stevenson, 1995). The leader teachers were referred to by various terms in the 1800s, and the title of principal was widely adopted by schools in the early 20th century. Principals have had many roles since their inception in the early 17th century. Schools were primarily for the wealthy because the tuition costs were what paid the teachers' salaries. The principal was also the teacher, and the curricula centered on learning to read religious content to reach their perception of salvation. Equally important, in the 18th century, James G. Carter altered the role of the principal or schoolmaster to ensure the school leaders were of good moral standing and well-versed in geography and languages such as Latin, Greek, and English (Stevenson, 1995).

Role of the Elementary School Principal

As the school system grew, the role of the administrator changed as well. At the turn of the 19th century, the principal position transitioned from a teacher leader to the middle management system people are accustomed to today, ensuring the school runs efficiently and addresses discipline concerns (Rousmaniere, 2013). Another essential point is principals directly communicate between the district initiatives and the stakeholders they serve.

Evolution of the Principal Position in Schools

The country's demographics changed throughout the early years of education establishments. The school became a popular setting, and more schools were created. Educational facilities no longer required tuition and were funded by taxpayers. More funds enabled more students to receive an education, but the connection between

establishments varied. As more people moved from the cities to towns, they still wanted education for their children. Complementary to this, principals in rural areas struggled because of inadequate funding (Stevenson, 1995). Necessities Americans know today, such as heat, lighting, and materials needed for schools, were essential, but the desire to avoid paying higher taxes superseded educational needs.

Elementary Principals' Communication

Principals are responsible for communicating with various stakeholders, including the superintendent, the school board, employees at the school site, parents, and students (McCormick, 2016). Therefore, leaders must be effective communicators to build and maintain necessary relationships. As Kambeya (2008) stated, to be effective, principals must be well-versed in communication, especially interpersonal communication. Essential types of communication include new initiatives from the district, weekly dialog with parents and staff, and daily interactions with stakeholders with various levels of needs.

Elementary Principals' Tenure

Elementary principals are leaving the position at an astonishing rate of 25% after the first year. Additionally, 50% of elementary principals resign after 3 years (School Leaders Network, 2014). Principals are essential to an elementary school to influence a positive school climate. Teacher performance and retention rates are not improving as time progresses, and the national average tenure in 2016-17 for a principal was 4 years (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Research on the consequences of turnover rates in principals at the elementary level is advancing (Hansen, 2018). What is known is that principal turnover affects students because inconsistent leadership is a detriment to student

achievement (Jones, 2021). Although teachers directly influence student outcomes, the principal does affect student learning by improving school and leadership teams. Strickland-Cohen et al. (2014) coincide with Jones's belief that principals influence student achievement. Educational improvement initiatives can make a difference in a school, and principals are the ones who ensure the sustainability of the initiatives.

Challenges Faced by Rural Elementary Principals

Increased demands of elementary school principals, including added responsibility and accountability, assist in understanding the impact EI may have on the longevity of principals. Goodwin (2013) believed that in transforming a school, a principal's success is attributed to their people skills and willingness to see a task through because it builds a positive school culture. Elementary principals are tasked with challenges faced by elementary administrators, including but not limited to unions, pandemics, vaccinations, protests, critical race theory, and civility (Chaidez, 2022). Principals face many challenges, but their challenges can be determined by the demographic they serve. To illustrate, Arnold (2004) believed administrators serving rural school districts encounter more significant challenges to recruit than their urban and suburban counterparts.

Additionally, Canales et al. (2008) supported this claim by stating that school districts in rural areas are complex. McCormick (2016) also found that rural school districts experience more significant challenges through limited financial resources and increased responsibilities by filling the organization's vacancies. One of the most critical issues is that rural principals often have to assume many duties handled by school personnel in urban and suburban school districts.

Demographic and Economic Conditions Affecting Education

Rural areas experience higher poverty rates with a greater likelihood of generational poverty (Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.-b). Unemployment rates are prevalent in rural areas because of the lack of opportunities for employees to earn a living wage (Sanders, 2022). Resources such as mental healthcare are less accessible in rural areas, which contributes to individuals self-medicating (Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.-b). Last, an added concern for increased substance abuse is the isolation of living in a rural area.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted educational establishments nationwide by closing them for 18 months. Schools were forced to drastically change their operations overnight by shifting from in-person learning to distance learning. School leaders ensured every student could have equal educational opportunities using digital devices such as WIFI hotspots and computers. When students and staff were allowed back on site, administrators focused on addressing the learning loss from distance learning. Additionally, schools saw a rise in the need for social-emotional education and managing the influx of behaviors in classrooms (Chaidez, 2022). Principals received additional tasks such as tracking exposures, staff vaccinations, and weekly testing (Tesar, 2021).

Union Relationships

In the majority of districts in California, teachers and classified staff are members of employee unions, such as the California Teachers Association and the Service Employees International Union (EdData, n.d.). A challenge facing administrators is reaching agreements with employee unions about working conditions. Because of outside

organizational factors such as the pandemic and rising inflation, unions have negotiated with district and school leadership to reach agreements on working conditions and salary increases. Several other items are negotiated with employee unions, such as safety in the workplace in every sector of the organization, employee health benefits, online instruction implementation, and culturally relevant curriculum (Jochim & Lavery, 2019). Principals in rural areas are directly involved in negotiations and are often the only ones (Hansen, 2018). It has been shown during heated discussions that using EI strategies such as recognizing personal and group emotions affects leadership longevity in the position (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).

Theoretical Foundations

Multiple Intelligence Theory

Howard Garner created multiple intelligence theory in 1976. He described this view on intelligence as "a complicated web of talents manifested in one's products and learning choices" (McClellan & Conti, 2008, p. 1). Educators gravitated to this theory on intelligence because it can be applied to student learning experiences. Students have many learning styles, but Garner believed their potential would increase if this theory were used with fidelity in educational settings. A potential hindrance of multiple intelligence theory is that although it covers a person's intelligence, it fails to include a multicultural perspective required to lead effectively (Riggio et al., 2002).

Sternberg's Multiple Loci of Intelligence

Sternberg's (1985) theory of multiple loci of intelligence proposed that intelligence is taught from exposure and lived experiences. Sternberg's theory recognized that specific loci of intelligence are distinct within an individual (Earley et al., 2006).

Multiple loci of intelligence theory detail both internal capacities (mental), such as metacognition, cognition, and motivation, as well as external capacities (overt), such as behavioral. What was discovered was that an individual's overt behavior was a direct result of leadership. Presbitero (2019) concluded that leaders influence ethical behavior by perceiving their cultural intelligence.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership describes inspirational leadership. Leaders inspire others to elevate their performance through the vision and involvement that conveys dedication above self-interest (Avolio & Bass, 2001). Many studies have shown correlations between effective leadership practices and emotions. A leader's EI plays a critical role in elevating the performance of organizational members (Zhou & George, 2003). McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002) shared that transformational leadership can directly correlate with dissatisfaction or optimism. Wolf (2010) also indicated that leaders who exhibit EI and transformational leaders display a more significant impact. Understanding transformational leadership and its connection with EI can assist principals. Using the links between EI and transformational leadership could impact how universities develop leaders and the process by which they are hired.

Rural Sociology Theory

Diving deeper into rural demographics and the society in which they reside is imperative to understand the emotions they experience. Rural sociology was developed to understand the issues stemming from rural civilizations (Hoffer, 1961). However, more progress has yet to be achieved to define what rural is. Hillyard (2007) believed there is a range of perspectives on the working definition of rural. Rural areas tend to encompass

areas of the countryside instead of a town-like atmosphere. The U.S. Census Bureau, a government agency, defines rural as an area with less than 50,000 people. A rural area can have urban clusters, which consist of 2,500 to 49,999 people (Health Resources & Services Administration, n.d.). The U.S. Department of Education refers to the National Center for Education Statistics to define rural, and it defines it in three categories: fringe, distant, and remote (Office of Elementary & Secondary Education, n.d.). Fringe is "Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster" (Center for Education Statistics, 2022, para. 5). Distant is

> Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022, para. 5)

Remote is "Census-defined rural territory more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022, para. 5).

Social Intelligence Theory

Albrecht (2006) described social intelligence as a fundamental understanding of people to get along with and influence them to work with a leader. Leaders with high levels of social intelligence attract others to them by showing traits of being socially conscious and nurturing. Thus, a critical skill school organizations rely on a leader to possess is the ability to inspire and grow others around them (Sternberg & Li, 2020).

Emotional Intelligence Theory

Salovey and Mayer created the term emotional intelligence (EI) in 1990 as the ability to effectively assess the mental capacity to monitor relations and understand the emotions of others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Goleman (1995) understood that a complex human element played a role in an organization's success. Because of this phenomenon, EI has risen to be a critical component of an organization through the four competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management. Furthermore, Goleman et al. (2013) later elaborated on his ideals of EI and its correlation to successful organizations and leaders producing effectively.

Goleman's Emotional Intelligent Theoretical Framework

Golman redefined EI in 2006 as one's ability to gauge the reactions of others and produce desired feelings. He described the importance of understanding the emotions of others and controlling their own emotions to facilitate emotional and intelligent progress (Goleman, 2006). Coinciding with Goleman's research, Fulcher Gutierrez (2017) agreed that EI is essential to school leadership. EI assists interpersonal connections with others, a mentor-mentee relationship, reacting appropriately to situations, and creating an emotionally safe environment that fosters growth. According to Goleman (1995), EI is the capacity to be aware of oneself, socially conscious, manage self, and manage relationships to encourage emotional and intelligent progress.

Self-Awareness

Goleman (2006) defined self-awareness as "understanding reactions and discerning linkages" (p. 74). Additionally, Goleman stated that self-awareness is "recognizing one's reactions accurately in an instant and identifying actions through

circumstances" (p. 74). Similarly, Widjaya (2014) stated that great leaders can be self-aware, which can be obtained with little effort.

Social Awareness

Social awareness is taking into account and being aware of others' emotions and feelings, points of view, and emotional states (Goleman et al., 2013). Awareness of the social dynamics in an organization and empathy play into social awareness. Therefore, leaders must use the awareness of their surroundings to obtain EI. Furthermore, leaders who use social awareness learn and understand others despite their status (Tait, 2020).

Self-Management

Self-management was defined by Goleman (2006) as the ability to control impulses and unpleasant emotions. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) concurred that self-management is displayed through regulating emotions. Leaders who possess self-management remain calm in difficult situations and can adjust as needed. When faced with adversity, leaders with self-management skills can deliver positive results (Botelho, 2020). With regard to self-management, Kucala (2017) argued that school leaders who manage their time, prioritize, and exhibit self-control can lead effectively.

Relationship Management

Goleman et al. (2013) described relationship management as helping others develop a vision to inspire and motivate. Principals can use this skill to become influential leaders by using relationships to influence others to build a shared vision to achieve common goals. In addition, leaders can create meaningful change by using relationship management as part of their team-building in their organization (Balaji, 2021).

Gap in the Literature

EI has been identified in the literature as favorable to effective leadership in law, medicine, and education; it may also be the case for public school elementary principals serving rural demographics (Fulcher Gutierrez, 2017). Research on EI described that leading a school organization requires various skill sets to respond to the challenges. Commonalities among leaders across the fields looked further into EI and its current and historical context. From the literature, it was concluded that minimal research was conducted about elementary school principals serving rural areas and their use of EI as they face challenges leading their schools.

Summary

The chapter focused on the educational patterns and recent shifts that have caused a need for transformational change by elementary principals in rural areas through emotionally intelligent strategies. Challenging decisions and the way leaders build teams to collaborate were examined. A conviction associated with leaders through current and historical context is EI. It was concluded that rural elementary principals lack extensive research on EI, establishing a need for this research.

Statement of the Research Problem

School principals in rural areas face unique challenges compared to urban principals, who are "multifaceted, place-conscious, and relationship-dependent" (Preston et al., 2013, p. 7). California has 39 counties classified as rural, comprising 60% of the state's land mass with 5.5 million residents (Rural County Representatives of California, n.d.). School leaders in rural areas face many challenges, such as geographic isolation, lower educational achievement levels, and fewer employment opportunities for families

in the community (Preston et al., 2013). Leaders in a school are responsible for student academic achievement, communicating with parents, budgeting, executing policy, and managing and maintaining relationships with all stakeholders (Griffin, 2005).

Despite past efforts to address the challenges facing exemplary principals in rural areas, their leadership ability was hindered during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Trimis (2021), the pandemic tested leaders' EI skills with all the accompanying issues and the typical challenges schools face. During the pandemic, principals faced the new challenge of transitioning between in-person and distance learning. Additionally, when schools returned to in-person learning from distance learning, there were many social-emotional concerns related to students and staff. Despite the intensity of the problems with all stakeholders, the leaders had to remain calm and lead effectively (Chaidez, 2022).

Researchers have agreed that transformational leaders are aware of situations in their organization and the emotions of staff and community members in turbulent times, facilitating practical work in various scenarios (Labby et al., 2012). Everyday stressors of elementary principals in rural areas are student discipline, scarce resources, low student academic achievement, and misconceptions about the duties of the administrators (Combs et al., 2009). Fullan (2003) believed that organizational change starts with the principal leadership. Furthermore, Fullan concluded, effective schools necessitate leaders who consider the whole child or the whole adult that go beyond the test scores when building schools.

Another issue that arose in the research is that principals are experiencing high burnout and need to balance responsibilities and motivating teachers (Combs et al.,

2009). Studies have shown that emotions can affect school leaders' performance, particularly when facing continual change in a school environment (Chen & Guo, 2018). A possible cause of the mismanagement of one's emotions in a leadership position is the need for education to inform school leaders of EI practices (Chaidez, 2022).

Few studies have examined the effects of EI on a principal's tenure in rural demographics. The lack of existing research indicates the need for greater insight into the capacity of exemplary principals in rural demographics to lead their organizations through the lens of EI as they encounter leadership challenges. Exploring the perceptions of rural elementary principals regarding how they used EI strategies in response to their unique circumstances can provide further insights into how to lead effectively in rural schools and communities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the emotional intelligence strategies that exemplary elementary principals in rural areas use as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management). A secondary purpose of the study was for exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics to explain how their use of emotional intelligence strategies supported their success and tenure as they responded to leadership challenges in their school organizations.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

The central research question for this study asked, "How do exemplary elementary Principals in rural school districts describe their use of emotional intelligence strategies as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of EI: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management?"

Research Subquestions

1. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of self-awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

2. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of self-management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

3. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of social awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

4. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of relationship management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

5. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of emotional intelligence strategies to support their success and tenure as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

Significance of the Problem

Principals are essential to create and maintain a culture that facilitates student achievement (Edmonds, 1979; Leithwood, 1994). Student achievement in schools is a direct result of the quality of the school leadership on campus (Educational Research Service, 1998). Taylor et al. (2001) determined that leadership in a school organization significantly shaped the school climate.

Kearney et al. (2018) found that working with socio-economically disadvantaged students influenced a principal's tenure. Working in a high-poverty school resulted in increases in principal turnover. Rural areas have higher numbers of children and families who live in poverty. Unemployment rates are prevalent in rural areas because of the lack of opportunities for the industry (Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.-c). Resources such as mental healthcare are less accessible in rural areas and contribute to individuals self-medicating. An added concern for increased substance abuse is the isolation of living in a rural area.

There have been instances of schools that are successful with demographics of at least 90% minority students, 90% of their students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, and student achievement in the 90th percentile on standardized tests (Kearney et al., 2018). A common factor in schools demonstrating success in these demographics is the longevity of their principals.

After examining the research, successful schools have emerged with leaders who have demonstrated strength in EI (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Principals who possess power in EI detect the emotional states of others to promote positive social functions (Brackett et al., 2011). Improving the culture in the workplace, efficiency, and

organizational functioning are all direct results of improving EI (Mathew & Gupta, 2015).

Principals face many decisions daily. Managing emotions is essential to a leader's performance, especially in a school environment in which things change rapidly (Chen & Guo, 2018). In a principal's decision-making process to guide the progress of the organization and work with a multitude of people, it is essential to understand how to engage in, prolong, and detach from emotional situations (Ashworth, 2013; Grobler et al., 2017).

Rural school districts routinely hire, mentor, and train principals. University administrator preparation programs can provide leadership and mentoring opportunities for current and future principals, specifically leaders in rural areas. Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) could profit by becoming aware of the benefits of EI and its benefits on leadership practices. A gap in recent research is how the principles of EI can affect a principal's leadership in a rural demographic (Chaidez, 2022; McCormick, 2016). Principals in rural areas experience more significant challenges than their affluent counterparts (Kearney et al., 2018). With a greater understanding of EI in principal leadership in rural areas, preparation programs can assist to facilitate strategies and techniques that support principal tenure (Chaidez, 2022; Kearney et al., 2018).

California has 39 counties classified as rural, comprising 60% of the state's land mass with 5.5 million residents (Rural County Representatives of California, n.d.). In a rural area, the residents are less prosperous than in an urban area and need influential school leaders to bridge the gap between rural and urban student achievement. This study supports how future and current school leaders in rural districts could better integrate EI

into their practice to facilitate relationships that produce positive outcomes with all stakeholders (Ament, 2013). Furthermore, principals with high EI have stronger relationships and are more effective in improving school by elevating staff and student learning potentials (Moore, 2009). In addition, evidence on EI and public school districts affirmed that EI is essential to school leadership (Chaidez, 2022). Thus, EI's integral components must be present for principals to build and lead a collaborative and influential culture and be exemplary leaders.

Definitions

I used the following operational and theoretical definitions throughout the study.

Operational Definitions

Emotional intelligence (EI). EI is the ability to make connections to one's emotions to strengthen relationships, excel in work, and make prosperous decisions (Segal et al., 2021).

Exemplary. Exemplary describes a person who provides an excellent model for people to copy.

Relationship management. Relationship management is handling interactions gracefully while listening and influencing others in a team to make appropriate decisions (Usher, 2017).

Rural. Rural defines an area with less than 50,000 people.

Self-awareness. Self-awareness is the ability to correctly identify, recognize, name, and monitor one's emotional state and distinguish one's beliefs from another (Goleman, 1995).

Self-management. Self-management adapts to changes while positively managing emotions (Segal et al., 2021).

Social awareness. Social awareness is the ability to feel comfortable in social situations while noticing and understanding others' emotions, concerns, wants, and power dynamics within an organization (Segal et al., 2021).

Theoretical Definitions

Emotional intelligence (EI). EI is the capacity to identify and control one's own and other people's emotions. The four domains of EI are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, 1995).

Exemplary. Someone who is exemplary stands out among peers significantly, and appropriate behavior, beliefs, or objectives can be emulated (Piazza, 2014).

Relationship management. Relationship management means leaders can take their own emotions, the emotions of others, and the context to manage social interactions successfully (Goleman, 1995).

Rural. A rural area experiences lower populations with higher rates of poverty, substance abuse, and lack of resources (Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.-a).

Self-awareness. Self-awareness means the leader can recognize and understand personal moods and drives and their effect on others (Goleman, 1995).

Self-management. Self-management means the leaders can flexibly manage their actions, thoughts, and feelings to get the desired results. Optimal self-management contributes to self-efficacy, confidence, and connectedness to others (Goleman, 1995).

Social awareness. Social awareness means the leader can effectively detect other people's emotions and read events. It's all about noticing other people's thoughts and feelings so the leader can empathize with them (Goleman, 1995).

Delimitations

In this multicase study, I delimited the population to the following criteria: five exemplary elementary principals leading in rural California districts of Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino counties. Additionally, participants needed to meet four of the five purposeful sampling criteria to be included in this study:

1. Current California public school elementary principals served 3 or more years in the same school district in a rural area.

2. Principals have demonstrated personal skills of EI.

3. Principals were members of the ACSA professional association.

4. Principals have published articles or papers or presented at conferences.

5. Principals have been recognized by a peer or peer group in the same position or superior as exemplary principals.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I discussed current research articles, a problem statement, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, a conceptual framework, five research questions, the research design, delimitations, definitions of key terms, and an explanation of the study's organization. The remainder of this study is divided into four chapters, a references page, and appendices. Chapter II provides a background and a literature review of research and literature related to the theory of EI and the pivotal role principals play in rural districts. Additionally, Chapter II discusses the gaps in the literature and the

need for greater study on the relationship between EI and principals in the context of leadership. Chapter III explains the methodology and research design of the study, including research objectives, instrumentation used in the study and its reliability and validity, the data collection process, and data analysis. Chapter IV of this study discusses the findings of each research question and the analysis of the data collected. Chapter V discusses the study's results, implications, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The roles of school leaders have evolved from a more conventional focus, one encompassing independent leadership, to a relational leadership approach that is more open and personable (Hoyle et al., 2005). This chapter explores the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) concerning effective leadership by elementary principals in rural areas as they counter the challenges in their school organization. Additionally, EI research as a component of the behaviors exhibited in principals' leadership in elementary schools, specifically in rural California, is reviewed. Furthermore, this chapter elucidates how rural school district elementary principals manage their EI use as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of EI: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Last, this chapter examines the principal's job in a school system in rural demographics concerning EI, including analyzing disparities in the research on principals.

History of Principals in Public Education

History of the Evolution of Schools

The early public education establishments were created to spread the religious beliefs of New England in the 17th century. Schools started to become more prevalent in the early 1800s. Schools were started primarily for the wealthy. The tuition costs funded teachers' salaries. Local officials declared leadership over public schools to manage and lead (Land, 2002). As America grew with new cultures, the ideology of the people rose to support democratic principles (Schul, 2019). Education continued to grow in a direction that displayed its importance to help teach skills to increase the productivity of society.

With many new residents of the United States through immigration, the nation was expanding, and educating the new population to the United States was seen as imperative. As a result, schools evolved into what they are today because of Horace Mann. Mr. Mann was administering schools to assist in creating self-sufficiency, teaching civic duty, and becoming a way for underprivileged families to rise in social and economic standing (Mathis, 2019).

Roles and Responsibilities

There are many roles a principal has had since a formal school's inception in the early 17th century. According to Stevenson (1995), the first principals of schools were teachers who absorbed administrative duties in addition to their teaching responsibilities. The head teacher or principal's curricula centered on learning to read religious content. By the 18th century, the role of the school leader was modified by James G. Carter to ensure that school leaders were of good moral standing (Stevenson, 1995). Additionally, leaders needed to be proficient in essential subjects such as geography and languages such as Latin, Greek, and English. In the 20th century, the term principal was introduced and adopted.

<div align="center">

Role of the Elementary School Principal

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The role of an elementary school principal has changed dramatically. Principals transitioned from teachers with extra responsibilities to middle managers. Principals now focus on school efficiency and discipline (Rousmaniere, 2013). Also, principals communicated with the stakeholders and district, ensuring awareness of district and school initiatives.

History of Evolution of the Principal Position

Schools have changed throughout history as their demographics have transformed. More schools were created as they became more popular and affordable. Principals were transitioned from teachers with biblical knowledge to middle managers. As cities became more inundated with population density, people moved to towns and wanted their children to receive an education. Tuition was no longer the norm for enrolling students, and educational establishments were becoming more funded by taxpayers. More schools and more funding resulted in a transformation of the principal position. Principals were in charge of schools but were isolated from other establishments while struggling because of inadequate funding (Stevenson, 1995). Although this is the case, principals evolved into the middle managers seen today.

The principal's responsibilities have changed to become a liaison between the school site and the district (Spillane et al., 2002). Administrators are responsible for external policy forced upon the school by the state and district while concurrently addressing challenges that present themselves internally. As principals experience the pressure of new initiatives, they provide coherence to facilitate connections to policy and align with school goals (Stosich, 2018).

The establishments necessitated this evolution because the need was no longer extended knowledge of content areas such as the bible and Latin but more of a role that facilitated the school's functioning as a business. The principal's role is to oversee everything happening at a school, such as the fiscal budgets, human resources, and other functions that make a school functional. Different demographics a principal was immersed in also proved to offer different challenges. When the demographics of a

school change, it is critical for the leader to develop relationships with everyone to invoke a sense of collectivity (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). In rural areas, necessities people know today, such as heat, lighting, and materials needed for schools, were essential, but the desire to avoid paying higher taxes superseded educational needs (Stevenson, 1995). As a result, principals must balance the school's internal needs with the direction and policy exerted on them.

School Demographic Changes

The demographics surrounding the school can impact what is happening in the students' lives, which affects the life of the school. For example, a family's income can impact the family's lives. Californians' average income in 2020 was $70,192, and the rural income was $52,022. Additionally, the poverty rates of rural areas exceeded that of urban areas by 13.4%, compared with 11.4% (Knudson et al., 2014). The population in rural areas experiences more unemployment, stemming from the lack of opportunities for employees to earn a living wage (Sanders, 2022). Resources to assist families are rare in rural communities, and mental health services are less accessible (Knudson et al., 2014). Students are affected by the environment that is created at home. Another concern is the isolation as a result of living in a rural area and the increased substance abuse.

Elementary Principals in Rural Demographics

Being a principal in rural school districts is a challenging administrative role (McCormick, 2016). Elementary principals have many responsibilities, but the school's priorities differ depending on the demographic being served. The more prevalent responsibilities are interacting with families, addressing staff turnover, and increasing academic performance.

In rural districts, the principal works with a population that experiences the cycle of poverty at a higher rate. Generational poverty, or the cycle of poverty, is the passing of poverty and deprivation from one generation to the next. Additionally, unemployment rates are extensive compared to those in more affluent areas because of the lack of industry and opportunity (Sanders, 2022). Adequate mental health care is nonexistent or requires excessive measures to achieve it, leading to increased substance abuse from self-medicating (Rural Health Information).

Administrators serving rural school districts experience severe challenges in recruiting (Arnold, 2004). The need for staffing is a never-ending scenario lived by administrators in rural demographics. Teachers with little to no experience running a classroom are often hired for an assignment. A school can employ a person with only a bachelor's degree, and with provisional permits, they are not required to enroll in a teaching credential program for up to 2 years after being hired. Moreover, teachers enter the classroom not knowing how to teach. The administrator is responsible for ensuring the classroom is a safe learning environment while teaching the educator how to lesson plan. This responsibility falls onto the administration because ineffective teachers impact student learning negatively and influence their academic careers. A negative teacher-student relationship can directly affect students' motivation to learn and influence student learning (Al Nasseri et al., 2014).

Academics and the way the school performs untimely falls onto the principal for accountability. Principals exercise their power to benefit the school and are held accountable for the responsibility of reaching the desired goals (Wang & Pollock, 2012). Moreover, research has shown that effective principals are necessary for an effective

school (Marzano et al., 2005). Regardless of their challenges, effective leaders are measured by the school's performance. With limited resources and conflicting priorities from district administration, principals are attempting to intentionally manage, sustain change, and promote student learning (Hamilton, 2020).

Elementary Principals' Communication

Communication in any organization is paramount to facilitate efficiency and growth. The principal's responsibility is to communicate effectively with all stakeholders, including superiors at the district office, families, employees, and the school board (McCormick, 2016). Examples of necessary communication are communication of new initiatives from the district, weekly dialog with parents and staff, and daily interactions with stakeholders with various levels of needs. Principals must be well-versed in communication, especially interpersonal communication (Kambeya, 2008). The relationships established by the principals assist how information is received.

Working Relationships

Developing and maintaining working relationships is paramount in rural areas when the demand for teachers outweighs the supply. The established culture measures a principal's success, their interactions with others, and their follow-through on tasks present in their organization (Goodwin, 2013). Interacting positively using EI has been a successful trait of leaders. Research has shown that leaders with EI produced more successful schools (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). An emotionally intelligent leader detects how others are emotionally and can promote positive social functions (Bracket et al., 2011). When transforming an organization, developing working relationships builds a team others want to join. EI improves an organization's culture, improving efficiency and

28

overall functioning (Mathew & Gupta, 2015). Increased responsibility and accountability for the ever-changing demands of elementary school principals further develop an understanding of the impact EI could have on principals' tenure.

Elementary Principal Tenure

A principal's tenure tremendously impacts a school; Jones (2021) stated that inconsistent leadership is detrimental to student achievement. As principal turnover rates increase, the consequences of unstable leadership become more of a focal point for researchers (Hansen, 2018). Elementary principals leave the position at an astonishing rate of 25% after the first year. Additionally, 50% of elementary principals resign after 3 years (School Leaders Network, 2014). Statistics have shown that performance and retention rates for principals are not improving as time progresses, and the national average tenure in 2016-17 for a principal was 4 years (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Principals affect student learning by improving school and leadership teams (Jones, 2021). To coincide with the beliefs of Jones, Strickland-Cohen et al. (2014) believed that principals influence student achievement. Principals implement educational improvement initiatives that can make a difference in a school, and principals are the ones who ensure the sustainability of the initiatives. With consistency in leadership, the establishment and those it serves can thrive. Increased demands of elementary school principals, including added responsibility and accountability, assist in understanding the impact EI may have on the longevity of principals.

Challenges Faced by Rural Elementary Principals

Principals face many challenges, but their challenges can differ by the demographic they serve. School districts in rural areas face more complex challenges

than urban and suburban districts (Canales et al., 2008). Rural school districts experience more significant challenges recruiting and retaining teachers than their urban and suburban counterparts (Arnold, 2004). McCormick (2016) agreed that rural school districts experience more significant challenges. Limited financial resources and increased responsibilities to fill the organization's vacancies are two challenges leadership faces in rural areas. Last, a critical challenge principals face in rural areas is that they often have to assume many duties handled by school personnel in urban and suburban school districts.

Demographic and Economic Conditions Affecting Education

Different areas experience distinct challenges that pertain to their demographic and economic conditions. For example, generational poverty is more prevalent in rural regions (Knudson et al., 2014). There is less industry in rural areas, thus causing an insufficiency of livable wage opportunities (Sanders, 2022). Moreover, mental health resources are scarce in rural areas, which can lead to parents self-medicating (Knudson et al., 2014). Rural areas have been shown to have an increase in substance abuse as a result of the isolation from living in a rural environment.

Current Public School Challenges

Elementary principals face many challenges in their schools. Some notable challenges elementary administrators face include but are not limited to unions, pandemics, vaccinations, and protests (Chaidez, 2022). Another challenge in the public school sector is the consistent staff turnover. Leaders are tasked with transforming a school for the betterment of the students, but the staff, to implement the transformation, need to display a tenure that would allow a change to be sustained. Goodwin (2013)

stated that in transforming a school, a principal's success is attributed to their people skills and willingness to see a task through because it builds a positive school culture.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic devastated education, and people are still seeing the effects years later because schools were forced to implement changes without a model or understanding of the best approach for students. Principals were tasked with ensuring their schools could function through distance learning. Every student was entitled to have an equal opportunity to education. Digital devices were the solution, but they needed to be organized and facilitated by the administrators. When students and staff were allowed back on campus, school leaders were given additional tasks such as tracking COVID-19 exposures, staff vaccinations, and weekly testing (Tesar, 2021). Additionally, the need for social-emotional learning and addressing the influx of behaviors in classrooms was prevalent (Chaidez, 2022).

Union Relationships

Unions are a significant part of a school culture because most teachers and classified staff are members of employee unions, such as the California Teachers Association (n.d.). Reaching agreements with employee unions regarding working conditions has been incredibly tiring for administrators since the pandemic. In rural areas, principals are often the only ones directly involved in negotiations (Hansen, 2018). Employee unions advocate for such things as safety in the workplace in every sector of the organization, employee health benefits, online instruction implementation, and culturally relevant curricula (Jochim & Lavery, 2019). Using EI strategies such as

recognizing the emotions of individuals during heated discussions has directly correlated to leadership longevity in the position (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).

<div style="text-align:center">Issues In Rural Education</div>

Conducting education in rural communities presents issues both unique and familiar. The communities are experiencing generational poverty and substance abuse. Furthermore, districts serving rural communities experience struggles to satisfy the needs of teacher recruitment, staff recruitment, resources for students with diverse needs, parent engagement, substance abuse, access to mental health care, and adverse childhood trauma (Cummins, 2019). Rindy Devoll, head of the CA Rural Ed Network and director of the Multi-Tiered System of Support for all of rural California stated, "Those are factors of anywhere; they are not unique to rural, but they do seem to have a more significant impact on our students and families in rural areas" (Cummins, 2019, p. 1)

Teacher Recruitment

A significant hindrance to educational establishments is the inability to attract and retain qualified teachers. A district administrator in rural northern California stated they have had issues recruiting teachers and even have to compete monetarily with neighboring districts over qualified educators (Cummins, 2019). The need for teachers is impacting districts to the point at which most applicants they receive have no teaching experience or educational background. The state requirements have been lowered to the point at which applicants are being hired with only a bachelor's degree. Many new teachers need help managing a classroom and leave the profession. About 30% of teachers leave schools that have a high-poverty rate (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). School working conditions and job dissatisfaction were the reasons for teachers leaving.

Staff Recruitment

Staffing shortages affect more than teachers only. Support staff are also essential to operate a school and can be challenging to recruit and retain. The shortages are compounded more in rural areas than in others, and sometimes, it is difficult just to get a body into the classroom (Cummins, 2019). Rural Ed Network's Devoll agreed and stated, "When the pool is smaller, you kind of have to take what you can get" (Cummins, 2019, The Staffing Problem section para. 4).

Resources/Staff for Students with Diverse Needs

Students in rural areas need help to get the same access and opportunity as students in metropolitan areas. According to an EdSource analysis of data from the California Public Utilities Commission, about 33% of rural California households are subscribed to internet service compared with 78% in urban areas (Johnson, 2020). In rural areas, the internet can be a source of frustration for those with it because an estimated 47% of households have inadequate broadband access speeds (Cummins, 2019). Additionally, students in rural areas are less exposed to rigorous coursework because of a need for qualified educators. Specific enrichment opportunities are unavailable to rural communities because of the organization and funding. Another hinderance that is apparent in rural areas is the need for transportation. Cummins (2019) stated,

> With issues ranging from school climate to home life to transportation inequities, Amador County Public Schools Board President Susan Ross said the state needs to realize the burden facing rural districts and do a better job of ensuring all

students have equitable access and opportunities. (Funding the Basics section,

para. 4)

Parent Engagement in the Education System

Parent engagement in schools is described by the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (2012) as parents and school staff collaborating to improve the student's

learning, development, and health. The research has shown that when a family is

involved in a student's educational experience, it leads to positive outcomes regardless of

socioeconomic status or background (Stanford, 2023). Parents attend more events in rural

areas than in suburban and urban areas but interact with teachers and talk to children

about school less (Prater et al., 1997).

Drug/Alcohol Abuse

Research conducted over the last decade has shown that rural areas experience

significant rates of substance abuse (Lambert et al., 2008). With many students indulging

in substances, it is hard to provide enough resources to combat the issues. According to

Cummins (2019), "Rural districts in California struggle to meet student needs and suffer

from disproportionately high incidences of suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and

suspension rates" (Funding the Basics section, para. 4). When the need for intervention is

apparent, there is nowhere locally to take substance abusers. Substance abuse prevention

and treatment services in rural areas are rare (Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Services Administration, 2005).

Distance to Mental Health Care

Mental health care facilities in rural areas are rare commodities. Many healthcare

establishments have closed in rural areas because many residents do not have adequate

health care and have to drive 40 miles farther for services less common, such as mental

health care and substance abuse (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2023). Those

who require services must have the means to travel to receive the necessary help.

Adverse Childhood Experiences/Trauma

Adverse childhood experiences are exposure to different forms of abuse,

dysfunction, and neglect in the household (Bryant et al., 2020). Many students in rural

areas experience trauma. Compared to urban children, rural children were more likely to

experience economic hardship, parental separation/divorce, household incarceration,

witness household violence, household mental illness, neighborhood violence, and

exposure to substance misuse (Crouch et al., 2022). Students are going to school with

these adverse childhood experiences and trying to learn without guidance on how to

navigate their mental health.

Theoretical Foundations for Emotional Intelligence

The subject of intelligence is familiar because it has been discussed and

researched for centuries. EI, on the other hand, is a relatively new concept. In the last 100

years, intelligence has been more formally examined (Romanelli et al., 2006). Through

the examination of intelligence, EI has been scrutinized through its research.

History of Intelligence as a Pathway to Emotional Intelligence

Throughout history, intelligence has been examined in all its forms. Recently,

further research has uncovered a consideration of more types of intelligence. Ancient

Greek philosophers such as Aristotle associated intelligence with problem solving and

remembering. Furthermore, other philosophers such as Descartes believed intellect was

delineating truth versus false statements. Thorndike and Stein (1937) developed the

notion that man is diverse in intelligence, compartmentalizing it into three categories—

mechanical, social, and abstract—as opposed to having a singular intellect (Salovey &

Grewal, 2005).

Multiple Intelligence Theory

Multiple intelligence theories have been studied for many decades. Garner was a

seminar author who studied multiple intelligence. Garner developed the multiple

intelligence theory in 1976 when he proclaimed seven intelligences through his book *The*

Shattered Mind. Within the seven intelligences, Garner defined social intelligence as an

amalgamation of a person's interpersonal intelligence and their intrapersonal

development. Interpersonal intelligence describes the awareness of one's moods and

emotions and those of others. Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to manipulate

feelings and apply this intelligence to one's actions, ideas, and behaviors (Gardner, 1976;

Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Other researchers, such as Salovey and Mayer (1990),

incorporated Garner's (1976) multiple intelligence theory into their work. Years later,

Cherniss and Goleman (2001) built on their ideas when they developed an EI model

focused on sensing and influencing leaders' emotions. Thus, principals who use multiple

intelligences consistently are thought to be more effective leaders.

Sternberg's Multiple Loci of Intelligence

For many decades, the multiple loci of intelligence theory have been studied.

Sternberg was a seminar author who studied the multiple loci of intelligence. Sternberg

(1985) alluded to intelligence being shaped by exposure and lived experiences. An

individual has a distinct set of loci in their intelligence (Earley et al., 2006). Multiple loci

of intelligence theory take into account mental internal capabilities (motivation) and overt

external capabilities (behavior). The way an individual displayed overt behavior was a direct result of leadership. The research concluded that leaders' perceptions of cultural intelligence influenced ethical behavior (Presbitero, 2019). Thus, principals who consistently use multiple loci of intelligence principles are thought to be more effective leaders.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Research on leadership has been studied for centuries. In the last few decades, transformational leadership has been examined. The founder of transformational leadership theory was James Burns (1978), who first discussed this theory on political leaders. Bernard Bass (1985) extended the idea of transformational leadership by exploring followers' loyalty to leaders. People want to follow a leader who inspires them. Many studies have shown that leaders can enhance the production of a team by effectively managing the emotions of self and others. Zhou and George (2003) believed a leader's EI plays an intricate role in transforming an organization. A seminal author correlating transformational leadership and EI, Wolf (2010) argued that leaders who display dynamic intelligence characteristics are more successful in transforming an organization. Furthermore, Wolf stated that the connection between transformational leadership and EI could influence how leaders should be trained. Transformational leaders display practical EI components and are thought to be more effective.

Rural Sociology Theory

Rural sociology theory has been studied for over a century. Beginning in the late 19th century, W. E. B. DuBois became a seminal author on rural sociology concerning agriculture and social consequences (Bailey & Zimmerman, 2022). The ideas of rural

sociology developed under the exploration of Charles Russel Hoffer (1961) to examine the issues rural civilizations face. A closer look into societies in rural areas develops a better understanding of the complex emotions the population experiences. Current research on rural areas has been minimal, but principals who understand rural sociology theory are more effective leaders.

Social Intelligence Theory

Social intelligence has been studied for many decades. Albrecht (2006) was a seminal author who studied social intelligence. Understanding people to influence them is fundamental to social intelligence. Leaders in a school setting, such as principals, depend on social intelligence to motivate and grow the people they lead (Sternberg & Li, 2020). A leader with competency in social intelligence is nurturing and socially aware, thus attracting others to their organization (Albrecht, 2006). Therefore, principals who use social intelligence consistently are thought to be more effective leaders.

Emotional Intelligence Theory

EI was built on the thoughts of social intelligence. A few seminal authors of EI are Salovey, Mayer, and Goleman. Salovey and Mayer established an EI model to determine the mental capacity of an individual to monitor relationships and decipher the emotions of others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Goleman (1995) expanded the research on EI and how it can benefit an organization's success. Goleman's four competencies of EI: social awareness, self-awareness, relationship management, and self-management have become a vital element of a successful organization. Thus, principals who use EI consistently are thought to be more effective leaders.

Goleman's Emotional Intelligent Theoretical Framework

EI was reevaluated in 2006 by Golman as the ability one possesses to construct desired feelings by the reactions of others. Golman reported the significance of being conscious of the emotions of others and managing one's own emotions to initiate emotional and intelligent progress (Goleman, 2006). Cross-referencing Goleman's research, Fulcher Gutierrez (2017) agreed that EI is crucial to leadership, especially in schools. Interpersonal connections are assisted by EI, such as in a mentor-mentee relationship, reacting to situations appropriately and establishing a safe environment that fosters emotional growth. Goleman (1995) expressed that EI is the ability to encourage emotional and intelligent elevation through his framework of EI: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Daniel Goleman's 1995 Framework of Emotional Intelligence

Self-Awareness	Social Awareness
• Emotional self-awareness • Accurate self-assessment • Self-confidence	• Empathy • Service orientation • Organizational awareness
Self-Management	**Relationship Management**
• Emotional self-control • Trustworthiness • Conscientiousness • Adaptability • Achievement drive • Initiative	• Developing others • Influence • Communication • Conflict management • Visionary leadership • Catalyzing change • Building bonds • Teamwork and collaboration

Note. From *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace: How to Select For, Measure, and Improve Emotional Intelligence in Individuals, Groups, and Organizations* (p. 101), by C. Cherniss and D. Goleman, 2001, Jossey-Bass.

Self-Awareness

Goleman (1995) elucidated self-awareness as cognizance of reactions and distinguishing affinity. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) supported Goleman because they found self-awareness to be the consciousness of one's reactions and context-identifying actions. That explanation provides insight into a person's thought process on problems, preconceptions, and expressive responses leading to unpleasant feelings. Development in leadership practices focuses on improving self-awareness and understanding of people and situations (Woodward & Shaffakat, 2014).

Leaders can learn from their relationships with others and be open to new experiences and ideas and identifying their strengths and weaknesses. According to Goleman (1995), self-aware people are aware of how others see them and being secure in themselves and displaying a sense of humor. Emotionally intelligent leaders demonstrate core EI components when leading an organization in a way that trust and collaboration do (Moore, 2009). When leaders are self-aware and confident in their abilities, they will likely make delineations promoting an organization's connectedness (Vann et al., 2017).

Social Awareness

Social awareness is recognizing sentiments, being mindful of others' perspectives, and actively engaging in afflictions (Goleman et al., 2013). It is the awareness to think outside of oneself and about other people's emotions, including their thoughts and feelings. A characteristic that encompasses social awareness in a leader is empathy. Leaders with social awareness attempt to understand the opinions and viewpoints of their constituents, thus facilitating collaboration and communication (Ferronato, 2017).

Social awareness must be present to promote positive working relationships. For social awareness to be present, empathy must be displayed. Empathizing in leadership is to see how decisions affect the other people in the organization and how they will view the direction. Socially aware leaders can anticipate how others will view directives because they put themselves in the perspective of what others are going through. An empathetic leader is recognized for their ability to communicate, influence others, people skills, and ability to control the culture in an organization. These socially aware characteristics assist a leader to be strategic when interacting with challenging people and tense circumstances (UF at Work, 2016).

Self-Management

According to Goleman (2006), self-management is managing impulses and negative emotions. To govern oneself directly correlates to self-awareness's ability to actively respond to emotional reactions (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Positively managing emotions and adapting to challenges is self-management (Segal et al., 2021). Leaders who display self-management in their emotions control their feelings to act timely and appropriately as they respond to changes (Chaidez, 2022). An example of this is when unpleasant information is brought forth, and leaders such as principals need to maintain composure and manage the stress of the situation as they lead the organization. Principals who possess self-management skills have the innate capacity to respond to adverse situations calmly and respectfully (Munro, 2021).

Relationship Management

Relationship management is identified as using the three previously mentioned behaviors by combining the techniques and awareness to effectively handle emotions and

interactions (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Goleman et al. (2013) believed relationship management is a vital skill to implement a vision that will inspire oneself and others. A typical example is when principals use visionary leadership, influencing others to achieve a desired goal when faced with difficult situations (Turner, 2020). Researchers have investigated the impact of EI on organizations, particularly relationship management (Ferronato, 2017). Research has found that leaders with high EI are more effective in organizational teamwork and initiative collaboration (Turner, 2020).

Relationship management can influence motivation in all and enhance EI in leaders. Chaidez (2022) stated, "Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management are four emotional intelligence principles that Goleman et al. (2013) defined as being relevant to relationship management" (p. 51).

Research Gap

Research into EI in various professions in education, law, and medicine has been shown to increase the effectiveness of leadership (Fulcher Gutierrez, 2017). Studies have shown that leaders who use EI lead their organizations using many skill sets as they address leadership challenges. An examination of the philosophy of influential leaders in EI, including its development and historical context, was conducted. From the exploration of the literature, the evidence showed there needed to be more information on elementary school principals in rural areas using EI as they lead their school organizations.

Summary

This chapter examined patterns in education and the role principals in rural areas have in transformational change through the use of EI. A thorough inquiry of

collaborative leaders expressed proficiencies indispensable in leading when making challenging decisions using teams. An examination of the philosophy of influential leaders in EI, including its development and historical context, was conducted. It was concluded that more extensive research on elementary school principals in rural areas is needed to lay the foundation for the intent of this research.

Synthesis Matrix

Researchers often use a synthesis matrix to organize study variables presented in the literature review (see Appendix A). The synthesis matrix is a framework in table or grid format that enables a researcher to get a quick overview of data related to a research variable. This matrix assists the researcher to conclude nonapparent relationships that exist between entries on the table. Matrices contain verbal information, quotes, summarized text, extracts from notes, memos, standardized responses, and, in general, data integrated around a point or research theme that makes sense. The matrix shows data on the variable and cites the researcher or author. The matrix is a strategy researchers use to show agreement between various research studies and authors concerning the variables being studied. The matrix contributes to the validity of the study variables. The synthesis matrix should be initiated when candidates begin reviewing the literature. It helps candidates to start synthesizing information from many sources. The display will show where there is significant support for selected ideas, concepts, or variables among leaders in the field.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the multicase research design used to understand better how elementary principals who have been recognized as exemplary in school districts in rural California use personal emotional intelligence (EI) to counter leadership challenges their school institutions face. The literature review revealed that the principal turnover rate in high-poverty schools, which most rural districts encompass, was 21% annually and 35% after 2 years (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Research is still being conducted on the principal turnover data postpandemic. This study employed a qualitative research design to explore a topic that needs to be well researched.

This chapter presents the research methodology that supports the purpose statement related to this inquiry and the rationale for supporting questions related to the research. Research questions and the statement of purpose were essential to reiterate for a comprehensive understanding of the foundation of the study. Qualitative methods are explained and provided a rationale for their effective use in this study. Furthermore, the population and the targeted population are explored, and the sampling methods are defined. Next, the reliability and rationality of the study are described along with the collection and examination procedures of the information. Limitations of the research are also discussed and explained. Last, Chapter 3 concludes with a summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the emotional intelligence strategies that exemplary elementary principals in rural areas use as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social

awareness, and relationship management). A secondary purpose of the study was for exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics to explain how their use of emotional intelligence strategies supported their success and tenure as they responded to leadership challenges in their school organizations.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

Central Research Question

The central research question for this study asked, "How do exemplary elementary principals in rural school districts describe their use of emotional intelligence strategies as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of EI: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management?"

Research Subquestions

1. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of self-awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

2. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of self-management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

3. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of social awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

4. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of relationship management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

5. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of emotional intelligence strategies to support their success and tenure as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

Research Design

The design used to explore the research was of qualitative methods. Qualitative research facilitates a deeper understanding of a phenomenon to educate researchers on a population's environment and its influence on their lives or experiences (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, Creswell (2009) clarified that qualitative methodologies are used to learn about people's experiences and the importance of humanities and issues. Qualitative methods were seen as the most appropriate research design to understand how elementary principals in rural areas use EI strategies they have obtained to lead organizations through challenges. With limited exposure in this research area, qualitative research methods sufficed the need for in-depth participant insight. Moreover, using semistructured interview questions that were open ended in nature revealed in-depth accounts of rural elementary principals' use of EI (Chaidez, 2022; Patton, 2015).

Qualitative Multicase Research Design

I found qualitative research to be the most appropriate design to meet the needs of the study's objective. Several qualitative methodologies were investigated, such as phenomenological, grounded theory, narrative, ethnography, and case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An examination determined that a multicase design was the most relevant

for the study. A multicase study analyzed and captured how exemplary elementary principals in rural areas manage their EI while navigating difficult decisions for their organizations. More research is needed regarding the EI strategies elementary school principals use in rural areas as they make difficult decisions. The multicase design helps to clarify a subject researchers know little about by gathering information (Chaidez, 2022).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described a case study as the inquiry of a bounded system that is methodic and in-depth. For this study, the bounded system included elementary principals from rural school sites and how they use the elements of EI to navigate leadership challenges. The rural environments and the leadership challenges they experience were described. The study included narrative descriptions of those events and relevant artifacts illuminating their circumstances and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In summary, artifacts and interviews were collected, and I determined themes on how elementary school principals in rural areas made complex decisions using EI strategies. Moreover, principals divulged how using EI enhanced their retention in the position. Because there is a scarcity of research about elementary principals' experiences in rural California, I sought to comprehend EI strategies principals used as they led their organizations and encountered difficult decisions.

Population

A population is classified as two or more groups of individuals who display distinguishing characteristics from one another (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Elementary school principals serving public schools in rural areas were the population for

this study. Recent statistics from the California Department of Education (n.d.) showed that California has approximately 5,857 public elementary schools. Each school has a principal leading the organization. Principals are identified as the middle management of the education system in charge of budgeting, stakeholder meetings, staff evaluations, scheduling, and handling immediate situations, including managing crises at the school site (Fullan, 2003). Fullan (2003) further explained that the principal's role is invaluable in the quest for school improvement and that the job's scope needs to be narrower. This large number of elementary principals necessitated resources that proved to overburden the study, and thus, the need for a target population was created.

Target Population

A population is targeted through sampling, in which a list of sampling units is generated to determine whether the selected sample is a target population (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This study needed a smaller number than 5,857 elementary principals, so two factors were used to create a target population. First, only principals from rural schools were examined, and only principals from rural environments in Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino counties were included. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) believed that it is implausible to explore a population because of time and resource constraints. However, instead, researchers should select a sample to generalize findings for the targeted group. It would only be economically viable to study some 5,857 elementary principals serving in California. The focus became California's rural counties, specifically Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino, comprising 352 elementary schools.

Sample

Three hundred fifty-two schools also had too many principals, and the resources available to the study could not adequately handle the data. Thus, a sample of the target population was obtained. A sample of a target population in a study is used to generalize a larger population (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). For this study, the sample was individuals representing a larger population of 352 elementary principals serving California's Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino districts. Another filter, a purposeful sample, was used in this study to examine elementary principals from these counties. Purposeful sampling refines a participant selection to associate specific candidates with more fruitful information (Patton, 2015).

Purposeful sampling criteria used in this study were established to study only exemplary principals from the 352 principals from these three counties. The exemplary principal candidates in this study needed to meet four of the five sampling criteria:

1. Elementary principals served 3 or more years in a California public school in the same school district in the identified rural counties.

2. Principals were perceived to have demonstrated personal EI skills.

3. Principals were members of the ACSA professional association.

4. Principals published articles and papers or presented at conferences.

5. Principals had been recognized by a peer or peer group in the same position or superior as exemplary principals.

Sample Sizes

Sample sizes can vary depending on the specific design of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A recommendation of four to five cases is sufficient in a multicase analysis.

Stake (2005) further claimed that fewer than four cases provide inaccuracies in demonstrating interactivity among participants and their surroundings. Furthermore, 15 to 30 subjects overload the researcher and the reader with too much interactivity. There is continual validity in sampling until there is an abundance of redundancy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Last, saturation is achieved once relative information is redundant or data ceases to generate output (Patton, 2015). Through the population sample selection process (see Figure 2), five exemplary elementary school principals serving rural demographics were selected for this multicase study .

Figure 2

Population Sample Selection Process

Population:

5,857 Public Elementary Principals in California

Target Population:

352 Public Elementary Principals in the California counties of Lake, Riverside and Mendocino.

Sample:

5 Public Elementary Principals in the California counties of Lake, Riverside and Mendocino.
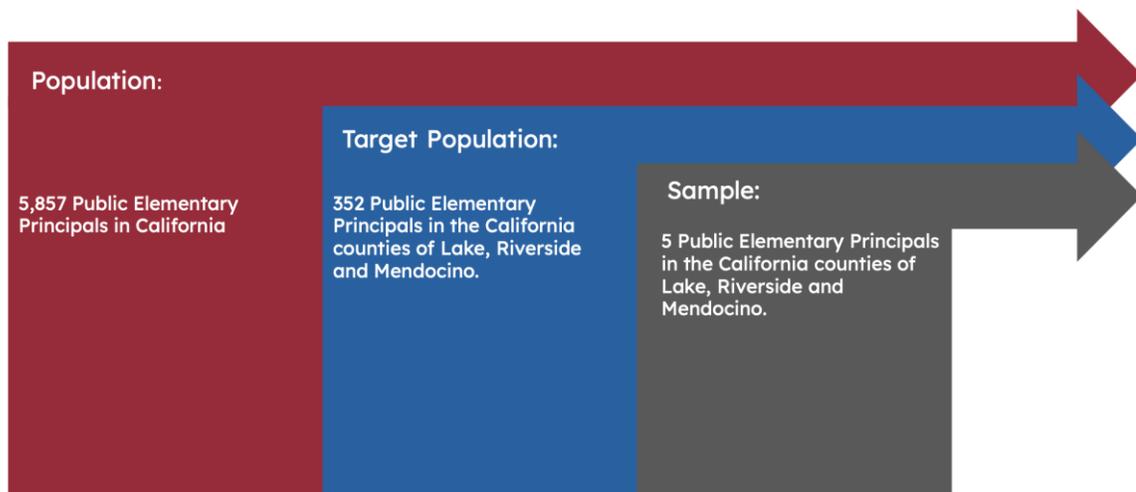
Sample Selection Process

Multiple sampling methods were used to find the participants to conduct the research. I enlisted a respected and connected director in a district from a rural county in California to locate a sample population. Dr. Shellie Perry was a former elementary principal supporting a rural school in Northern California and is currently a director of curriculum and instruction in a rural district. Additionally, Dr. Perry is a leader in the

ACSA community where she interacts with all the school leaders from several rural communities. Experts in these smaller county offices have first-hand knowledge of the leadership qualities of the principals in their counties.

To identify the study's participants, I used several methods. First, I collaborated with Dr. Shellie Perry to find several principals who satisfied four of the five criteria of the sampling selection for the study. The study's lead investigator contacted two or three principals from each county believed to meet the purposeful sampling criteria proposed in this study. Convenience sampling was used after possible participants were identified based on the purposeful sampling criteria. Convenience sampling was used to find the first rural exemplary principals willing and available for this study. After the principals were selected and they communicated their agreement to take part in the study, I analyzed publicly available data on the possible principals to make sure that the principals met the sampling criteria. This data analysis removed participants who could not meet the sampling criteria, such as professional accomplishments and longevity in a school district. After this identification and criteria analysis process, five exemplary principals were identified from the California counties of Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino.

Procedures for Contacting the Participants for This Study

Following the sampling procedure, I contacted the exemplary elementary school principals in rural districts for this study in the following manner:

1. I contacted the rural elementary principals by email to explain the purpose of the study, the benefits to rural elementary principals, and the risks of participating in the study. In addition, I explained that the research was based on anonymity for

participants, and any answers from the principals would be and remain confidential.

2. Upon agreeing to participate, each of the five exemplary rural elementary school principals consented to a 60-min meeting. Time allotment for the interview was considered and accommodated the principals' busy schedules.

3. After the scheduling of each interview occurred, I emailed the following documents to the participants: (a) an Invitation to Participate letter (Appendix B), (b) Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form to be signed and collected at the time of the interview (Appendix C), (use of Zoom – chat box for the participants to verify their consent), (c) Interview Protocol and Questions for the participants to review before their interview (Appendix D), (d) Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix E), (e) CITI Clearance Certificate of Human Subjects Research (Appendix F), and (f) Audio Release form to be signed and collected at the time of the interview (Appendix G).

Instrumentation

I employed a qualitative multicase study to align the research questions targeting the exemplary principals' means of EI through their leadership of organizations in rural elementary schools. First, I reviewed the literature to examine EI. Based on this literature review, Goleman's (1995) EI framework was selected. Interview instruments were developed for this study based on this framework. The instruments were developed to collect data on elementary school principals serving rural districts and their use of Goleman's four domains of EI to navigate complex decisions in their schools. Goleman's EI four domains model was selected through a review of a synthesis matrix. The

instruments were designed to capture Goleman's EI four domains that framed the

research and interview questions:

1. Self-awareness - the leaders' ability to recognize and understand personal moods

    and drives and their effect on others.

2. Self-management - leaders can flexibly manage their actions, thoughts, and

    feelings to get the desired results.

3. Social awareness - the leaders' ability to accurately notice the emotions of others

    and read situations appropriately.

4. Relationship management - the leaders' ability to take their own emotions, the

    emotions of others, and the context to manage social interactions successfully.

    Based on Goleman's (1995) research, 13 interview questions were created

(Appendix D). The interview questions were reviewed by an expert in the qualitative

research field to ensure alignment with the framework (see Appendix H). Based on their

feedback, questions were altered. Moreover, a field test was conducted to improve the

interview process. I turned to virtual interviews to collect qualitative data while

supplementing data with relevant artifacts.

Interviews

Qualitative research methodology provides extensive knowledge about a desired

population's experiences to answer the research question (Patton, 2015). Semistructured,

open-ended questions were used during the interviews to examine and understand how

rural elementary principals use EI to lead their schools.

The following recommendations by seminal authors Patton (2015) and McMillan

and Schumacher (2010) for best practices for conducting interviews were used:

1. Qualitative in-depth interviews are renowned for:

   a. authenticity;

   b. establishing and preserving eye contact;

   c. elicit responses;

   d. creating confidence;

   e. conveying that the researcher hears and connects with the participant

      through voice tone, phrasing, and cadence, elicits more legitimate data than

      a stiff approach. (McMillan, 2010, p. 357)

To entice the participants to divulge more detailed information about their

experiences, including thoughts, feelings, and knowledge, semistructured, open-ended

questions and probes were used (Patton, 2015).

I wanted to capture the essence of each participant's responses to include direct

quotes and context and accurately depict the correct data; thus, interviews were recorded.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) concluded that participant responses could be clarified

and elaborated on for me to gain precise and accurate responses.

Interview Guide Procedures

The interview guide developed by me contained a statement of gratitude to the

participants for their generosity in contributing their experiences to the study. Also, the

guide included the purpose statement of the study along with a copy of the questions that

would be asked during the interview. Before the interview, each participant in the study

was given 13 interview questions in addition to Goleman's (1995) EI framework's four

domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship

management and their definitions. Three questions were asked for each domain during

the interview. School leaders were asked an additional question to describe their perception of their use of EI, its perceptual effect, and how it has contributed to their success as principals.

At the beginning of each interview session, I expressed gratitude to the participants for sharing helpful information about their principal experiences. After I introduced the study's purpose, I asked participants whether any clarification was necessary for any provided documents. Next, I presented the IRB documentation to the participant, including the participant's Bill of Rights, consent form, and confidentiality agreement.

I used a semistructured, open-ended approach to reduce variation between the participants' perceptions during the interview questions. Striving for a minimal variance enabled me to be methodical and present in the interview, eliciting participant participation. The semistructured, open-ended approach provided a more robust and valid analysis of the experiences.

Artifacts

The collection of artifacts and subsequent analysis yielded supplementary data to validate the primary data collected, the interview data. Including an artifact review allowed cross-referencing the data with the interview data because it strengthened the study's findings and the themes' validity. The artifacts supplemented the interview transcriptions by interpreting the different forms and materials.

For this study, pivotal information supporting the research questions came from external communications and school documents. Publicly available data were gathered. Data were collected that pertained to awards the principals had received,

accomplishments they made, school website, principal communications, school plan on student achievement, and difficult decisions the principals faced, such as the pandemic and challenges accompanying it. Data were also gathered with the principals, who were asked to supply documentation of choices they made that they considered difficult. Last, NVivo™ was used as a qualitative coding software to analyze all collected artifacts.

The Researcher as the Instrument

The researcher is acknowledged as an instrument in qualitative research studies. Because of this, a potential bias in the collection of data and its analysis process could be apparent. Several factors could influence data, including, but not limited to, the researcher's perspective, character, and exposure (Patten, 2012; Patton, 2015). I bring leadership and administration experience working in rural elementary schools. Through an organizational academic setting, I have had extensive experience planning and executing many interviews.

The goal of the research was to develop a better understanding of the experiences of elementary school principals serving schools in rural areas. I was interested in this topic because he wants to excel as a principal of a rural elementary school. With the content in mind, I was aware of possible data collection and interpretation bias. Researchers must be mindful of the behaviors they exude because they could impact participants' responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Qualitative researchers prioritize maintaining empathic neutrality and a nonjudgemental attitude (Patton, 2015). Displaying a neutral affect includes listening to comprehend instead of listening to reply. Following the methodology and field-test protocols assists in avoiding bias during the

data-gathering process. The researcher's objectivity and expertise ultimately determines the accuracy of the qualitative data collected.

Validity

Researchers Creswell (2015) and Patton (2015) agreed that accuracy in intended measurement ensures validity. An instrument demonstrating validity is deemed credible. I reviewed EI research to elevate the study's validity and chose a seminal EI model of Goleman (1995).

Six best practices strategies recommended by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) were used by me to improve the validity of the qualitative research:

1. Extensive and persistent fieldwork: I spent many hours investigating other case studies featuring groups such as Latino superintendents and their ability to use EI to lead an organization. Through the process, I supported the topic of study by examining items in the other case studies that could benefit the research. To validate the primary conclusions of the study, I used cross-validation analysis of the artifacts collected.

2. Mutual meaning: Each participant had a common perception with me of the language used in the study and the semistructured interview questions. The interview questions were consistent with each participant to ensure cohesion and no variation. Interviewees were provided a platform to express their lived experiences in a story through the interview questions. Last, the participants and I agreed on the meaning of the described events (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

3. Multimethod strategies: I used semistructured interview questions and probes during the interview to analyze verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Pertinent artifacts

and dedicated time by me were essential strategies implemented to examine the participants' experiences and environment. Additionally, I ensured the study had enough data to satisfy the research goal by comparing the questions selected for research to the artifacts collected and the semistructured interview questions.

4. Testing and critiques by educated observers: Experimental testing and interview analysis assisted me to uncover semistructured interview questions that did not directly correlate to my questions.

5. Interview affirmation and contributor review: I examined the authenticity and validity of each interview by confirming the transcripts with each participant. Each participant was encouraged to confirm or deny the impressions I received to provide clarity and context, thus improving accuracy. I sent each transcription to participants to allow them to alter anything they saw fit to extend accuracy, clarity, and accuracy.

6. Inclusion of negative or discrepant data: I tried to uncover findings that contradicted the emerging themes.

Field-Testing

Researchers should use field and pilot testing to increase the study's validity and reliability (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a pilot test is a practice interview conducted with someone with similar characteristics to the chosen sample population to refine skills. At the same time, qualitative research experts watch and analyze what they observe. Reflection is essential in this process to solicit feedback from the interviewee and the expert observer (see

Appendix I). From the feedback, I instituted a structured self-reflection regarding the

interview and made adjustments based on the data (see Appendix J).

Critical elements of the field test were note-taking, observation, and quality

feedback. A specialist who observed the process, including the interview, provided this

feedback to me. After completing the field test, my feedback from the principal guided

further adjustments to the interview questions. Adjustments that were made based on

observation and feedback were clarity in the presentation of words and sentences,

nonverbal behavior, and cadence.

Reliability

Reliability is defined as consistent measurement from an instrument (Roberts,

2010). According to Patten (2012), in a study's context, reliability is when the same

results would occur in a replicated investigation. Reliability reflects the consistency of

measurement (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Therefore, a reliable instrument displays

the gathering of data consistently, consistent processing, and outcomes (Patton, 2015;

Roberts, 2010).

The study used field-testing, methods of inquiry through interviews, and interview

questions that were consistent in the questions to increase the study's dependability. An

interview guide was created and employed to promote equality among participants,

ensuring no variance in the questions asked and helping reliability. The interview guide

also provided uniformity of interview data collected. Additionally, the protocols set up

for the interviews were field-tested before they were conducted in the field, as McMillan

and Schumacher (2010) emphasized. Field-testing the data collection instruments is

imperative to ensure clarity and additional data points to cross-reference reliability from participant data.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability is the agreement to validate the accuracy of the data by employing peer analysis to cross-check data codes (Creswell, 2015). The intercoder agreement is established when multiple analysts agree on the codes used for the data sets, including but not limited to transcripts of interviews and artifacts. I used the resources of a doctoral student who had demonstrated proficiency in qualitative research methods through the investigation of data codes and their consistency. Before the data were cross-checked, I set a .80 level of reliability (Lombard et al., 2004). NVivo™ qualitative coding software was used in the research to deduce themes from the data collected. I conducted a crosscheck by analyzing generated themes and creating a code list. When codes were settled, I enlisted the support of an external reliability coder. After the intercoding process was completed, codes that achieved a .80 or higher level of reliability were employed to identify patterns (Creswell, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010)

Data Collection

Human Subject Consideration

The study design must be reviewed and approved by the University of Massachusetts Global's Internal Review Board (IRB) before data collection can begin. The IRB is essential to ensure the protection of all participants and comply with ethical considerations and federal regulations. Once the proposed study received IRB approval, the human participants were asked to participate through a formal letter, an informed consent letter, and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix E).

Participants were also provided with my contact information and the background of my professional career. Additionally, I added several other documents, including an overview of the intended research, an estimated time investment needed, an informed consent letter, technology authorization to record the interview with an opportunity to analyze the transcript, and a statement ensuring clarity on the voluntary interview. Copies of the signed documents were provided to the participants to reaffirm the willingness of the participants to consent to be recorded. All study participants agreed to be recorded and requested transcripts of their interviews. The participants' privacy was paramount to me, and because of the importance, I ensured that all data gathered from the interviews were secured (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Furthermore, the anonymity of the participants remained secure because the dissertation chair and I were the only ones with knowledge of the participants. Pseudonyms were used to conceal the participants' identities, and all data related to the participants were destroyed.

Interview Process

Every principal who participated consented to the interview and to be recorded. All interviews were conducted via a virtual platform to accommodate the participants' and researchers' travel time and anonymity. Each interview consisted of identical interview protocols. The interviewees were provided with the 13 questions before the interview and definitions of EI. Questions asked during the interview were developed concerning the EI competencies defined by Goleman (2006). Questions developed by me were semistructured and open ended and were evaluated by research experts in qualitative design.

Before each interview started, the participant was thanked for their participation in contributing knowledge to the field of study. I then provided details of the study and its intention. An overview described the interview process and how it was organized as semistructured, open-ended questions discussing when EI was used for making difficult decisions. After introducing the study, I briefly discussed my background and the research purpose and reviewed essential documents such as the consent paperwork. When concluding the introductory discussion and before the interview, I reminded the participants of the voluntary nature of the interview, and the fact they could conclude their input at any point. The interview started with an investigation into the participants' demographic. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) recommended collecting demographic data toward the beginning of the time spent on the interview to develop rapport and focus attention on the reason for the interview. Interviews in this body of research varied from 45 min to 60 min. After each interview, I thanked the principal, considering their contribution to the study.

With the consent of the participants, every question asked was documented and transcribed. Participants were allowed to examine their words to verify the transcription's validity after finishing to ensure accuracy. I used a qualitative software called NVivo™ to assist in analyzing, coding, and assessing data. Last, the reports by me solidified a connection between the framework of the study and the central research question, interview, and recorded results.

The following steps were included in a synopsis of the data collection process:

- Five principals participated in one-on-one, semistructured, open-ended interviews using Zoom, a virtual meeting format, as part of an interview methodology.

- Using an iPhone and the Rev app, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

- Each principal received a copy of the interview transcription to check for accuracy.

- During the interview, each principal was invited to present digital or hardcopy artifacts that supported their use of EI strategies during difficult decisions.

- I collated interview transcripts and collected artifacts for each principal to construct an individual report of acquired data.

Artifact Review

I collected artifacts and documents related to the study to increase qualitative data collection and expand triangulation procedures (Creswell, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The artifacts collected pertained to documentation describing difficult decisions principals had to navigate in their leadership roles. An example of an artifact was a weekly communication, staff meeting communication, action plan, or other stakeholder communication.

Data Analysis

I reviewed the data from the five exemplary principals' interviews acquired by the Zoom format. Interviews were recorded using the Zoom format and were then transcribed professionally. Before the interview transcripts were professionally transcribed, each participant was offered the opportunity to review the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. After the transcripts were read thoroughly by me, patterns began to emerge from the data to unveil themes. To code the themes in the data, an electronic coding software called NVivo™ was employed. Coding data assisted in discovering frequency and patterns,

categories, assertions, and themes from the responses (Patton, 2015). Moreover, quotes were sought that encompassed the themes I looked for and analyzed them. Procedures used in the analysis of the input were the following:

- Individual principal data reports were compared and analyzed to detect trends and themes in participant replies and acquired artifacts.

- Identifiers were assigned to patterns and themes to code and store acquired data in the NVivo™ software tool.

- The total number of coded participant replies was determined using NVivo™.

- A frequency table was generated to display the extent to which all participants commented on the same theme or pattern.

- Member checking was provided to participants to verify their transcriptions against recordings for accuracy (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Member checking transcriptions were not for verification; therefore, the finding was not included (Patton, 2015). Chapter IV includes tables to present data, including descriptions and qualifiers. The researcher's relentless review of data best aligned with the research question uncovered themes.

Artifacts and Data Triangulation

Artifacts were included if they addressed the research questions or purpose of the study. The artifacts collected pertained to the difficult decisions that the principals made. Principals elaborated on how they used EI strategies when they encountered difficult decisions. Data collected from the interviews were compared to the artifacts collected. Data were triangulated by examining artifacts representing difficult decisions to explore the uses of emotionally intelligent leadership (Chaidez, 2022).

Data Representation

The data on the subquestions of the study were examined repeatedly by me to uncover themes. After identifying themes, the data were presented through frequency tables and participants' comments. A visual representation was developed for each research question, showcasing a frequency of themes. The visual included a table with theme frequency, artifact frequency representing the theme, and participant comments aligning with a theme. Additionally, there was a total frequency of participant comments and artifacts about each theme. The central research question and subquestions identified themes and ranked from the most to the least frequent.

Data were inspected by me several times to recognize and label themes that embodied the study's research subquestions. Information was categorized in multiple ways: participant comments and frequency tables. A table showcasing the frequency for each theme was provided as a visual representation to support all research subquestions. Included in the table were how many participants' interview remarks coincide with the identified theme, the frequency of a theme alluded to in an interview, and the frequency of participants providing artifacts for an identified theme. A total frequency was documented based on every theme from participant comments and artifacts. The themes generated about the central research question and subquestions are presented from the highest to the lowest frequency at the end of Chapter IV.

Summary

In Chapter III, I used the qualitative multicase research design to describe how exemplary principals serving rural districts manage their EI as they make difficult decisions for their organizations. Chapter IV describes the way the research was

designed, the collected and analyzed data, and the qualitative interview methods.

Furthermore, the development of the instruments used in the research, the data-gathering

process, and data analysis procedures are described. Additionally, weaknesses apparent in

the study are identified. Furthermore, the data-gathering process, including the research

outcomes, is described in more depth in the next chapter. In Chapter V, I present the

study's conclusion and describes the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for

future research.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV profiles the process of the study's methodology, data collection, and findings. The purpose statement and research questions are examined, followed by an analysis of the population, sample, and demographic characteristics. The primary objective of the chapter is to present data findings, specifically qualitative data concerning lived experiences, strategies using emotional intelligence (EI), and recommendations of elementary principals in rural districts as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations. Furthermore, data findings about emotional intelligence are presented in the four domains according to Goleman (2006): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the emotional intelligence strategies that exemplary elementary principals in rural areas use as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management). A secondary purpose of the study was for Exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics to explain how their use of emotional intelligence strategies supported their success and tenure as they responded to leadership challenges in their school organizations.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

The central research question for this study asked, "How do exemplary elementary Principals in rural school districts describe their use of emotional intelligence

strategies as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on

Goleman's (2006) four domains of EI: self-awareness, self-management, social

awareness, and relationship management?"

Research Subquestions

1. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of self-awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

2. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of self-management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

3. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of social awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

4. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligence strategy of relationship management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

5. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of emotional intelligence strategies to support their success and tenure as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative multicase study was conducted to highlight the lived experiences, strategies using EI, and recommendations of elementary principals in rural districts as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's

(2006) four domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. I conducted in-depth interviews with five exemplary elementary principals from rural districts who were identified through specific criteria as California public school elementary principals who served 3 or more years in the same school district. The interviews were conducted virtually and recorded with the permission of the participants. I securely saved the study's data.

Population

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a population is a group of elements or cases that meet specified criteria, whether humans, objects, or events. It is critical to note the study population in research because it is to this group that results are generalized. The population for this study was public school elementary principals serving in rural districts. Recent statistics from the California Department of Education (n.d.) show that California has approximately 5,857 public elementary schools. Each school has a principal leading the organization. The focus was on California's rural districts, specifically Lake, Butte, Riverside, Yuba, and Colusa, comprising 139 elementary schools.

Target Population

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), a researcher can only investigate part of the population for a study. Therefore, a smaller number of participants are chosen. The results are generalized to these sampled participants. This study's target population was a group of elementary school principals serving in rural areas of California. This study needed a smaller number than 5,857 elementary principals, so two factors were used to create a target population. First, only principals from rural schools were

69

examined, and only principals from rural environments in Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino counties were included. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) believed exploring a continual population is implausible because of time and resource constraints. Still, the researcher should select a sample to generalize findings for the targeted group. It would not be economically viable to study some 5,857 elementary principals serving in California. The target population became California's rural districts, specifically Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino, comprising 352 elementary schools.

Sample

A sample of a target population in a study is used to generalize a larger population (Creswell &Guetterman, 2019). For this study, the sample was individuals representing a larger population of 352 elementary principals serving California's Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino counties. Another filter, a purposeful sample, was used in this study to examine elementary principals from these counties. Purposeful sampling refines a participant selection to associate specific candidates with more fruitful information (Patton, 2015).

Purposeful sampling criteria used in this study were established to study only exemplary principals from the 352 principals from these three counties. The exemplary principal candidates in this study needed to meet four sampling criteria:

1. Elementary principals served 3 or more years in a California public school in the same school district in the identified rural counties.
2. Principals were perceived to have demonstrated personal EI skills.
3. Principals were members of the ACSA professional association.
4. Principals published articles and papers or presented at conferences.

5. Principals had been recognized by a peer or peer group in the same position or superior as exemplary principals.

To help identify possible principals who fulfilled the purposeful sampling criteria, I enlisted the help of experts, a director, a former principal in a rural district, and the chapter president of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). I contacted school experts to help identify potential study participants and discussed the purposeful sampling criteria. The final sample was five school principals working in one of the 352 schools in California who met the criteria.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability data were used in this study to obtain reliable data and minimize mistakes. As indicated by Creswell and Poth (2018), ensuring agreement on how the data are coded boosts the accuracy of the information and reduces the possibility of potential bias. Having two or more coders code the same data is essential. Accordingly, two more expert researchers shared and classified 20% of the study's qualitative data. The intercoder reliability exceeded 82%, indicating that the data coding was apparent. According to Creswell and Poth, good qualitative reliability requires at least 80% agreement. As a result, the intercoder reliability for this study was determined to be sufficient, and the qualitative findings were deemed permissible.

Demographic Data

The study included five participants who met the eligibility criteria to participate; participants verbally consented on the Zoom platform and were recorded. Specific demographic information was collected to describe individuals, including years as a

principal in the current district, total years as a principal, and county of the school district.

Table 1 represents each participant's demographic data, identified with numbers 1 to 5.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Years as principal in current district	Total years as principal	County of district	Public or private school	Supporting grades	Student ethnic diversity index	Free and reduced lunch 2022–23
1	6	6	Riverside	Public	K-5	44	67.8%
2	3	3	Lake	Public	K-6	40	42.9%
3	4	4	Lake	Public	K-5	45	60.1%
4	8	11	Mendocino	Public	6-8	42	81.1%
5	4	4	Lake	Public	K-6	37	87.6%

Participant 1: This principal used EI strategies to respond to leadership challenges in one elementary school in Riverside County with kindergarten to fifth-grade students. In the 2023–2024 school year, the elementary school enrolled 734 students. Of these students, 58.3% were Hispanic, 9.1% African American, 21.4% White, 3.3% Asian, 2.2% Filipino, 0.4% Pacific Islander, 0.7% American Indian or Alaska Native students, and 3.8% had two or more races. Furthermore, 67.8% of students received free or reduced lunch (EdData, n.d.). The 2021 Census Report for this school population reported that 26% of household income was under $50,000, and 8.8% of those in poverty status were living below the poverty level.

Participant 2: This principal used EI strategies to respond to leadership challenges in one elementary school in Lake County with kindergarten to sixth-grade students. In the

2023–2024 school year, the elementary school enrolled 462 students. Of these students, 34% were Hispanic, 0.2% African American, 56.1% White, 0.9% Asian, 0% Filipino, 0% Pacific Islander, 1.3% American Indian or Alaska Native students, and 7.4% had two or more races. 42.9% of students receive free or reduced lunch (EdData, n.d.). The 2021 Census Report for this school population reported that 34% of household income was under $50,000, and 5.38% of those in poverty status were living below the poverty level.

Participant 3: This principal used EI strategies to respond to leadership challenges in one elementary school in Lake County with kindergarten to fifth-grade students. In the 2023–2024 school year, the elementary school enrolled 223 students. Of these students, 30.5% were Hispanic, 0% African American, 48.9% White, 0% Asian, 0.4% Filipino, 0% Pacific Islander, 1.8% American Indian or Alaska Native students, and 13.9% had two or more races. Moreover, 60.1% of students received free or reduced lunch (EdData, n.d.). The 2021 Census Report for this school population reported that 57.25% of household income was under $50,000, and 23% of those in poverty status were living below the poverty level.

Participant 4: This principal used EI strategies to respond to leadership challenges in one middle school in Mendocino County with sixth to eighth-grade students. In the 2023–2024 school year, the elementary school enrolled 392 students. Of these students, 48% were Hispanic, 41% White, 0.5 % African American, 1.5%, 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native students, Asian, 0% Filipino, 0% Pacific Islander, and 5.9% had two or more races. In addition, 81.1% of students received free or reduced lunch (EdData, n.d.). The 2021 Census Report for this school population reported that 53% of household

income was under $50,000, and 18.6% of those in poverty status lived below the poverty level.

Participant 5: This principal used EI strategies to respond to leadership challenges in one elementary school in Lake County with kindergarten to sixth-grade students. In the 2023–2024 school year, the elementary school enrolled 708 students. Of these students, 60.7% were Hispanic, 2.3% African American, 26.7% White, 0% Asian, 0% Filipino, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 1.8% American Indian or Alaska Native students, and 5.8% had two or more races. Furthermore, 87.6% of students receive free or reduced lunch (EdData, n.d.). The 2021 Census Report for this school population reported that 62.8% of household income was under $50,000, and 26.5% of those in poverty status were living below the poverty level.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a case study is an in-depth description and examination of a bounded system. The delimited system in this multicase study was the school site and the challenges principals face when leading their organization. This study looked at relevant artifacts such as public school sites, district data, school strategic plans, school websites, and descriptions of the issues school principals experience while leading an organization (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Presentation and Analysis of Data

I gathered and analyzed data from the five participants to invoke their experiences, EI strategies, and recommendations as they responded to leadership challenges in their school organizations. I employed semistructured interviews with open-ended questions guided by the theoretical framework derived from the literature review about EI. The research questions were answered using qualitative data from in-depth

interviews and artifacts. The primary qualitative data were gathered through face-to-face virtual interviews with five elementary principals and artifacts that supported the interview data. I spent 5 hr conducting interviews and an equal amount of time analyzing the items.

Data Analysis for Research Subquestion 1

How do exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of self-awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

The following sections communicate the qualitative data from the five interviews with principals that were coded into themes. The information presented was collected from Interview Questions 1 and 2. The following subsections outline the responses to Research Subquestion 1. Table 2 shows the themes and frequency counts.

Table 2

Themes, Participants, Sources, and Frequency, Highest to Lowest Frequency, for Research Subquestion 1

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Model self-awareness	4	22	9	31
2. Model self-awareness when decision-making	4	15	4	19
3. Active listening	5	10	3	13
4. Altruistic	3	7	3	10

In summary, with a total frequency of 31, four of the five participants identified model self-awareness as the number one self-awareness strategy when responding to leadership challenges in their school organizations. Four of the five principals emphasized the strategy of model self-awareness when decision-making to address challenges with a total frequency of 19. The third highest theme was engaging in active listening, mentioned by all participants for a frequency of 13. Following that, with 10 frequencies, principals described being altruistic as a self-awareness attribute of EI they exhibit when faced with leadership challenges. As previously discussed, the first two interview questions gathered information regarding the lived experiences of exemplary elementary principals. The next section outlines an analysis of the qualitative data for the themes to answer the first research question using individual experiences.

Theme 1: Model Self-Awareness

The first research question for this study asked exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of self-awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations. According to the data analysis, with a frequency of 31, four of the five principals stated that modeling self-awareness assisted them when faced with challenges while leading a school organization. In this theme, modeling was when the principals showed desired traits to inspire their organization, such as staying positive, consistent, and genuine in responding to leadership challenges. Table 3 shows the frequency of this theme as evidenced by five virtual interviews.

Four principals described multiple leadership challenges and their ability to model self-awareness when addressing them. Participants 1 and 2 shared challenges when they

used staying positive to lead their organization. Participant 2 experienced a consistent turnover of district leadership, having seven leaders in 4 years. The principal used the challenge to inspire the staff to focus on what they control and developed the motto, "We do good work here." Participant 2 stated, "What could have been demoralizing instead was used to kind of strengthen us from within." Participant 1 encountered challenges when trying to elevate student achievement. They expressed modeling self-awareness when they stayed positive after looking at student achievement data and not reaching 100% proficiency when they mentioned, "I always try to look on the bright side." Participant 1 also stated the importance of a "positive mindset, on moving forward rather than dwelling." Principals set the tone of the school and need to maintain a positive effect to create and maintain a positive culture.

Table 3

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Model self-awareness	4	22	9	31

The principals recognized the need to be consistent when modeling self-awareness while addressing leadership challenges. Participant 1 expressed the importance of consistency when they stated, "I want others to see me as a consistent go-to person." Participant 1 further explained, "They're (staff) not wondering what reaction or response they're gonna get from me as far as the tone." Participant 2 also elaborated on the need

for consistency in a leader when modeling self-awareness: "No one wants a leader who rides their emotions like a surfboard on the waves."

Last, the principals recognized the need to be genuine when modeling self-awareness while addressing leadership challenges. Participant 1 stated, "If there's bad news to share, I don't sugarcoat." Participant 2 explained how they handled the turnover challenge with district leadership with their staff: "I took an approach that allowed me to communicate my frustration 'cause I didn't want to be inauthentic. I don't wanna pretend that everything's fine." This approach assisted the staff to maintain their trajectory without the interference of the distraction of what was happening with district leadership. Participant 4 expressed that they were modeling self-awareness during the challenge of growing personnel. Participant 4 stated,

> If they're (teachers) not getting where I need them to be, I have frank
> conversations with them, but I have to be okay with myself and know how to
> frame it so that it's helping the person grow within the profession.

Theme 2: Model Self-Awareness When Decision-Making

Based on the first research question focusing on exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of self-awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations, the second highest strategy, with a frequency of 19, was model self-awareness when decision-making. Almost all the principals stated that modeling self-awareness when decision-making assisted them when faced with challenges while leading a school organization. In this theme, modeling was when the principals showed desired traits to inspire their organization, such as gauging internal feelings before acting and being

78

reflective in responding to leadership challenges. Table 4 shows the frequency of this theme, as evidenced by five virtual interviews.

Table 4

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Model self-awareness when decision-making	4	15	4	19

Leaders of school organizations experience a multitude of challenges each day. Four principals described leadership challenges and their ability to model self-awareness when making decisions as a means to address them. Participant 2, as mentioned previously, has seen an extreme amount of turnover in his direct supervisor's position; "We recently had a change at the superintendent level. It was an opportunity for me to use my self-awareness and my feelings as a tool for finding a path forward for my school." When the principals received the news of the last change in leadership, they were frustrated and disappointed. They gauged their internal feelings before they addressed the conversation with their staff. Participant 2 mentioned "taking a minute to gauge my internal feelings before I move forward with the decision." Alternately, Participant 4 expressed the challenge of nonreelection of an employee and how it is essential to model self-awareness when making that decision and gauge your own emotions before addressing the situation: "Kind of checking my own emotions so that I'm comfortable guiding and giving direction, and then at times no-reelecting and having

that conversation that this isn't a good fit." The principals demonstrated the ability to monitor their emotional state.

Modeling self-awareness when making decisions is emphasized by principals when they demonstrate self-reflection. Participant 4 reported after discussing the challenge of implementing new initiatives, "I'm super reflective when something goes sideways. Like what was my role in that? What could I have done differently to get a different outcome?" Additionally, Participant 5 stated a similar notion when changing an established practice for the betterment of all stakeholders: "It really makes me self-reflect and go back, okay, how do I handle that differently? So in the future, I wouldn't handle it the same way." The principals provided examples of their ability to reflect on a situation to model self-awareness when making decisions.

Theme 3: Active Listening

Continuing to answer the first research question of exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of self-awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations, the third highest strategy, with a frequency of 13, was that all participants mentioned active listening. In this theme, active listening encompasses when the principals listen to understand the issues in responding to leadership challenges and receiving advice from colleagues. Table 5 shows the frequency of this theme, as evidenced by five virtual interviews.

All principals described multiple leadership challenges and their ability to actively listen when addressing them. Participant 1 described daily challenges when staff are in need or a parent is upset at something: "Everyone wants to feel heard." When describing

the daily challenges and how they address them, Participant 1 stated, "Make them [stakeholders] feel like I'm listening to them." Participant 5 also described daily encounters with parents and staff members when they stressed the importance of listening actively. Participant 5 stated, "It's important to just be, be a person to listen and try to be a mediator to solve problems or to be helpful to people."

Table 5

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Active listening	5	10	3	13

Another way principals described their use of self-awareness during leadership challenges was by seeking advice from a trusted colleague. Participant 2 mentioned, "If I do realize that my own emotions are influencing a decision too much, I take a minute to realize that and then reach out to a colleague." Demonstrating the ability to monitor one's emotional state and seek advice is self-awareness. Participant 4 also stated the importance of collaborating with colleagues when faced with difficult decisions by "checking in with trusted colleagues when something goes sideways, just to get another opinion. We tend to be our own worst critic."

Theme 4: Altruistic

To conclude, answering the first research question focusing on exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to describe their use of the EI strategy of self-awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations, the

fourth highest strategy, with a frequency of 10, mentioned by three principals was being

altruistic. Altruistic in the sense of self-awareness is the ability to support others and

bring the best out of them. Table 6 shows the frequency of this theme, as evidenced by

five virtual interviews.

Table 6

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Altruistic	3	7	3	10

A challenge for the leader is to retain and grow educators to increase student

achievement. A self-aware leader can recognize and understand personal moods and

drives to bring out the best in others. Participant 1 was altruistic when they stated, "I

bring out the best of them [staff]." Participant 5 reiterated the challenge of building staff

capacity and knowing when to nonreelect: "I have to make sure that it doesn't look like

I'm making that based off of my thoughts or feelings, but based on what's best for

students."

In addition to bringing out the best in others, the participants supported others

selflessly, giving their time to whoever needed it. Participant 4 explained, "Helping

support our new teachers in those positions, we, I put a bunch of support into that first

year." Finding credentialed teachers and rural districts hiring educators without any

education experience is a challenge. Providing support is necessary for the school to be

successful. When issues arise, the school looks to the leader for solutions. The principal

recognized and understood personal moods and drives while being altruistic when they said, "Let me look into that. Let me investigate. Let me do some research. Let me ask people some questions, and I'll get back to you."

Data Analysis for Research Subquestion 2

How do exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of self-management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

The next section examines the qualitative data coded into themes generated from the five interviews with principals. The data discussed were collected from Interview Questions 3 and 4. The following subsections outline the responses to Research Subquestion 2. Table 7 shows the themes and frequency counts.

Table 7

Themes, Participants, Sources, and Frequency, Highest to Lowest Frequency, for Research Subquestion 2

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Modeling self-management when leading	5	38	7	45
2. Modeling self-management	5	16	2	18
3. Identifying and eliminating bias	3	8	9	17

In summary, with a total frequency of 45, all five participants identified leading by modeling self-management as the number one self-management strategy when responding to leadership challenges in their school organizations. All five principals

83

emphasized the strategy of model self-management during decision-making, addressing challenges with a total frequency of 18. The third highest theme was identifying and eliminating bias by three of five participants for a frequency of 17. The third and fourth interview questions gathered information regarding the lived experiences of exemplary elementary principals. The following section provides an overview of the qualitative data analysis for the themes answering the research question using individual experiences to contribute a sense of self-efficacy or confidence and a sense of connectedness to others.

Theme 1: Modeling Self-Management When Leading

Based on the second research question focusing on exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to describe their use of the emotionally intelligent strategy of self-management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations, the highest strategy, with a frequency of 45, was self-management when leading. A leader with self-management displays strategies of preparedness and organization. All five participants offered their experiences and perspectives on flexibly managing one's actions, thoughts, and feelings to get the desired results. Table 8 shows the frequency of this theme.

Table 8

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Modeling self-management when leading	5	38	7	45

All participants described modeling self-management when leading with preparedness during everyday moments and assisting the organization when faced with leadership challenges. Participant 1 stated, "I can do things ahead of time to ensure that things are gonna run smoothly." By being prepared for all situations, the people you lead will trust you as a leader. As Participant 5 said, "Everybody feels more comfortable and more confident in you or in a situation when they're overly prepared, and they know what to expect." Self-management contribute to a sense of self-efficacy or confidence and connectedness to others and the leader. Participant 3 stated that preparation "helps with my motivation if I'm looking ahead to plan and anticipate things. A challenge area where it is imperative to be prepared is when leading a new initiative." Participant 4 has encountered the challenge of starting a new initiative and suggested, "I would say that anytime where I'm moving forward with a new initiative that I know that there is resistance, I try to front-load."

Self-management and organization can assist in the development of the leader and the school. Participant 1 emphasized the importance of organization by stating, "I live by my calendar." When events are planned, it is comforting to know that looking at the calendar will provide the necessary information to know what events are taking place. Participant 5 agreed with Participant 1 when they stated, "I think that it's important to be prepared, knowledgeable, and organized."

Theme 2: Modeling Self-Management

Building on the second research question, which focused on exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas describing their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of self-management as they respond to leadership challenges in their

school organizations, the second highest strategy, with a frequency of 18, was modeling self-management. The principals described self-management strategies as communication and connectedness to others. All five participants described modeling self-management to lead their organizations during challenges. Table 9 shows the frequency of this theme.

Table 9

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Modeling self-management	5	16	2	18

All five principals described multiple leadership challenges and their ability to model self-management when addressing them. Participant 1 stressed the importance of "Communicate things ahead of time." Participant 1 discussed the challenge of starting a school year and everything it entails. When staff are communicated with, some challenges are less invasive. Participant 5 also expressed the importance of communication: "Being super clear in communication. And even when you think you're clear, sometimes you're not clear, you gotta be clearer."

The principals acknowledged the need to have connectedness to others when modeling self-management while addressing leadership challenges. Participant 4 expressed, "I'm not top-down. I'm very much, we're all in this together." Principals see the importance of a sense of connectedness to others in their self-management while navigating leadership challenges. Participant 5 also expressed the importance of

connectedness to others when they stated, "Be thoughtful of each person and their thoughts and beliefs."

Theme 3: Identifying and Eliminating Bias

Concluding the second research question focusing on exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of self-management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations, the third highest strategy, with a frequency of 17, was identifying and eliminating bias. The principals described identifying and eliminating bias as detaching personal ego from decision making. Three participants described modeling self-management to lead their organizations during challenges. Table 10 shows the frequency of this theme.

Table 10

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Identifying and eliminating bias	3	8	9	17

Three principals described multiple leadership challenges and their ability to identify and eliminate bias when addressing them. Participants 2 and 5 shared challenges when they used detaching personal ego from decision making to lead their organization. Participant 2 expressed that challenges occur daily and can arise in all situations. Participant 2 stated, "My success isn't contingent upon knowing everything. I'm never going to know everything. I have to be okay with that." Participant 4 also reiterated the

importance of detaching personal ego from decision making when they discussed challenging interactions with staff members who displayed negative sentiments. Participant 4 stated, "Being willing to move forward and then just, you know, not taking anything personally." Last, Participant 5 summarized how to identify and eliminate bias when addressing leadership challenges: "Take your emotions out of it, look at data, data will drive direction."

Data Analysis for Research Subquestion 3

How do exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of social awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

The following section communicates the qualitative data from the five interviews with principals that were coded into themes. The information presented was collected from Interview Questions 5 and 6. The following subsections outline the responses to Research Subquestion 3. Table 11 shows the themes and frequency counts.

Table 11

Themes, Participants, Sources, and Frequency, Highest to Lowest Frequency, for Research Subquestion 3

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Model social awareness	5	51	6	57
2. Organizational awareness	4	14	5	19

In summary, with a total frequency of 57, all five participants identified model social awareness as the number one social awareness strategy when responding to leadership challenges in their school organizations. Four of the five principals emphasized the strategy of organizational awareness during decision-making when addressing challenges, with a total frequency of 19. Two interview questions gathered information regarding the lived experiences of exemplary elementary principals. The next section outlines an analysis of the qualitative data for the themes in answering the third research question using individual experiences.

Theme 1: Model Social Awareness

The third research question for this study asked exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of social awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations. According to the data analysis, with a frequency of 57, all five principals stated that modeling social awareness assisted them when faced with challenges while leading a school organization. In this theme, modeling was when the principals showed desired traits to inspire their organization, such as being supportive with positive encouragement, connecting with people, communicating, being approachable, and being empathetic in responding to leadership challenges. Table 12 shows the frequency of this theme, as evidenced by five virtual interviews.

All five principals described multiple leadership challenges and their capabilities for modeling social awareness when addressing challenges. Participants 2, 4, and 5 shared challenges when they used being supportive with positive encouragement to lead their organization. Participant 2 experienced challenges with stakeholders and how to

navigate each need to get the most out of the performance of the stakeholders. Participant 2 stated this challenge when he said, "Knowing when to push when to hold back, when to guide, and sometimes when just to listen is essential." This aligns with social awareness because it is about sensing what other people are thinking and feeling. Participant 4 stated a routine challenge: "I've always said, what do I do with broken adults? Meaning I've got adults that don't necessarily have the social-emotional skills that I need them to have in order to support our students." The apparent challenge is that principals are faced with a need for teachers without a supply of competent and trained professionals. Rural districts often hire who they can to fill vacancies and in turn hire adults that have their own severe needs. Participant 5 discussed how they support the organization during challenges: "So you wanna hear them, they wanna feel like you're a part of it and you're, you're involved in it, and you care about their kids."

Table 12

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Model social awareness	5	51	6	57

The principals recognized the importance of connecting with people when modeling social awareness and addressing leadership challenges. Participant 1 expressed the challenge others present to the leadership when frustrations arise. Other stakeholders view their perception as reality, which can lead to challenges. Participant 1 explained that they combat the challenge by "just trying to connect with them (stakeholders) and share

with people that I also have so many similarities that they don't always think about."

Participant 2 has encountered similar challenges, and when engaging with stakeholders, it's important to "gauge somebody's mood, with just a glance, you know, the right responses for each situation to help get the results that you want. I think that skill is essential to administration." Participant 2 further explained, "Being able to show empathy in all situations is essential for building trust and creating those impactful relationships." The connection with parents and other stakeholders is vital to the organization's success. Participant 5 explained how they foster the connections with the community: "I feel like they feel like you really, truly care about their children and their wellbeing is when they're seeing you out in public and those community events and they can relate to you."

Principals discussed the importance of communication when modeling social awareness when navigating leadership challenges. How we communicate is essential, as Participant 2 stated, "Understanding when to give an empathetic ear, when to give pointed and targeted advice, when to push, when to hold back, I think is essential for an administrator." They further explained,

> I wish we could have all principals wait tables for a couple of years. I think we
> would see a huge increase in communication. The skillset is essential in
> administration as emotions can be elevated from family, students, and employees.

To increase his communication and ensure it is going to de-escalate the situation, Participant 2 explained,

> I reread every email I send from multiple perspectives before hitting send. If I was
> angry, how would I receive this email? If I was in a good mood, how would I
> receive this email? It takes time initially, but then it becomes kind of second

nature. But it helps impact the amount of work that you can do by just sending an

empathetic, strongly worded email.

Participant 4 added, "Delaying calling back the angry parent because you'll get a very

different person." Being strategic in communicating can assist in leading an organization

through challenges.

Another essential skill presented by the principals was being approachable when

modeling social awareness during leadership challenges. Participant 1 stated, "I like

people to feel like they can approach me." Both principals agreed that being approachable

is being present and visible. Participant 5 built on the idea of being approachable when

they stated, "Be out there with the families and around the kids."

The final way principals model social awareness during leadership challenges is

through being empathetic. According to Participant 2, "Emails and empathy go hand in

hand. Too many arguments and hurt feelings are caused because of a wrongly worded

email." Participant 2 also described how they used empathy when navigating student

discipline: "To be empathetic towards the student when trying to understand where the

behavior's coming from and what may be going on in their life to cause it, it's essential to

be empathetic to the teacher who's at their wit's end." Participant 3 added the perspective

claim when they explained, "It's important for the staff to think of it not just from our

side of the situation, but from the parent's side of the situation as well." Last, Participant

5 said,

> I think it's important to listen. I think it's important to acknowledge the problem,
>
> to be empathetic with it, and try to understand it's to be just, most people are only

in there for you to listen to this situation and listen actively, not listen by typing or

writing or doing something else.

Theme 2: Organizational Awareness

The third research question for this study asked exemplary elementary school

principals in rural areas to describe their use of the EI strategy of social awareness as they

respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations. According to the data

analysis, with a frequency of 19, four principals stated that organizational awareness

assisted them when faced with challenges while leading a school organization. In this

theme, organizational awareness refers to when the principals show desired traits to

inspire their organization such as being attuned to the school dynamics, anticipating, and

visibility in responding to leadership challenges. Table 13 shows the frequency of this

theme, as evidenced by five virtual interviews.

Table 13

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Organizational awareness	4	14	5	19

Four of the five principals described multiple leadership challenges and their

capabilities of organizational awareness when addressing challenges. Participants 1, 3,

and 4 shared challenges when they used being attuned to the school dynamics to lead

their organization. Participant 1 stated that staff dynamics can be challenging to navigate.

Each month, Participant 1 sends out a check-in by which staff can tell the principal of any

compliments, concerns, or issues. They stated, "We send out a Google form that is kind of a check-in form." Participant 3 added to the importance of a check-in system: "You gotta be aware of what's going on." When discussing staff challenges and the inner working dynamics, Participant 4 said, "Reading the room. Sometimes it's like a spidey sense, but also knowing that not everybody has the same foundation."

The principals recognized the need for organizational awareness while addressing leadership challenges. Participant 2 expressed the importance of anticipating: "It's essential to put yourself in everyone else's shoes, everyone who's gonna be affected, put 'em in your, their shoes so that you can understand what their ripple effects are and how you can get ahead of them." Participant 3 further explained, "There are a lot of pieces that are coming at us from all different directions that we need to be aware of."

Furthermore, the principals recognized the need to be visible while addressing leadership challenges. Participant 1 stated, "I'm a visible person." Participant 3 explained how they handled daily challenges at their site: "I think it is important (social awareness), and you can't bury your head in the sand on any of it."

Data Analysis for Research Subquestion 4

How do exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of relationship management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

The following sections communicate the qualitative data from the five interviews with principals that were coded into themes. The information presented was collected from Interview Questions 7 and 8. The following subsections outline the responses to Research Subquestion 4. Table 14 shows the themes and frequency counts.

Table 14

Themes, Participants, Sources, and Frequency, Highest to Lowest Frequency, for Research

Question 4

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Model relationship management	5	29	14	43
2. Listen and influence	5	14	6	20

In summary, with a total frequency of 43, all five participants identified model relationship management as the number one relationship management strategy when responding to leadership challenges in their school organizations. Again, all five principals emphasized the strategy of listening and influence during decision-making when addressing challenges, with a total frequency of 20. Two interview questions gathered information regarding the lived experiences of exemplary elementary principals. The following section outlines an analysis of the qualitative data for the themes in answering the fourth research question using individual experiences.

Theme 1: Model Relationship Management

The fourth research question for this study asked exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of relationship management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations. According to the data analysis, with a frequency of 43, all five principals stated that modeling relationship management assisted them when faced with challenges while leading a school organization. All participants shared examples of daily occurrences that they use to model relationship management such as having a relationship

with everyone in responding to leadership challenges. Table 15 shows the frequency of this theme, as evidenced by five virtual interviews.

Table 15

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Model relationship management	5	29	14	43

Five principals described multiple leadership challenges and their capabilities in modeling relationship management when addressing challenges. All participants shared challenges when having a relationship with everyone was used to lead their organization. Participant 1, when discussing daily challenges such as staff dynamics, stated, "Have a positive relationship with everybody." Furthermore, Participant 2 added, "The best thing that you could do as a leader is get out there and build relationships with the people who work for you, with the students, with the families. I think everything else falls into place from there." Having a positive relationship can assist to address challenges because all stakeholders trust each other. Supporting the claim of modeling relationship management, Participant 2 also stated,

> Relationships are what schools are built on. Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. And I think this is true of everyone at every age. You know, it's not just students, it's employees, it is coworkers, it's parents. You can't effectively lead without building relationships.

Participant 5 supported this claim when addressing daily challenges presented by stakeholders: "Every day you're talking to people, asking 'em how they feel, checking in with them. Without relationships, you have nothing. Nobody will listen to you, and the school will fall apart."

Theme 2: Listen and Influence

The fourth research question for this study asked exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of relationship management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations. According to the data analysis, with a frequency of 20, all five principals stated that listening and influence assisted them when faced with challenges while leading a school organization. All participants shared examples of daily occurrences that they use to address challenges such as to listen and influence in responding to leadership challenges. Table 16 shows the frequency of this theme as evidenced by five virtual interviews.

Table 16

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Listen and influence	5	14	6	20

Five principals described multiple leadership challenges and their ability to listen and influence when addressing them. In trying to establish positive relationships, Participant 1 wants others to feel heard, as they stated, "I want them to feel like I'm

97

listening to them and that they're important." Feeling heard can have a profound impact on a person's morale. Participant 2 built on this idea when they addressed the challenge of starting at a new site and establishing relationships. They stated,

> Show them [staff] that I care. They're having a hard time, spend those extra 10 minutes that I don't have, but make room to spend that 10 minutes and sit there and have that conversation with 'em. I think that goes a long way towards building a safe community and the school and making this a place where people wanna be because you're a leader that cares about them. And I, I think there's, there's nothing better than that.

This further builds the idea that a positive relationship can overcome any challenge.

The principals discussed the need for communication when addressing leadership challenges. Participant 3 conveyed the importance of communication at all times to prevent challenges. He stated, "If I were to not have communication with them [staff], our relationships would not be good." Equally important, Participant 4 described how they communicate to prevent challenges: "A lot of clarity around what the expectation is and the why behind it, I think, makes a big difference." Communication addresses challenges and also can be used as a preventative measure.

Data Analysis for Research Subquestion 5

How do exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas describe their use of emotional intelligent strategies to support their success and tenure as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

The following sections communicate the qualitative data from the five interviews with principals that were coded into themes. The information presented was collected

from Interview Question 9. The following subsections outline the responses to Research

Subquestion 5. Table 17 shows the themes and frequency counts.

Table 17

Themes, Participants, Sources, and Frequency, Highest to Lowest Frequency, for Research

Question 5

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Relationship management	5	21	20	41
2. Social awareness	4	7	11	18

In summary, with a total frequency of 41, all five participants identified

relationship management as the number one strategy to support their success and tenure

when responding to leadership challenges in their school organizations. Four of the five

principals emphasized the strategy of social awareness during decision-making when

addressing challenges, with a total frequency of 18. The last interview question gathered

information regarding the lived experiences of exemplary elementary principals and the

strategies they used to support their success and tenure. The next section outlines an

analysis of the qualitative data for the themes in answering the final research question

using individual experiences.

Theme 1: Relationship Management

The final research question for this study asked exemplary elementary school

principals in rural areas to reflect on how they managed their EI to respond to leadership

challenges in their school organization and what parts of EI have contributed most to

their success in tenure as a principal in a rural area. According to the data analysis, with a frequency of 41, all five principals stated that relationship management assisted them when faced with challenges while leading a school organization. All participants shared examples of daily occurrences that they use in relationship management in responding to leadership challenges. Table 18 shows the frequency of this theme, as evidenced by five virtual interviews.

Table 18

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Relationship management	5	21	20	41

Every principal described the importance of relationship management and its contribution to the success and tenure of a principal. Participant 2 defined how they saw relationship management during challenges: "Part of building a relationship with somebody is knowing how to interact with them and knowing what they need." Participant 1 stressed the importance of relationships: "Really focus on building positive relationships with every person." They added, "If you don't have a positive relationship, people aren't gonna work hard for you." Relationship management is a defining characteristic of a successful leader. Participant 5 believed, "If they don't have a relationship with you and feel like you're a part of their community and their circle, they're not gonna listen. All your knowledge in the world doesn't matter."

Theme 2: Social Awareness

The final research question for this study asked exemplary elementary school principals in rural areas to reflect on how they managed their EI to respond to leadership challenges in their school organization and what parts of EI have contributed most to their success in tenure as a principal in a rural area. According to the data analysis, with a frequency of 18, four principals stated that social awareness assisted them when faced with challenges while leading a school organization. All participants shared examples of daily occurrences that they use in social awareness in responding to leadership challenges. Table 19 shows the frequency of this theme, as evidenced by five virtual interviews.

Table 19

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Social awareness	4	7	11	18

Four of the five principals described multiple leadership challenges and their capabilities to use social awareness when addressing them. Participant 4 navigated the challenge of a changing world and progressing education system. Participant 4 indicated the importance of "being aware of what's going on" not just being aware at the school level of what is going on but also at the state and federal levels. You can anticipate and prepare if you have the social awareness to understand the surrounding dynamics. Participant 1 expressed how social awareness has helped to navigate challenges and assist

in their tenure. Participant 1 said, "Just trying to be visible, talk to people, ask them about their family, ask them about their children, ask them about their vacation." Participant 2 showed how they use social awareness to enhance the relationship:

Some teachers need you to check in once in a while and say, you know, Hey, you're doing a great job. Have a good one. Some teachers need you to check in with them daily. Having that social awareness aspect can help build that relationship.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the purpose statement, research questions, methodology, data-gathering process, population, and sample. A complete presentation and analysis of the data included five interviews and supporting evidence from artifact reviews. Uncovering ways elementary principals in rural areas respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations is important for several reasons. Modeling Goleman's (2006) four domains of EI (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) along with active listening, altruism, identifying and eliminating ego and bias, organizational awareness, and listening and influence were strategies shown to assist principals' success and tenure.

A further look into exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics' use of EI strategies based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of EI (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) and how it supported their success and tenure as they responded to leadership challenges in their school organizations can assist future generations of stakeholders revealed which domains were the most critical to implement. The most significant EI domains for principals in rural

areas to implement during leadership challenges are relationship management and, to a lesser extent, social awareness.

Eleven themes emerged from the data regarding the strategies exemplary elementary principals used when faced with challenges in the school organization to support their tenure in their position (Table 20). Furthermore, data were collected on which domain of Goleman's (2006) EI was used with intentionality most frequently (Table 21). The tables summarize the themes and frequencies for each research question.

Table 20

EI Domain, Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Emotional intelligence	Theme	Participants	Frequency of the emotional intelligent practice		
			Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Self-awareness	1. Model self-awareness	4	22	9	31
	2. Model self-awareness when making decisions	4	15	4	19
	3. Active listening and feedback	5	10	3	13
	4. Altruistic	3	7	3	10
2. Self-management	5. Modeling self-management when leading	5	38	7	45
	6. Identifying and eliminating ego and bias	5	16	2	18
	7. Model self-management	3	8	9	17
3. Social awareness	8. Model social awareness	5	51	6	57
	9. Organizational awareness	4	14	5	19
4. Relationship management	10. Model relationship management	5	29	14	43
	11. Listen and influence	5	14	6	20

Table 21

EI Domain, Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency of theme		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Relationship management	5	21	20	41
2. Social awareness	4	7	11	18

The final chapter of the study includes a summary of the study's significant findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions. The chapter concludes with implications for action, proposals for additional research, and concluding remarks and thoughts.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The crucial and unexpected findings are disclosed, followed by the conclusions drawn. A discussion regarding the implications of action outlines emotional intelligent strategies that can be used by principals in rural areas when responding to leadership challenges in their school organizations. Furthermore, there are recommendations for future research that may add to the breadth and depth of knowledge regarding emotional intelligent strategies that elementary school principals in rural areas use as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations. This chapter concludes with my summarized thoughts and remarks.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the emotional intelligence strategies that exemplary elementary principals in rural areas use as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management). A secondary purpose of the study was for Exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics to explain how their use of emotional intelligence strategies supported their success and tenure as they responded to leadership challenges in their school organizations.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

The central research question for this study asked, "How do exemplary elementary Principals in rural school districts describe their use of emotional intelligence

strategies as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on

Goleman's (2006) four domains of EI: self-awareness, self-management, social

awareness, and relationship management?"

Research Subquestions

1. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use
   of the emotional intelligence strategy of self-awareness as they respond to
   leadership challenges in their school organizations?

2. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use
   of the emotional intelligence strategy of self-management as they respond to
   leadership challenges in their school organizations?

3. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use
   of the emotional intelligence strategy of social awareness as they respond to
   leadership challenges in their school organizations?

4. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use
   of the emotional intelligence strategy of relationship management as they respond
   to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

5. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use
   of emotional intelligence strategies to support their success and tenure as they
   respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

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Methodology Review

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A qualitative multicase study described the lived experiences, challenges,

strategies, and recommendations of exemplary elementary principals who have led their

school organizations using EI strategies as they respond to leadership challenges in rural

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106

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areas. The methodology was designed to answer the central research question, followed by the five research subquestions.

I conducted in-depth interviews with five exemplary principals from rural areas who have led their school organizations using emotional intelligent strategies as they responded to leadership challenges. The five qualitative interviews were conducted virtually in the location most convenient to the participant and were recorded with permission. The data obtained for the study were stored securely by me.

The population for the study was exemplary elementary school principals serving public schools in rural areas who have led their school organizations using emotional intelligent strategies as they responded to leadership challenges. Studying all 5,857 public elementary school principals in California was not practical. Therefore, two factors were used to create a target population. First, the study examined only principals from rural schools. Next, the participants of the study included only principals from rural environments in Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino counties. For this study, the sample was individuals representing a larger population of 352 elementary principals serving California's Lake, Riverside, and Mendocino districts. Another filter, a purposeful sample, was used in this study to examine elementary principals from these counties. Five exemplary elementary school principals serving rural demographics were selected for this multicase study.

Major Findings

The qualitative data were compiled and analyzed into themes to establish the critical findings for the study on exemplary elementary principals in rural areas who have led their school organizations using emotional intelligent strategies as they responded to

leadership challenges. The qualitative data consisted of five face-to-face, virtual in-depth interviews with artifact-reviewed evidence. Within the qualitative data, I established that the data having 10 or more occurrences with at least three of five participants in the collected responses were considered a theme. Identified key findings also considered lived experiences, challenges, strategies, and recommendations.

The critical findings listed in the following sections examine the experiences of exemplary elementary principals in rural areas who have led their school organizations using emotional intelligent strategies as they responded to leadership challenges in their school organizations.

Key Finding 1

All four domains of Emotional Intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) are essential strategies for responding to leadership challenges.

All participants verbalized the same stance that all domains of EI are essential in responding to leadership challenges in their school organizations. The data validated this stance with a frequency count of 31 on modeling self-awareness, followed by 45 on modeling self-management when leading, 57 on modeling social awareness, and 43 on modeling relationship management. The importance of modeling self-awareness and the represented actions, such as having a positive mindset, being consistent, and being genuine were mentioned by participants. Participant 1 described how they are assisted in modeling self-awareness when faced with leadership challenges as being authentic: "If there's bad news to share, I don't sugarcoat." Additionally, Participant 2 elaborated, "No one wants a leader who rides their emotions, like a surfboard on the waves." Showing the

ability to discern the emotions of personnel and the group, in addition to monitoring one's and others' emotions, affects a leader's performance and sustaining in their position (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).

All five principals experienced modeling self-management when leading while responding to challenges and emphasized being prepared as their preferred strategy. Participant 4 emphasized that during challenges, being prepared assists in the delivery: "Anytime where I'm moving forward with a new initiative that I know that there is resistance, I, try to front-load." Participant 5 added, "Everybody feels more comfortable and more confident in you or in a situation when they're overly prepared, and they know what to expect." Self-management contributes to a sense of self-efficacy or confidence and connectedness to others and the leader.

All principals stated that social awareness strategies helped them model their social and organizational awareness as they respond to leadership challenges. Principals discussed the importance of communication when modeling social awareness when navigating leadership challenges. How principals communicate is essential, as Participant 2 stated, "Understanding when to give an empathetic ear, when to give pointed and targeted advice, when to push, when to hold back, I think is essential for an administrator." He further explained,

> I wish we could have all principals wait tables for a couple of years. I think we
> would see a huge increase in communication. The skillset is essential in
> administration as emotions can be elevated from family, students, and employees.

To increase his communication and ensure it will de-escalate the situation, Participant 2 explained,

I reread every email I send from multiple perspectives before hitting send. If I was angry, how would I receive this email? If I was in a good mood, how would I receive this email? It takes time initially, but then it becomes kind of second nature. But it helps impact the amount of work that you can do by just sending an empathetic, strongly worded email.

The principals discussed the need for communication when addressing leadership challenges. Participant 3 conveyed the importance of communication at all times to prevent challenges. He stated, "If I were to not have communication with them (staff), our relationships would not be good." Equally important, Participant 4 described how they communicate to prevent challenges: "A lot of clarity around what the expectation is and the why behind it, I think makes a big difference." Communication addresses challenges and also can be used as a preventative measure.

Key Finding 2

Two domains of emotional intelligence (relationship management and social awareness) were identified as more critical when responding to leadership challenges in their school organization.

All five principals discussed the importance of relationship management and its contribution to the success and tenure of a principal. Participant 2 defined how he saw relationship management during challenges when he said, "Part of building a relationship with somebody is knowing how to interact with them and knowing what they need." Participant 1 stressed the importance of relationships by stating, "Really focus on building positive relationships with every person." They added, "If you don't have a positive relationship, people aren't gonna work hard for you." Relationship management

is a characteristic of EI in a successful leader. Participant 5 said, "If they don't have a relationship with you and feel like you're a part of their community and their circle, they're not gonna listen. All your knowledge in the world doesn't matter."

All principals stated that relationship management strategy helped them communicate and communicate with everyone as they responded to leadership challenges. Participant 5 supported this claim when addressing daily challenges presented by stakeholders, "Every day you're talking to people, asking 'em how they feel, checking in with them. Without relationships, you have nothing. Nobody will listen to you and the school will fall apart."

Participant 2 also stated, supporting the claim of modeling relationship management,

> Relationships are what schools are built on. Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. And I think this is true of everyone at every age. You know, it's not just students, it's employees, it is coworkers, it's parents. You can't effectively lead without building relationships.

As the research has uncovered, to be successful during their tenure, principals must decelerate the emotional feelings of the stakeholders, including parents, students, and staff; assist in diverse perspectives be heard; and lead through all challenges to respond to as they lead their organization (Schul, 2019).

Four of the five principals described using social awareness when addressing challenges. Participant 4 indicated the importance of social awareness when they stated, "Being aware of what's going on. I don't think that necessarily our lawmakers, which tend to come from larger communities understand the rural challenges. Our kids need

111

access to the same resources that everybody else has." Participant 1 expressed how social awareness has assisted in navigating challenges and their tenure. Participant 1 said, "Just trying to be visible, talk to people, ask them about their family, ask them about their children, ask them about their vacation." Participant 2 showed how they use social awareness to enhance the relationship:

> Some teachers need you to check in once in a while and say, you know, "Hey, you're doing a great job. Have a good one." Some teachers need you to check in with them daily. Having that social awareness aspect can help build that relationship.

A successful leader uses social awareness and relationships to influence others to construct a shared vision. The skill of influencing others allows leaders to develop meaningful change in their organizations when responding to challenges (Balaji, 2021).

Key Finding 3

Two domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness and self-management) were identified as less important when responding to leadership challenges in their school organization.

Every principal described the importance of relationship management and social awareness to support the success and tenure of a principal but needed to state the importance of self-awareness and self-management. With a total frequency of 41, all five participants identified the theme of relationship management as the number one strategy to support their success and tenure when responding to leadership challenges in their school organizations. Four of the five principals emphasized the theme of social

112

awareness during decision-making when addressing challenges with a total frequency of 18. Participant 2 said,

> My success is due to a combination of social awareness and relationship management. I think those two things are pretty strongly related. Part of building a relationship with somebody is knowing how to interact with 'em, right? And knowing what they need.

Principals with relationship management skills know how to act in different situations as they respond to leadership challenges (Munro, 2021). Participant 3 said, "I think relationships, number one, in supporting success and tenure." The participants noted that the self-domains (self-awareness and self-management) were easier to achieve because of their innate abilities but were essential foundational skills such as preparedness and organization, but they alone did not drive success and tenure. Domains related to social interactions and relationships took more effort and were valued more in driving the participants' success and tenure. Participant 5 alluded that relationship management is more critical than self-awareness and self-management when they stated,

> Growing up in the area, knowing the culture, knowing most of the family's histories over time, and growing up with them have also helped me be able to serve them. But mostly it's just getting to know the people, the students and their families that we serve. Being a part of their community is the most important thing. You can be as smart as can be, but if they [families] don't have a relationship with you and feel like you're a part of their community and their circle, they're not gonna listen. All your knowledge in the world doesn't matter.

Principals noted that all skills related to EI are essential to display. Therefore, principals must possess many leadership skills to lead and respond to challenges using EI strategies.

<div align="center">**Conclusions**</div>

The key findings resulted in three conclusions based on the lived experiences of current exemplary elementary principals in rural areas who have led their school organizations using emotional intelligent strategies as they responded to leadership challenges. The three conclusions have supporting evidence from the qualitative data and the literature.

Conclusion 1: Modeling Emotional Intelligent Strategies Are Essential in Responding to Leadership Challenges

I conclude that the complexities of principalship and cultural competencies of serving rural communities require superior usage and maintenance of the four domains of EI (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management). Additionally, all facets of EI can assist leaders in navigating leadership challenges in their organizations.

Literature agrees that a leader with proficient emotional skills is more likely to be effective and productive (Goleman, 1995). Moreover, multiple empirical studies disclosed that EI is integral to school leadership (Fulcher Gutierrez, 2017). Consequently, principals must exhibit these essential actions of EI as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations. The following evidence supports this conclusion:

1. All principals described modeling emotional intelligent strategies as essential in responding to leadership challenges in their school organizations. How they

<div align="center">114</div>

communicated was vital to using EI with social awareness, which was referred to

by all participants at a frequency count of 51 and broached in all five interviews,

indicating an average of over 10 mentions per participant.

2. All principals disclosed that modeling self-management when leading assisted

   them in their response to leadership challenges. The principals declared that

   preparedness and organization were instrumental to ensure success and tenure.

Conclusion 2: Relationship Management and Social Awareness Are Crucial to

Support Success and Tenure

It is concluded that relationship management and social awareness are more

crucial emotional intelligent strategies to be successful with a longer tenure in their

school organization as evidenced by five exemplary rural elementary principals.

Principals who strategically manage relationships by building positive relationships with

everyone, listening, communicating, and being socially aware by support with positive

encouragement, connecting with people, communicating, and being approachable and

empathetic will have tremendous success and longer tenure. On the other hand, it is

concluded that principals' tenure may be imperiled when they neglect their EI of creating

and managing relationships and modeling social awareness when responding to

leadership challenges in their school organization.

Relationship management is a strategy to conduct and drive an organization with

a vision to progress toward success (Goleman, 2006). Building and managing

relationships is an essential strategy to lead through challenges to bring together others to

fight against conflict. Additionally, the ability to recognize the emotions of others assists

one to be socially aware. Furthermore, multiple primary reports provide evidence that EI has aided and is a requisite to a leader's tenure (Fulcher Gutierrez, 2017).

The following evidence supports this conclusion:

1. Managing relationships through creating relationships with everyone and listening and influencing were prominent relationship management strategies with a frequency count of 63 combined in the five interviews and artifacts, giving it an average of over 12 mentions per participant.

Conclusion 3: Modeling Self-Management When Leading Is Influential to Support Success and Tenure

It is concluded that modeling self-management when leading is crucial to support success and tenure, as evidenced by five exemplary rural elementary principals. Administrators who demonstrate the characteristics of being prepared and organized will have more success and longer tenure. In contrast, the success and tenure of an administrator will be hindered by a state of ill-preparedness and disorganization. Prepared principals increase both principal and teacher retention rates as well as elevate student achievement in their schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Self-management is a strategy to navigate impulses and negative emotions (Goleman, 2006). Managing emotions during leadership challenges is essential to lead an organization in a positive direction. Managing emotions in a positive way while adapting to challenges is self-management (Segal et al., 2021). The following evidence supports this conclusion: All principals disclosed that modeling self-management when leading assisted them in their response to leadership challenges. The principals declared that preparedness and organization were instrumental to ensuring success and tenure.

116

Implications for Action

Implication for Action 1: Implement Ongoing Professional Development on EI

Derived from the conclusion that the intricacy of principalship requires

exemplified excellence in the use and maintenance of strategies in the four domains of EI

(self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) to

impart consistency in practice, it is recommended that principals engage in ongoing

professional development. Professional development provided by districts can assist

school administrators in building their capacity on EI principles. Establishments that

allow principals to progress in their EI skills include learning how to listen, deciphering

when to answer, and recognizing bias because these are crucial in building relationships

(Frey, 2012). Principals should engage with the material, extending their learning on EI

to share with stakeholder groups in proximity to the organization to create a support

system. Modeling emotional intelligent strategies will assist in a leader's success

navigating challenges. Management meetings can provide an opportunity to educate

administrators on principles of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and

relationship management while also allowing the administrators to share experiences and

collaborate in a relevant context. Organizations such as the Association of California

School Administrators (ACSA), administrative preparation programs, and the County

Office of Education could devise elements of training essential for EI to succeed as

expressed by the principals in the interviews. School districts should allocate their

existing supplemental funds from state and federal governments to provide professional

development on emotional intelligent strategies. The professional development should

center on the practices and principles of EI and how to model them consistently during

challenging times. Practices such as modeling self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management as well as characteristics of organized, prepared, altruistic, listening and feedback; identifying and eliminating ego; and influencing create greater success and longer tenure. Workshops can use collaborative practices to incorporate EI practices into experiences so the administrative team can reflect and adjust their own practices.

Additionally, professional development of EI can be incorporated into universities' administrator training programs. Overarching themes of EI discovered in the study can assist successful leadership. Providing an understanding of the skills and concepts of EI before obtaining an administrative position will better develop future leaders in rural education to cope with the unpredictability of their environment. Thus, the results of this study can be used to improve the training systems and retention of future leaders, building more vital leadership for the organization to be successful. Universities have a platform by which they can assist new impressionable administrators in how to successfully increase their skill set to navigate challenges administrators face. Administrative preparation programs must examine the results of this study to embed EI into the curricula exposed to new administrators. Providing awareness and experiences to reflect on modeling self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management as well as characteristics of organization, preparation, altruism, listening and feedback, identifying and eliminating ego, and influencing would assist administrators in overcoming challenges.

Implication for Action 2: Modeling Emotional Intelligence Strategies With

Emphasis on Managing Relationships Creates Success and Longer Tenure

Developed from the conclusion that modeling all EI strategies is essential, and because relationship management is the most crucial emotional intelligent strategy, as evidenced by five exemplary rural elementary principals to be successful and have a longer tenure in their school organizations, modeling EI strategies especially in the way relationships are managed creates success and longer tenure in administrators.

The tenure of principals and its impact have significant implications. Most of the current research has investigated the impact of characteristics other than the principal, with fewer studies looking at principal tenure, how it affects student progress, and how students respond to daily challenges in their school. According to Henry and Harbatkin (2019), principal turnover is linked to declining test scores, a lack of school-level proficiency, and teacher turnover. The national average tenure of principals in 2016–2017 was 4 years (Levin & Bradley, 2019). In areas of high poverty, the turnover rate of principals was 21%. School districts can invest in an awareness tool that when a new employee is hired teaches them their aptitude in EI. As part of their employment, school leaders should be required to take an EI training course (Chaidez, 2022). To implement an effective EI initiative, elementary principals must conduct an assessment to identify the gaps in EI. The awareness gained from this exercise is imperative to grasp the strengths and weaknesses of EI in the administrator. The results from the assessment will drive the support needed for further development. Existing district professional development funds should assist in providing the resources the principals need based on their individual and collective results. Additionally, each district should appoint a

principal to oversee the coordination of schools to promote and model EI strategies. This appointed principal should be used as a point person that can offer and schedule resources as well and check in with the administrators to reflect on difficult decisions to reflect and plan for a sustained or better outcome.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings and conclusions from this study add to the existing literature regarding exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics as they lead their school organizations using emotional intelligent strategies as they respond to leadership challenges. This multicase study was a glimpse into the lived experiences of principals; the potential for further exploration into the complexities of rural principalship could be invited by future researchers. Developed from the data of this study, the following are recommendations for future research:

1. Further research into rural schools and differences between kindergarten through sixth grade, middle schools sixth through eighth grades, and kindergarten through eighth grade is recommended.

2. It is recommended that this study be replicated in other demographics, such as urban and suburban. A future qualitative multiple case study approach that replicates this research for exemplary elementary principals in urban demographics could be conducted.

3. Further research on previous experiences that connect to success and tenure in principalship (coach, customer service, and parent) is recommended.

4. It is recommended that a future study be conducted on exemplary superintendents in rural demographics and the use of EI during leadership challenges.

5. It is recommended that a multiple case study be proliferated to other principals serving rural demographics to create a more developed understanding of tenure. This would strengthen and inform this study's findings.

6. It is recommended that a qualitative case study be conducted examining how relationships are created, managed, and maintained during high-stress situations. Training should focus on leaders in simulated hostile and high-stress situations. Regular practice and use of training can support the practice of relationship management.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

This study was a significant, inspiring, relevant, and strenuous learning experience. The time required persistence and dedication to learn from exemplary elementary principals in rural areas. Venturing into this dissertation journey allowed me to examine an area of interest in this country: exemplary elementary principals in rural areas use EI as they lead their organizations. Sacrifices of time and energy have been fruitful for my thinking more profoundly to understand EI better and apply to similar contexts. I am indebted to my family, friends, professors, and colleagues for assisting in my journey to this point.

From this experience of conducting a study and writing a dissertation, I recognize the importance of continuing to inspire others through research. My pursuit of creating positive relationships and a desire to learn is vast. My aspiration to dedicate my time to others as an ethical, passionate, and relied-on leader drives me. My mission is to recognize, value, and support others. In summary, the learning conducted in this study helped me reach an educational milestone in my career. This experience directly results

from my dedication to be the best exemplary elementary principal who will lead with

emotional intelligence and will respond to challenges.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

References	Th…	… …	… …			Principal Challenges	… …	Pandemic	… …	Multiple Intelligence Theory	Multiple Loci of	Transformational Leadership	Rural Sociology	Qualitative	Family Involvement
Albrecht, K. (2006)	X														
Ament (2013)		X				X									
Arnold, M. L., & Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, A. C. (2000)				X											
Ashworth AR (2013)		X	X	X											
Avolio, B. J., & Bass, B. M. (2001)			X									X			
Balaji, D. (2021)		X	X												
Bennis (2009)			X												

Reference	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Botelho, G. (2020)	X																
Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P. (2011)	X																
Bradberry, T., & Greaves, J. (2009).	X						X										
Brinia, V., Zimianiti, L., & Panagiotopoulos, K. (2014)	X	X	X														
Bryant, D. J., Oo, M., & Damian, A. J. (2020)				X													
California Department of Education (2023)																X	
California Teachers Association (2023)							X										
Canales, M., Tejeda-Delgado, C., & Slate, J. R. (June 06, 2008)				X													
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012)				X													
Chaidez (2022).	X	X					X										

Reference																	
Chen, J., & Guo, W. (2018)	X	X															
Cherniss & Goleman (2001)		X				X											
Combs, J., Edmonton, S. L., & Jackson, S. H. (2009)		X	X	X	X		X										
Counties. Rural Counties. (n.d.).				X													
Creating a positive school culture (2019)						X											
Creswell, J. W. (2009)															X		
Creswell, J. W. (2015)															X		
Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019)															X		
Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C.N. (2018)															X		
Crouch et al. (2022)				X													

Reference																
Cummins, A. (2019)				X												
Darling-Hammond, L., Wechsler, M. E., Levin, S., Leung-Gagne, M., & Tozer, S. (2022)																
Health Resources & Services Administration				X											X	
Department of Education				X											X	
Earley, P. C., Ang, S., & Tan, J.-S. (2006)													X			
Edmonds, R. (1979)		X		X												
Educational Research Service (1998)					X		X									
Ferronato, B.S. (2017)	X	X														
Ford, J. M. (2010)	X															
Fulcher Gutierrez (2017)	X	X														
Fullan, M. (2003)		X	X													

143

Reference	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Gardner, H. (1976)												X						
Goleman, D. (1995)	X																	
Goleman, D. (2006).	X																	
Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2013).	X	X																
Goodwin, B. (2013)	X	X	X															
Griffin, A., Jr. (2005)		X	X															
Grobler, B., Moloi C., & Thakhordas, S. (2017)	X	X	X															
Hall, C. (2007)	X																	
Hamilton, M. (2020)		X	X			X												
Hansen, C. (2018).				X	X	X												
Henry, G.T., & Harbatkin, E. (2019)				X		X												
Hillyard, S. (2007)				X												X		
Hoffer, C. R. (1961)				X												X		

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Hoyle, J., Bjork, L., Collier, V., & Glass, T. (2005)			X														
Ingersoll, R., & Tran, H. (2023)					X												
Jochim, A., & Lavery, L. (2019)											X						
Johnson, S. (2020)					X												
Jones, M. L., Jr. (2021)			X	X		X											
Kambeya, Norma Vanessa (2008)		X		X													
Kearney, W. Sean; Valadez, Albert; and Garcia, Larry (2018)		X		X													
Kouzes (1995)			X														
Kucala (2017)		X	X														
Labby, S., Lunenberg, F. C., & Slate, J. R. (2012).		X	X	X													
Land, D. (2002)									X								

Source	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Lambert, D., Gale, J. A., & Hartley, D. (2008)					X											
Leithwood, K. (1994)				X			X									
Levin, S., & Bradley, K. (2019)						X										
Lombard, M., Snyder-Dutch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2004)															X	
Louis, K. S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2011)			X				X									
Mathew, M., & Gupta, K.S. (2015)		X	X	X												
Mathis, W. (2019)									X							
Maxwell (1993)			X													
Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2016)		X														
Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1990)		X														
Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997)		X														

Reference																	
Knudson, A., Meit, M., & Popat, S. (2014)				X													
Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016)															X		
McClellan, J. A., & Conti, G. J. (2008)										X							
McColl-Kennedy, J. R., & Anderson, R. D. (2002)	X	X											X				
McCormick, Christine (2016)		X	X	X			X										
Moore B (2009)	X	X	X														
Munro, I. (2021)	X																
National Center for Education Statistics. (2023)				X													
U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2022)				X													
Patten, M. L. (2012)															X		
Patton, M. Q. (2015)															X		

Reference													
Piazza, P. (2014)		X											
Prater, D.L., Bermudez, A.B., & Owens, E. (1997)				X									
Presbitero, A. (2019)		X								X			
Preston, J. P., Jakubiec, B. A., & Kooymans, R. (2013)		X	X	X		X							
Riggio, R. E., Murphy, S. E., & Pirozzolo, F. J. (2002)		X							X				
Roberts, C.M. (2010)													X
Romanelli, F., Cain, J., & Smith, K.M. (2006)	X												
Rousmaniere, Kate (2013).							X						
Rural Health Information Hub. (n.d.)				X									
Salovey, P., & Grewal, D. (2005)	X												
Salovey, P., & Mayer, J.D. (1990)	X												

Reference															
Sanders, A. (2022)				X											
School Leaders Network. (2014)					X										
Schul, J. E. (2019)			X				X								
Segal, J., Smith, M., Robinson, L., & Shubin, J. (2021)	X														
Smith, D.D., & Grandey, A. (2022)	X	X													
Spillane J.P., Diamond J.B., Burch P., Hallett T., Jita L., & Zoltners J. (2002)						X	X								
Spotlight, F. (2016)	X														
Stake, R.E. (2005)													X		
Stanford, L. (2023)															X
Sternberg, R. J. (1985)									X						
Sternberg, R. J., & Li, A. S. (2020)	X									X					

Stevenson, Vera L. (1995)					X			X	X								
Stogdill RM. (1950)			X														
Stosich, E.L. (2018)								X									
Strickland-Cohen, M. K., McIntosh, K., & Horner, R. H. (2014)			X		X												
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration				X													
Substance use and misuse in rural areas (n.d.)				X													
Tait, B. (2020)	X																
Taylor, D., Tashakkori, A. & Crone-Koshel, L. (2001)			X			X											
Tenenbaum, S. (2010)			X														
Tesar, M. (2021)									X								
Thorndike, R. L., & Stein, S. (1937)	X																
Trimis, E. (2021)		X	X						X								

150

Turner, D. A. (2020)		X	X													
Usher, B. (2017)		X														
Vann, V., Sparks, B., & Baker C. (2017)		X	X													
Vincent, J. M. (2018).				X												
Wallace Foundation. (2013)			X	X												
Wang, F., & Pollock, K. (2020)				X			X									
Widjaya, I. (2014)			X													
Woodward, I.C., & Shaffakat, S. (2014			X													
Wolf, T. (2010).		X	X										X			
Zhou, J., & George, J. M. (2003)		X	X										X			

Participation Request Letter

RESEARCH STUDY INVITATION LETTER

FOR EXEMPLARY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN RURAL

PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN CALIFORNIA AND UMASS GLOBAL

Date

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a multi-case research study about exemplary elementary school Principals' use of Emotional Intelligence as they lead their organizations in rural areas. The main investigator of this study is William Cook, a Doctoral Candidate in UMass Global's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you were identified as an elementary school principal serving in a current California public school for three or more years in the same school district in a rural area. Additionally, you met the criteria of having demonstrated personal skills of EI, being a present member of the ACSA professional association, published articles and papers, or presented at conferences and/or have been recognized by a peer or peer group in the same position or superior as exemplary principals.

A total of 5 current principals serving in rural California will be enrolled in this study. Participation should require one hour of your time and is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to describe the emotional intelligence strategies that exemplary elementary principals in rural areas use as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management). Additionally, a secondary purpose of the study was for exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics to explain how their use of emotional intelligence strategies supported their success and tenure as they responded to leadership challenges in their school organizations.

PROCEDURES: Should you decide to participate in this research study, you agree to partake in a virtual interview scheduled at the participants convenience. The virtual interview link will be provided through email The interview will take approximately one hour and will be recorded. In the course of the interview, a series of questions will be asked that are designed to share experiences you've had as a principal in a rural demographic in California about how you manage your emotional intelligence as you respond to leadership challenges in your school organization

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: Minimal to no significant risks or discomforts are associated with this research. It may be inconvenient to schedule time to answer the interview questions, but every effort to accommodate your schedule will take place. Additionally, interviews will be scheduled enough time in advance to avoid any scheduling conflicts. Lastly, interview questions may cause discomfort as you reflect on challenging experiences in the context of emotional intelligence in leadership.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no significant benefits to you for participation, but the study's potential could impact the profession. The information from this study is intended to inform educational leaders, researchers, policymakers, and educators of the perceptions of emotional intelligence and its effects and impacts on principals' leadership in rural areas.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and your responses will not contain any identifying link in the study. Identifying you as the person who provided any specific information for the study will not be possible.

You are encouraged to ask any questions at any time to help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me by e-mail at xxxxx@umassglobal.edu. Also, you may contact Dr. Tim McCarty, Dissertation Chairperson, at xxxxx@umassglobal.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Respectfully,

William Cook
Principal Investigator

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: Exemplary Elementary School Principals' Use of
Emotional Intelligence as They Lead Their Organizations in Rural Areas

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: William Cook, Doctoral Candidate

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to
describe the emotional intelligence strategies that exemplary elementary principals in
rural areas use as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations
based on Goleman's (2006) four domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-
management, social awareness, and relationship management). A secondary purpose of
the study was for exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics to explain how
they navigate leadership challenges in their school organizations.

This study will fill the gap in the research regarding the impact and application of
emotional intelligence strategies used by principals in rural areas as they respond to
leadership challenges in their school organizations.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an individual interview. The
interview will last approximately one hour and will be conducted electronically using the
Google virtual meeting platform.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks or discomforts associated with participating in this research.
Interview sessions will be held via Zoom to accommodate the distance between
participants. Some interview questions may cause me to reflect on challenges that are
unique to my lived experience and sharing difficult experiences in an interview
setting may cause minor discomfort.

b) The possible benefit of this study is that my input may help add to the research
regarding coaching programs and the impact coaching programs have on developing
future school leaders. The findings will be available to me after the study and will
provide new insights about the coaching experience in which I participated. I understand
that I will not be compensated for my participation.

c) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted, and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study, all recordings will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact William Cook, xxxxx@umassglobal.edu or by phone at xxxxxxxxxx or Dr. Tim McCarty (Dissertation Chair) at xxxxxxx@umassglobal.edu.

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study and withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) No information identifying me will be released without my separate consent, and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be informed, and my consent will be re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

UMass Global IRB January 2024

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol and Questions

Hello, I am William Cook, a doctoral candidate in organizational leadership at UMass Global.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your answers will help fellow principal candidates in rural areas to be more effective in their roles.

I am researching how exemplary elementary principals in rural areas use emotional intelligence strategies to respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's four domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management).   In addition, how their use of emotional intelligence strategies supports the success and tenure as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations. Finally, how do you create a positive work environment and a healthy culture and successfully lead your organization?

I am conducting five interviews with principals like yourself. The information you provide and historical and archival data will hopefully give a clear picture of how exemplary elementary principals in rural areas use emotional intelligence strategies to respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations and add to the currently available body of research.

I will be reading most of what I say. This is to guarantee that my interviews with all participating exemplary principals will be conducted in the most similar manner possible.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

I want to remind you that any information obtained concerning this study will remain confidential. All data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or institution(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail to check that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

You received the Informed Consent and UMass Global Bill of Rights in an email and responded with your approval to participate in the interview. Before we start, do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. I may skip a particular question or stop the interview at any point during the interview. However, I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent to ease our discussion and accuracy.

Before this interview, you received information concerning the purpose of the research, a copy of the interview questions, UMass Global's Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Informed Consent form. After reviewing the protocols, you were offered an opportunity to ask questions concerning the research and the consent process. At that time, you provided verbal consent to participate in the interview. To verify your consent, would you again provide a verbal yes as to your consent that will be included in the recording of this interview? Thank you.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Okay, let us get started, and thank you again for your time.

Here is a list of the four major emotional intelligence (EI) domains that research suggests are necessary for an exemplary leader.

List of Major EI Domains

SELF-AWARENESS: The leader has the ability to recognize and understand personal moods and drives, as well as their effect on others. The ability to monitor one's emotional state and to correctly identify and name one's emotions.

SELF-MANAGEMENT: The leader has the ability to manage one's actions, thoughts, and feelings in flexible ways to get the desired results. Optimal self-management contributes to a sense of self-efficacy or confidence and a sense of connectedness to others.

SOCIAL AWARENESS: The leader has the ability to accurately notice the emotions of others and "read" situations appropriately. It is about sensing what other people are thinking and feeling to take their perspective using your capacity for empathy.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: The leader has the ability to take one's own emotions, the emotions of others, and the context to manage social interactions successfully. The leader can listen and influence those around us to make good decisions. Relationship management can also involve working with collaboration and teamwork.

Interview Questions

Self-Awareness

1. Please describe, how do you manage your self-awareness as you respond to leadership challenges in your school organization?

2. Can you please share some situations where this domain of self-awareness was used that you recall for yourself to lead your organization?

Self-Management

3. Please describe, how do you manage your self-management as you respond to leadership challenges in your school organization?

4. Can you please share some situations where this domain of self-management was used that you recall for yourself to lead your organization?

Social Awareness

5. Please describe, how do you manage your social awareness as you respond to leadership challenges in your school organization?

6. Can you please share some situations where this domain of social awareness was used that you recall for yourself to lead your organization?

Relationship Management

7. Please describe, how do you manage your relationship management as you respond to leadership challenges in your school organization?

8. Can you please share some situations where this relationship management domain was used that you recall for yourself to lead your organization?

Overarching Emotional Intelligence Question

9. Of all the things we have spoken about today – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. As you reflect on our interview about how you manage your emotional intelligence to respond to leadership challenges in your school organization, what part(s) of your emotional intelligence have contributed most to your success and tenure as a principal in a rural area?

Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of my research

are known, I will send you a copy of my findings.

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

UMASS GLOBAL
A nonprofit affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

UMASS GLOBAL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

UMass Global IRB   Adopted   2021

CITI Clearance "Protecting Human Research Participants" Course

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 17-May-2022
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 48965072

This is to certify that:

William Cook

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?weada278a-3ef6-46e1-b1af-f8e5c5d56fa8-48965072

APPENDIX G

Audio Recording Release & Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: Exemplary Elementary School Principals' Use of

Emotional Intelligence as They Lead Their Organizations in Rural Areas

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: William Cook, Doctoral Candidate

RELEASE: I understand that as part of this study, I am participating in an interview

which will be audio recorded as a digital file, per the granting of my permission.

I do not have to agree to have the interview audio recorded. In the event that I do agree

to have myself audio recorded, the sole purpose will be to support data collection as part

of this study.

The digital audio recording will only be used for this research. Only the researcher and

the professional transcriptionist will have access to the audio file. The digital audio file

will be destroyed after three years. The written transcription of the audio file will be

stored in a locked file drawer and destroyed three years following completion of this

study.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any

time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any

time. I also understand that no information identifying me will be released without my

separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits

allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed I will be

informed and my consent obtained.

I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the

informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor

Academic Affairs, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618

Telephone (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill

of Rights.

CONSENT: I hereby give my permission to William Cook to use audio-recorded

material taken of me during the interview. As with all research consent, I may withdraw

permission for the audio recording of me to be used in this research study.

Signature of Participant: _____Date: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Alignment Table

Research Study Title

Exemplary Elementary School Principals' Use of Emotional Intelligence as They Lead

Their Organizations in Rural Areas

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to describe the emotional

intelligence strategies that exemplary elementary principals in rural areas use as they

respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on Goleman's (2006)

four domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social

awareness, and relationship management). A secondary purpose of the study was for

exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics to explain how their use of

emotional intelligence strategies supported their success and tenure as they responded to

leadership challenges in their school organizations.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

The central research question for this study asked, "How do exemplary

elementary principals in rural school districts describe their use of emotional intelligent

strategies as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations based on

Goleman's (2006) four domains of EI: self-awareness, self-management, social

awareness, and relationship management?"

Research Subquestions

1. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of self-awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

2. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of self-management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

3. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of social awareness as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

4. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of the emotional intelligent strategy of relationship management as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

5. How do exemplary elementary principals in rural demographics describe their use of emotional intelligent strategies to support their success and tenure as they respond to leadership challenges in their school organizations?

Research Questions	Survey Item	Analytical Technique
Research Question 1	1. abridged Job in General Scale (aJIG) . a. People on your present job. b. Job in general. c. Work on present job. d. Opportunities for promotion. e. Supervision	Data tabulated, median scores measured and analyzed, then charted and graphed. Descriptive statistics: mean, medium, mode. Information presented in tables, charts, and figures.

Research Question 2	1a. Demographic form: data input into Microsoft word.	Simple descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, and Spearman rank-order correlations displayed in tabular form.
Research Question 3	2. abridged Job in General Scale (aJIG) a. People on our present job. b. Job in general. c. Work on present job. d. Opportunities for promotion. e. Supervision	Data tabulated, median scores measured and analyzed, then charted and graphed. Descriptive statistics: mean, medium, mode. Information presented in tables, charts, and figures.
Research Question 4	2a. Demographic form: data input into Microsoft word.	Simple descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, and Spearman rank-order correlations) displayed in tabular form.

APPENDIX I

Field Test Interviewee Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview, the interviewer should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview, ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation. Either script or record their feedback so you can compare it with the other two team members to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities

   to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok? Was the pace okay?

3. Were the questions by and large clear, or were there places where you were

   uncertain what was being asked?

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that

   were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview… (I'm pretty new at

   this)?

APPENDIX J

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions for Both the Interviewer and the Observer

Conducting interviews is a learned skill and research experience. Gaining valuable insight into your interview skills and the effect of the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. Complete the form independently from each other, then discuss your responses. Sharing your thoughts will provide valuable insight into improving the interview process.

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate? Did the respondents have ample opportunities to respond to questions?

2. Were the questions clear or were there places where the interviewees were unclear?

3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing to the interviewees?

4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous? For the observer: How did the interviewer appear during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?

5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? For the observer: From your observation, did the interviewer appear prepared to conduct the interview?

6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly, and why do you think that was the case?

7. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle, and why do you think that was the case?

8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?

9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

10. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?

11. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?