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Considering Emotional Intelligence as a Leadership Competency for Lesotho Secondary School Principals

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Abstract: As an educationist over the years, I have experienced principals' outburst and their tendency to make a scene out of seemingly minor issues that could have been addressed with little modesty. This behaviour has led to an uproar amongst parents, teachers and learners about the school principals' insensitiveness which is attributed to lack of emotional intelligence (EI) competency. The study is underpinned by the transformational leadership theory which aims at pioneering change of attitude in school leadership so that different educational actors could be influenced to achieve the school and overall educational objectives. This qualitative study generated data from five (5) conveniently selected secondary school principals, five (5) parents and five (5) teachers using semi-structured interviews. Using thematic analysis method, the study revealed that principals with EI are able to enhance school performance and satisfy parents. Thus, the study revealed that EI is useful in establishing and maintaining good relationships with different school stakeholders. It is fundamental in managing conflicts in schools and facilitates constructive management of any stressful situations. The study further revealed that principals could acquire this skill through self-enrichment and induction initiatives by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). It is recommended that before principals are appointed, they should be subjected to multiple aptitude tests to evaluate their knowledge and competencies. Furthermore MoET through its experts should continually induct principals on EI aspects.

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence, leadership competency, schools principals.*

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Introduction

Lesotho school principals are entrusted by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to lead schools on its behalf. In Lesotho, school principals are executive officers and are expected to champion effective teaching and learning activities among others (Education Act, 2010). Since leadership is understood as a practice that is geared towards influencing others to achieve a shared school vision, schools need leaders who have a wide range of competencies to facilitate school efficacy (Ayiro, 2014). These include among others the ability to plan, communicate effectively, delegate responsibilities, and discipline both teachers and learners (Francis & Oluwatiyin, 2019; Mustamin & Yasin, 2012; Piaw et al., 2014; Victor, 2017). It is further argued that principals should undoubtedly be sensitive while interacting with different school stakeholders. As a consequence, scholars have recognised emotional intelligence (EI) as the decisive ingredient needed by school leaders for effective headship (Gómez-Leal et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2007). Since school success is dependent on the principal, without EI schools are likely not to achieve their goals (Chen & Guo, 2020). For that reason, the general aim of this paper is to investigate in-depth the significance of EI competency in heading Lesotho schools and how principals' EI proficiency could be enhanced.

Research Background

In Lesotho, the vacancy for the position of a principal is advertised in the MoET circular and the aspiring teachers are invited to apply. After screening the applications, the shortlisted candidates are invited for the interview and the school board makes a recommendation to the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) which appoints (Sepiriti, 2021). TSC only appoints secondary school principals on the basis of having a university or college teaching certificate and five (5) or more teaching experience. Despite MoET having decentralised its powers to district offices to provide schools with

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various support, the school principal is at the helm of school administration while the school board is responsible for entire school governance (Tlali & Matete, 2020).

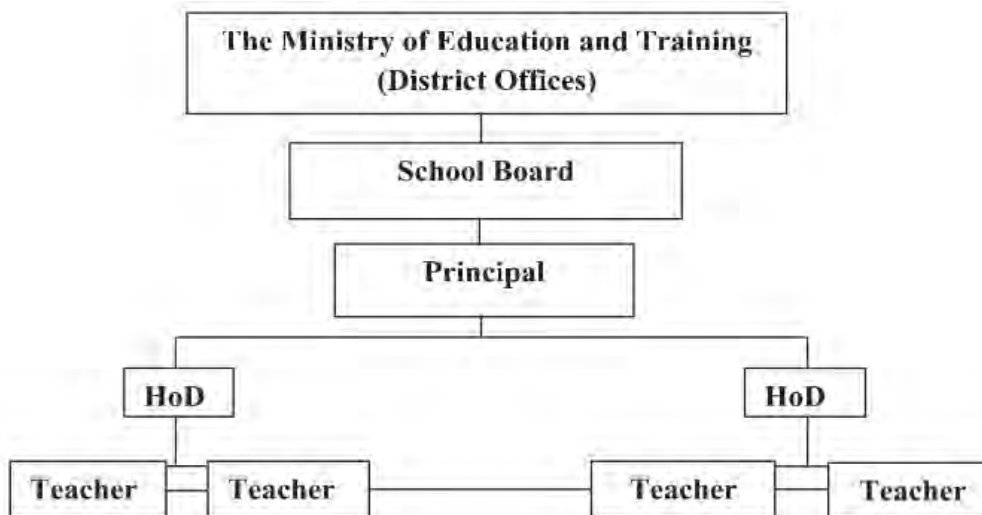


Figure 1. Lesotho School Management Organogram (Tlali & Matete, 2020)

As illustrated in Figure 1, the school principal is second in command after the school board. By virtue of their position, they are in charge of the entire school curricular and extra mural activities. Due to varied activities and mounting pressure from stakeholders, principals are often strained to perform as anticipated (Sepiriti, 2021). As a consequence, to perform as proposed they should have EI competency to execute the schools mandate adequately. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of one's and others emotions is paramount for successful school leadership (Brinia et al., 2014). While it appears that there is a dearth of research on EI issues and school effectiveness in Lesotho which suggests a research gap, the same cannot be said in other contexts. The issues of EI and school effectiveness have ignited an academic marathon whereby scholars sought to identify the exact significance of EI in school leadership. Hence a number of studies conducted on EI subject and how it relates to expected principals' performance. For instance, there are studies conducted in Greece, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Zambia aimed at investigating the role of the principal's EI on effective school leadership (Brinia et al., 2014; Kareem & Kin, 2019; Liman et al., 2019; Mushibwe et al., 2020). These cited studies concluded that among other essential competencies, EI is indispensable for effective school leadership and it should be displayed daily.

The views presented in the foregoing paragraph and personal experiences have spurred this investigation of the significance of EI towards effective leadership in Lesotho secondary schools and how principals' EI competencies could be enhanced. Having been a secondary school teacher for over a decade, I have seen principals' turmoil and a tendency to make a scene out of seemingly trivial issues that could have been managed with little modesty. This behaviour has led to the deafening outcry amongst parents, teachers and learners about the school principals' insensitiveness. With the above in perspective, the current study attempts to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

The current study is anchored by the following research questions:

- Why is EI one of the core skills Lesotho secondary school principals should possess?
- What strategies can be used to enhance EI in Lesotho secondary school principals?

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence as a Concept

EI is conceptualised as the principal's ability to recognise and understand his or her own emotions and appreciate those of the subordinates and other relevant school stakeholders (Brinia et al., 2014; Issah, 2018; Perez et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2007; Ugoani et al., 2015). School leaders who have developed EI competence are able to use their emotions to understand and appreciate their feelings and those of others by expressing and adopting their opinions and actions with thoughtfulness (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2018). EI was first heard of in 1920 when it first appeared in Thorndikes' social intelligence work, and later in 1983 from Howard Gardner (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2018). In 1986 it appeared further in the works of Wayne Payne (Mařin et al., 2019). Nonetheless, EI was popularised by Goleman in 1995 (Brinia et al., 2014; Dhani & Sharma, 2016; Drigas & Papoutsis, 2018). Goleman came up with four EI competency constructs which are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social (relationship) management, (Boda, 2016; Dhani & Sharma, 2016; Ugoani et al., 2015).

Social awareness marks the very first step towards developing EI competency (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2018). It is about the principal's ability to have a thorough understanding of their emotions, strengths, limitations, and desires (Goleman, 2011; Sharma & Shrawat, 2014). Often principals who have high degrees of self-awareness appreciate their strengths and weaknesses, hence encourage and welcome productive criticisms (Bower et al., 2018; Perez et al., 2016). The self-awareness component enables principals to be emotionally sensible to others (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2018) as a result, school overall effectiveness may be enhanced (Goleman, 2011). Despite principals on daily basis being confronted with challenging situations that may require rapid response, it is however expressed in this study that school principals should not be impetuous; rather they should be rational and attentive before reacting (Goleman, 2011).

The second EI competency is self-management which is concerned with the principal's ability to manage their emotions while interacting with different groups of people (Farahbakhsh, 2012; Perez et al., 2016). According to Goleman (2011), self-management frees principals from being prisoners of their own emotions by making them aware of their own feelings. It enables the ability to control and manage rage, which often leads to production and elaboration of negative school climate that discourages innovative teaching and learning. The self-management construct enables principals to control their impulse that may be triggered by ever present challenging tasks and demands. Self-management does not only help the principal to be less critical and reactive but also to be more civil (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2018). Self-management enables a school principal to refine their ability to respond to different situations, and therefore become better leaders.

The third competency is social awareness. It is concerned with the principal's ability to understand non-verbal clues from the subordinates and to act appropriately given the situations (Fubara, 2020). This EI construct is anchored on the empathy concept. It is believed that for school principals to be socially aware, they should understand others and take interest in their issues (Masrek et al., 2015). However, Goleman (2011) cautions that being compassionate does not mean attempting to please everyone, rather being considerate and informed by all relevant factors before making decisions that may have a bearing on others' emotional being. Being socially aware, a principal will be able to render support where it is needed most; especially on core school activities and other assigned tasks. This competency suggests that school principals should be friendly with all subordinates, teachers in particular, for effective attainment of stated goals and objectives (Bower et al., 2018).

The last competency is relationship management or social skills. This component is not only about the principal being friendly, but also being work-oriented (Goleman, 2011). Principals who are socially competent encourage and support team work. As a result, this competency enables principals to establish and maintain relationships with different relevant sectors and stakeholders. Thus, relationship management is not only about the principals' ability to negotiate and solve disagreements in schools and create a win-win environment, rather it informs how the principals communicate with all relevant schools stakeholders (Perez et al., 2016). If a school principal cannot successfully manage their emotions and lacks empathy, there is likelihood that they would not be effective in establishing and maintaining useful relationships (Badea & Pană, 2010). This last component alludes to the principal's talent to foster sustainable relationships needed for overall school effectiveness.

It is presented that for schools to be led successfully there is need for a variety of competencies including EI (Hamidi & Azizi, 2012). Principals' position is characterised by numerous responsibilities and challenges. Various stakeholders have varied expectations on how schools should be led. The pressure is further exacerbated by the ever changing education landscape (Issah, 2018; Kin & Kareem, 2020). For example, Lesotho's education has just experienced a major refurbishment since independence from Britain in 1966 (Dungey & Ansell, 2020; Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). Since schools need to change with the environment, principals find themselves under enormous duress to influence potent teaching and learning experiences for attainment of educational goals. Literature as a result suggests that, emotionally competent principals find it effortless to handle stressful situations that are continuously emerging (Ashworth, 2013; Madondo, 2014) since they can effectively manage change (Hamidi & Azizi, 2012). Principals should demonstrate the following aptitudes as reported in a study conducted in Malaysia: the ability to avert, trim down, amplify or even alter an emotional response not only on themselves but to others at all times so that the school objective could easily be accomplished (Kareem & Kin, 2019). The preceding as a consequence implies that there is a correlation between emotionally intelligent school principals and the overall school performance.

Principals with high levels of EI are able develop comprehensive school vision, goals and objectives. Emotionally intelligent principals do not struggle to inspire their followers to commit to the developed vision (Ugoani, 2016). This is possible because they do not surrender when confronted with resistance (Issah, 2018). Thus, it becomes less problematic for them to rejuvenate subordinates to work towards attaining the milestones set. The above argument is upheld by Hamidi and Azizi (2012) who hint that principals' EI has a positive effect on how schools are managed and led. It is further suggested that an emotionally intelligent principal is able to instil trust, honesty and teamwork throughout the school (Maulod et al., 2017; Ugoani, 2016). This could result in schools being successfully transformed into learning organisations. Learning organisations provide an uninterrupted environment where teachers in particular learn from one another (Dawood et al., 2015). This suggests that principals with less or no EI struggle not only to come up with the school vision and goals, but also to forge sustainable teams in their schools.

Moreover, since literature suggests that EI is increasingly connected to school efficiency (Arfara & Samanta, 2016), it is important that school principals use it. The above is suggested despite scholars not agreeing whether EI is inborn or learned competency (Behera, 2016; Kannaiah & Shanathi, 2015; Kumari, 2022). Without taking sides on these debates, it is argued in this study that like any other competency school principals need, EI competency, could be acquired and enhanced. EI competency could be enhanced to achieve desired performance (Kumari, 2022). Some scholars presented that for school principals to acquire this competency, they should undergo training which will equip them with necessary attitudes for effective school leadership (Hamidi & Azizi, 2012; Kareem & Kin, 2019; Singh et al., 2007). Issah (2018) further hints that school leaders need to be developed on EI issues to adequately confront the ever-changing school environment.

Theoretical framework: Transformational Leadership

This study is underpinned by Transformational Leadership (TL) theory which is aimed at pioneering change in the school principal's attitude which will impact how other actors perform their duties (Armugam et al., 2021; Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). TL is based on the premise that school leaders play a key role in continually promoting and responding to the contemporary challenges facing school efficacy (Berkovich, 2016). Since the study of school leadership is concerned with how principals influence different stakeholders in particular parents, teacher and learners to work towards achieving varied educational goals (Lee, 2014), the subject of EI cannot be overlooked in Lesotho context given the educational expectations and those of the pressure groups that normally causes gush of emotions on the principal's side. The question of how school principals interact with different actors (teachers, parents and learners included) in schools is vital because it has a bearing on whether or not the school is able to achieve its overall aspirations. Consequently, the school principals should improve the quality of work environment and strengthen equal participation of all school stakeholders (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). With the above in context, TL theory is relevant to this study because it emphasises that through EI competency, a principal can change the overall school culture, beliefs and attitudes by setting targets for desirable school performance (Al Jabri et al., 2021). Thus, the actions of transformational school leaders enables all school stakeholders to continually improve their performance in an erratic environment that normally causes upsurge of emotions (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016).

TL theory enables school principals to effectively lead schools through the following four dimensions: idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and individual considerations. Idealised influence is understood as the actual actions of the principal that compels teachers, parents and learners to follow them (Al Jabri et al., 2021). Intellectual stimulation refers to the principal's ability to inspire mainly teachers and learners to be innovative and critical thinkers while interacting with the planned content. According to Savovic (2017) inspirational motivation refers to the principal's ability to clearly share the school vision with all relevant players. An individualised consideration is the principal's ability to deal with specific challenges of each teacher, parent and learner (Al Jabri et al., 2021; Savovic, 2017). The above mentioned attributes enable a school principal to effectively provide actors with a clear school vision. To be able to achieve that, principals should demonstrate high levels of EI which will help them to not only understand the emotions and feelings of those following but also to manage them effectively. The above therefore accounts for the appropriateness of this theory to the current study.

Methodology

Research Design

The study departed from interpretivist paradigm and adopted a qualitative research approach. Interpretivist paradigm enabled the unpacking of participants' opinions in order to understand the significance of EI as a core competency which Lesotho secondary school principals should have (Hussain et al., 2013; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Given that it generally attempts to make meaning from the participating principals' responses in their natural environment (Addae & Quan-Baffour, 2015; Okesina, 2020; Pulla & Cater, 2018), it perfectly aligned with the aim of this study since it sought to gain in-depth understanding of the consequence of EI competency on effective school leadership.

The qualitative approach was chosen in this study because firstly, it enabled closer interaction between the researcher and the participants. This made it possible to gain first-hand information regarding their take on the significance of EI competency while leading Lesotho secondary schools and how this competency could be enhanced for effective school leadership (Coy, 2019). Secondly, since there was no evidence of any research inquiry in Lesotho covering issues of EI and school principals' effectiveness, qualitative inquiry happens to be the most suitable approach when little is known about the subject in question (Coy, 2019; Haven & Van Grootel, 2019).

Participant's Selection and Data Collection

The study was conducted in Maseru district, the capital of Lesotho. The choice of Maseru was based on the fact that it has a larger share of secondary schools compared to other districts, and is also the place where the researcher resides. Five (5) principals, five (5) parents and five (5) teachers were conveniently selected and telephonically invited to take part in the study. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews due to their flexible nature. They allow

follow-up and probing questions to be asked in order to gain further clarification when and if it is needed (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The interviews were recorded and were later transcribed.

Ethical Considerations

To observe the ethical issues, consent was obtained from the participants after being informed about the study and their rights (Cohen et al., 2018). For anonymity and confidentiality purposes, the participants were allocated pseudo-codes with a view to disguise their identity (Maree, 2016). The following pseudonyms were allocated to participating principals, teachers and parents.

Table 1. Principal's Biography

Pseudonym	Gender	Headship Experience (years)
Khotso	M	6
Pula	F	10
Lehloa	F	7
Sefako	M	12
Phoka	F	19

Table 2. Teacher's Biography

Pseudonym	Gender	Teaching Experience (years)
Patsi	M	14
Mollo	M	9
Sefate	F	12
Lekala	F	5
Mothapo	M	16

Table 3. Parent's Biography

Pseudonym	Gender
Metsi	F
Lehola	M
Thupa	F
Joang	F
Phuleng	M

Data Analysis

The study aimed at investigating in-depth the significance of EI competency to Lesotho secondary school principals and how its acquisition could improve their skills. Thematic analysis was used to identify major themes and sub-themes from data generated. Thematic analysis approach consists of systematic coding process, through which patterns in the data are identified and meaning is constructed (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Ozuem, et al., 2021). Since themes emerging from the data represents the authors interpretations (Byrne, 2022; Finlay, 2021), the themes and subsequent sub-themes were named after the participating principals have checked the transcribed interviews to verify the raw data to correct any factual errors. Even though there are other suggested thematic analysis steps as demonstrated by Vaismoradi et al., (2016), this study adopted Braun & Clarke's six-layered data analysis framework (Clarke Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some of the direct quotes from the data itself are included to emphasise the participant's reactions and to further enhance legitimacy of the findings and interpretations (Eldh et al., 2020).

Findings

The findings indicated the core substances of EI as a competence in school leadership and the strategies that could be incorporated to enhance school principal's EI competence. Against this background, the findings are categorised into the following broad themes and related sub-themes:

Table 4. Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
The significance of EI	Good relationships
	Management of conflicts
	Ability to manage stressful situations
Enhancement of EI	Self-enrichment
	MOET intervention

Theme 1. The Significance of EI

Sub theme 1.1: Good Relationships

Participants revealed that EI is one of the core competencies school principals should have because it enables them to establish and maintain good working relationships with all relevant stakeholders in Lesotho education. The participants argued as follows:

EI is significant in that it helps me to effectively interact and communicate mainly with parents, teachers and learners (Khotso).

It helps in maintaining good working relationships, especially while dealing with the teachers, parents and learners who have diverse needs and expectations. However, I need to emphasise that having this ability does not mean that the principal has to tolerate ill-discipline and teacher's laziness (Pula).

Teachers have their own expectations, parents and learners as well. These expectations should be managed and the best way to manage them is through EI. If a principal does not have EI, these stakeholders will overpower the principal and the school will be turned into anarchy (Lehloa).

EI is an important competency that we principals have to acquire and use. This is because if a principal has EI, he or she will be able to manage group dynamics and that will lead to a creation of friendly environment where teachers and learners can show case their talents (Sefako).

As principals we lead many people whom have diverse opinions and attitudes. These individuals should be managed so that the core business of the school could be achieved. The ability of the principal to satisfactory manage individuals, means that everyone will play his or her part and the school will be able to achieve its core aim (Phoka).

I think EI is helpful because even when the principal and parents clash, a principal should not take revenge. He/she should be modest to separate issues (Patsi).

Emotional intelligence is an important skill for any one in leadership position. In school context, a principal who has EI will not take offence when teachers do not agree with what is been suggested or implemented (Mollo).

We have a problem of principals who feel threatened by teachers who are critical and take initiatives. High EI competence will help the principal to create an environment where teachers can freely contribute ideas (Sefate).

Emotionally intelligent school leader will not feel challenged when teachers take charge or initiate things (Lekala).

I think school principals should have this skill because without it, he/she cannot relate well with teachers and parents. So like I said it is important in establishing good relationships (Metsi).

Emotional intelligence is that skill, which is important because one can relate well with anyone at anytime (Thupa).

As parents we have many and sometimes contradicting expectations, so it is my opinion that principals should be able to manage our diverse outlook without necessarily causing scene. Principals while demonstrating high levels of EI, they however need to be watchful that some people do not take any advantage of them (Joang).

It is important that principals have this skill because as principal interacts with different angry parents, emotions could be high and one's ability to control them is important (Phuleng).

The findings suggest that good working relationships between different actors are important for school efficacy. The school principal's EI competency is deemed as a tool that enables emergence and maintenance of good relationships. Good working relationships implies that stakeholders will be able to freely make contributions to important issues that either directly or indirectly affect teaching and learning activities.

Sub Theme 1.2: Reduction of Conflicts

Schools are social institutions that are not immune to conflicts. However conflicts may be good for the growth of the school, but if not well – managed by principals, it may spell havoc. As a result, participants revealed in this study that EI competence helps in effectively managing the conflicts in the schools. They articulated as follows:

I think it is important for the school principal to have this skill because I think conflicts will be reduced since everyone will be happy (Pula).

Schools consist of many individuals whom have different understanding. Normally their diverse outlooks or expectations cause conflicts. As the principal, I have to be able to manage conflicts that are inevitable in schools (Lehloa).

As teachers, we have different groups and principals should not affiliate themselves with any group because in doing so, they deny themselves an oversight power. Thus, they would not be able to take control and make things happen (Sefate).

An emotionally intelligent principal will not use divide and rule principle. Most principals who lack self-esteem and EI normally use some teachers against others (Lekala).

Emotionally intelligent principal will not rush to punish teachers or learners if they misbehave. He or she will seek to understand the cause of the behaviour and take informed corrective decisions. This way, those who have to be reprimanded will not feel discriminated or not being liked (Mothapo).

As parents, we do not normally understand how schools are run. Some of the decisions made by the principal may not sit well with us and that could spark misunderstandings that may eventually cause conflicts. If the school principal has EI, he or she instead of shouting at us, he or she will sit us down and explain what really transpired (Lehola).

It can be noted from the above findings that schools are made up of many individuals that have different expectations. If their expectations or those of their affiliations are not met, they may retaliate. Consequently it is revealed that school principals need EI competency not only to manage individuals and groups' expectations but to also adequately manage any conflict that may arise from unfulfilled expectations.

Sub Theme 1.3: Ability to Manage Stressful Situations

Participants cited that EI enables the secondary school principals to effectively deal with stressful scenarios. In the view of the above, they presented:

Sometimes I hate being a principal. On several occasions we are confronted with difficult scenarios from parents and teachers with their unrealistic expectations especially when relating to use of school funds. We are perceived as thieves by most parents and teachers. They say we are embezzling school funds. As principal one cannot buy clothes or motor vehicle because it would be perceived as having used school funds to acquire them. Therefore, as principals we have to have EI to manage stresses like this (Khotso).

It is my understanding that school principals need to have this skill because on daily basis, we meet stressful situations that requires one to be calm at all times. And I must admit that since I read about it, I am more understanding and considerate to teachers, parents and learners (Lehloa).

I know that emotional intelligence is the ability to understand ones emotions and those of others. I am telling you that to be a successful school principal; one needs this skill because there are a lot of people from different backgrounds that one interacts with and each and everyone needs to be appreciated for their uniqueness. It really helps in dealing with stressful situations (Sefako).

I want to be honest with you, teachers and parents are never satisfied. They always think we could have done more and that is stressful. These expectations causes pressure especially when we are not paid well and school fees paid is never enough to finance all activities (Patsi).

The findings reveal that EI enables the school principals to effectively deal with stressful scenarios that are inevitable especially when the resources are scarce. For that reason, given the findings, it is important to note that principals with less EI may not be able to deal with stressful situations; rather they are likely to worsen the matter instead of calming it down.

Theme 2: Enhancement of Principal's Proficiency

The last research question aimed at establishing how EI competency could be enhanced. The findings revealed that school principals' EI skills should be sharpened so that they could be more efficient while interacting with parents, teachers and learners.

Sub Theme 2.1: Self-Enrichment Strategies

Participants argued that secondary school principals could on their own acquire EI competencies. They asserted that EI competency could be attained and enhanced through various self-enrichment initiatives ranging from reading, enrolling with institutions of higher learning and being submissive. Thus, in their words for example they argued that:

So I think principals could easily acquire this important knowledge from reading books, there is no need for any workshops (Lehloa).

I think it is up to us to see to it that we are competent. We should enrol with institutions of higher learning to further our understanding of effective leadership (Pula).

Principals know exactly what is right and wrong. They need to introspect themselves because most of them believe they are untouchable. Being a principal is not a right to disrespect and not listen to inputs especially from teachers whom are expected to support them (Mollo).

Principals should understand that they are servants. They serve learners, teachers, parents and the entire country. While it is important that they should be inducted, they have to be humane and accommodating. It is an inborn skill but they often choose otherwise (Lehola).

Sub Theme 2.2: MOET Intervention

Other participants articulated that it is MOET's responsibility to ensure that the principals' EI competencies are enhanced. In verbatim they argued that, MOET has to organise workshops for principals aiming at enhancing their skills. Thus:

For me, this is one skill that is often overlooked by my fellow principals and the Ministry of Education and Training because I have never heard it being emphasised. Principals skills therefore needs to enhance by workshops (Khotso).

The Ministry with its experts can train us on how to effectively use emotional intelligence (Pula).

I think the Inspectorate Office could institute training workshops (Phoka).

It is an important skill for principals to have and as a result it is important that the Ministry of Education and Training sees to it that this inborn competency is enhanced for the betterment of the schools (Sefate).

I think Ministry of Education and Training and other relevant organisations should not desert principals especially when it is known that principal in Lesotho are appointed with definite skills. Principals should be empowered through training (Lekala).

Ministry of Education and Training should not forget that it is their responsibility to ensure that school are lead as expected. They should not forget to induct school principals (Metsi).

The Ministry of Education and Training has to see to it that principals are well trained and equipped with different skills that will allow them to be perfect (Phuleng).

Discussions

Data presented above suggests that it is critical for secondary school principals to have and demonstrate high levels of EI competency daily. The data revealed that EI is an important competency since it facilitates good school leadership in the following manner;

Firstly, it helps the school principal to institute and sustain good working relationships with all stakeholders, in particular the parents, teachers and or learners. The study argues that, EI makes it easier for the school principal to lay a high worth on all school stakeholders even though they may have diverse needs and interests. School principal with high levels of EI will be able to incorporate the diversified stakeholders' needs and interests in propelling the school in a desired direction and to curtail contemporary issues (Gichochi, 2015; Janmaat et al., 2016; Lasater, 2016). It is for this reason that principals should prioritise relationship building for attainment of meaningful school results (Chombo, 2020). The above findings are consistent with literature which suggests that school leaders who understand their emotions and those of other actors are able to nurture positive culture characterised by trust and honesty (Maulod et al., 2017). The findings echoes TL principle that the school principals should at all times strive to improve the quality of work environment and strengthen equal participation of all school stakeholders (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016).

Secondly, it is revealed that high levels of EI are needed for the effective management of conflicts in the school. Given the data, it is presented that there is a direct relationship between the principals' EI and the ability to curtail conflicts. More, it is reported that, for a school principal to create a conducive school environment which is free from conflicts and any other setbacks, such principal should demonstrate high levels of EI, (Al Shehhi et al., 2020; Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Skordoulis et al., 2020). Schools comprise of many people with different personalities, as a consequence, principals are expected to effectively comprehend the emotive side of all the stakeholders (Al Shehhi et al., 2020). Oftentimes, when varied stakeholders needs are not met by the principal, a conflict emerges. The ability of the principal to manage conflict in schools is vital because all the energy and resources will be devoted to enhancing teaching and learning activities (Crossfield & Bourne, 2018). Unmanaged conflicts in secondary schools are likely to permanently smash the positive school culture. If principals could use EI competency effectively, there is a greater chance that effective teaching and learning will take place in Lesotho secondary schools.

Lastly the study revealed that EI leads to the ability of the school principal to manage any stressful situations. It is argued that on daily basis, the school principal is confronted with numerous stressful situations that need to be attended to. EI qualifies a school principal to deal with stressful setting (Bashir, 2017). In this study, it is therefore strongly postulated that any principal who will be able to confront stressful situation is the one who will have high

levels of EI, (Fteila & Awwad, 2020). It is argued in this paper that there is a direct relationship between EI and ability to manage stress. The findings are consistent with literature which argued that since principals daily faces challenging surroundings that may require rapid response; they should not be impulsive but calmly consider all factors before reacting (Goleman, 2011). The findings further resonates TL permutations that school leaders play a key role in continually promoting and responding to the contemporary challenges facing school effectiveness and that EI helps in managing the daunting expectations of MoET and other actors that are often overwhelming.

It is presented in this study, that EI is a skill that can be acquired. Although it can be enhanced by reading as other participants declared, it is however emphasised that an emotionally aware principal is the one who has been satisfactorily trained. Running a school which consists of different stakeholders with different expectations needs a principal who is well inducted. As result the recommendation made by Al Shehhi et al. (2020) that pre-service and in-service programs on EI issues should be made available for principals is upheld in this study. The above suggestion is not new, studies of Swift (2018) and Martinez (2020) also suggested that principals need to be continuously trained with the aim of enhancing this important competency in school governance. The suggested training should not be afforded to the novice principals only but to all school principals in Lesotho. The above argument is presented because research has indicated that, principals with high levels of EI can create an ideal environment for effective teaching and learning to take place (Chen & Guo, 2020). Pre-service and in-service programmes on EI competency should be prioritised.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study is in line with Goleman's (2017) that EI competency is twice as vital as any other competency in school leadership. EI enables school principals to achieve effectiveness since it enables them to sieve the most destructive opinions and actions from beneficial ones. The study concluded that EI empowers a principal to be smart and is vital in ensuring ultimate school performance and further helps EI helps them to create a positive and sustainable academic environment. The findings are consistent with TL theory which advocates that emotionally intelligent principals are those leaders who prioritise school effectiveness. With EI, school effectiveness is likely to be attained because the principal will be able to understand their strengths and weaknesses and those of others and, resultantly be able to establish sustainable relationships with stakeholders that are based on tolerance and fairness.

Recommendations

Given the findings presented and discussed above, it is firstly recommended that before principals are appointed, they must be subjected to multiple aptitude tests to evaluate their knowledge and competencies. It is also recommended that MoET through its experts continually induct principals on EI aspects. It is further suggested that other scholars could replicate this study using mixed methods approach. The triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative methods will lead to a more error free and objective conclusions. Moreover to fill and the address the short comings of this study, it is recommended that future researchers could further assess the impact of school principal's EI competence with teacher's satisfaction and whether teachers EI is directly related to learners academic achievement or not.

Limitations

This qualitative study cannot be considered to be widely representative as few principals, parents and teachers participated. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that its main purpose was to understand in-depth the significance of EI competency while leading Lesotho secondary schools and how principals' competencies could be enhanced. The significance of the study is therefore based on the opinions raised as opposed to the number of people who raised them. This study could also be critiqued on the fact that the data generated and reported could be biased since only interviews were used to collect data.

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