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Individual Consideration in School Leadership: A Transformational Approach Based On Emotional Intelligence in Resource-Constrained Institutions

Gladys Matandiko[1], Adam Daka[2], Farrelli Hambulo[3]

[12]Institute of Distance Education, University of Zambia.

[3]EAPS, University of Zambia.

ABSTRACT: This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the relationship among emotional intelligence, social competence, and transformational leadership qualities in secondary school headteachers within resource-constrained schools. Based on an integrated framework of Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership Theories, the research purposefully selected five headteachers and fifteen subject teachers to generate insights specific to the context. Through thematic analysis, findings showed that headteachers exhibited high levels of sensitivity and self-awareness, which enabled them to mentor and offer personalised support to staff. These practices highlight the emotional intelligence dimension of self-awareness and the transformational aspect of personalised consideration, with IC identified as a key mechanism through which emotional intelligence influences leadership behaviours. The study proposes a unified conceptual model positioning personalised consideration at the nexus of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership. This framework enhances theoretical understanding by illustrating how emotional skills underpin transformational practices and providing practical guidance for leadership in resource-limited educational settings. The implications extend beyond Zambia, contributing to the global discussion on school leadership in resource-constrained environments. The study argues that emotionally intelligent leadership offers a sustainable pathway to educational improvement, equity, and resilience, thus linking academic models with the practical realities faced by under-resourced schools.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Intelligence, Individualised Consideration, Transformational dimensions, low-resourced communities, self-awareness, empathy, social competence.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Supportive leadership has been associated with reduced stress and improved overall well-being among staff (Bruyneel et al., 2025; Kelly et al., 2021). As organisations face increasingly complex socio-emotional environments, the capacity of leaders to recognise and attend to the unique needs of their followers has proved to be a defining feature of impactful leadership. Contemporary evaluations of leadership effectiveness now extend past technical proficiency or strategic capability to encompass the capacity to inspire and motivate staff toward extraordinary results. Transformational leadership (TL) has received considerable scholarly attention across multiple disciplines. Over the past several decades, transformational leadership theory has become central to educational administration research and the conceptualisation of exemplary school leadership (Sedky, 2025).

According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership comprises four dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. The individual consideration dimension highlights personalised mentorship, empathy, and developmental support, separating it from transactional or managerial approaches. Importantly, the foundation of transformational leadership is closely linked to the often-underemphasised construct of emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, understand, and control emotions (Mayer, 1997). Goleman (1995) and Mayer et al. (2008) advanced the concept, defining EI as the capacity to recognise one's own and others' emotions, to self-motivate, and to manage emotions effectively. This key work has informed a substantial body of research exploring the relationship between EI and transformational leadership (TL). Empirical studies have established a positive correlation between EI and TL (Kumari, 2024), leading to greater recognition of the significance of emotional competencies for effective leadership (Goleman, 1995, cited in Maldonado, 2023). A bibliometric review of literature from 2014 to 2024 presents a consistent and growing body of evidence supporting the positive association between EI and TL, especially in relation to individualised leadership practices. For instance, Korakis and Poulakis (2025) conducted a systematic review that identified sixteen studies confirming the synergistic relationship between EI and TL, while also accepting a minority of dissenting perspectives on its universality.

Hatta A. M. and Abdullah (2020) demonstrated this, and Hera (2024) emphasised that emotional intelligence is not a singular, homogeneous concept but a combination of various interconnected components, a precious asset in both persona and professionalism.

This study examined the relationship among emotional intelligence, social competence, and transformational leadership qualities of secondary school headteachers in resource-poor communities. The research was guided by the following objectives:

1.2 To investigate the relationship among emotional intelligence, social competence, and transformational leadership qualities among secondary school principals in resource-limited communities.

1.2.1 To identify and analyse the emotional mechanisms that enable transformational school leaders to engage empathetically with teachers and learners in under-resourced school contexts.

1.2.2 To develop and propose a Conceptual Model that explains how emotional intelligence and social competence shape transformational leadership practices in low-resourced schools.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEWED

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Emotional Intelligence Theory (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1995) proposed that emotional intelligence (EI) encompasses self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. This theory is relevant to the present study as it explains the emotional mechanisms that enable school leaders to engage empathetically with teachers and learners. It also offers a psychological structure for understanding how school leaders in low-resourced schools nurture trust, collaboration, and individualised support.

Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985) asserted that transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers by demonstrating idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. This theory is pertinent to the current study as it frames the leadership behaviours that are enhanced by emotional intelligence and social competence. Furthermore, it links emotional skills to outcomes such as collaboration, trust-building, and support within challenging school environments.

2.1.1 Integration of the EI and TL Theories for this study

Emotional Intelligence Theory explains how leaders process and manage emotions, while Transformational Leadership Theory describes how these emotional competencies are translated into leadership practices. Together, these theories supply a strong theoretical foundation for this study and inform the development of a conceptual model for leadership in low-resourced schools.

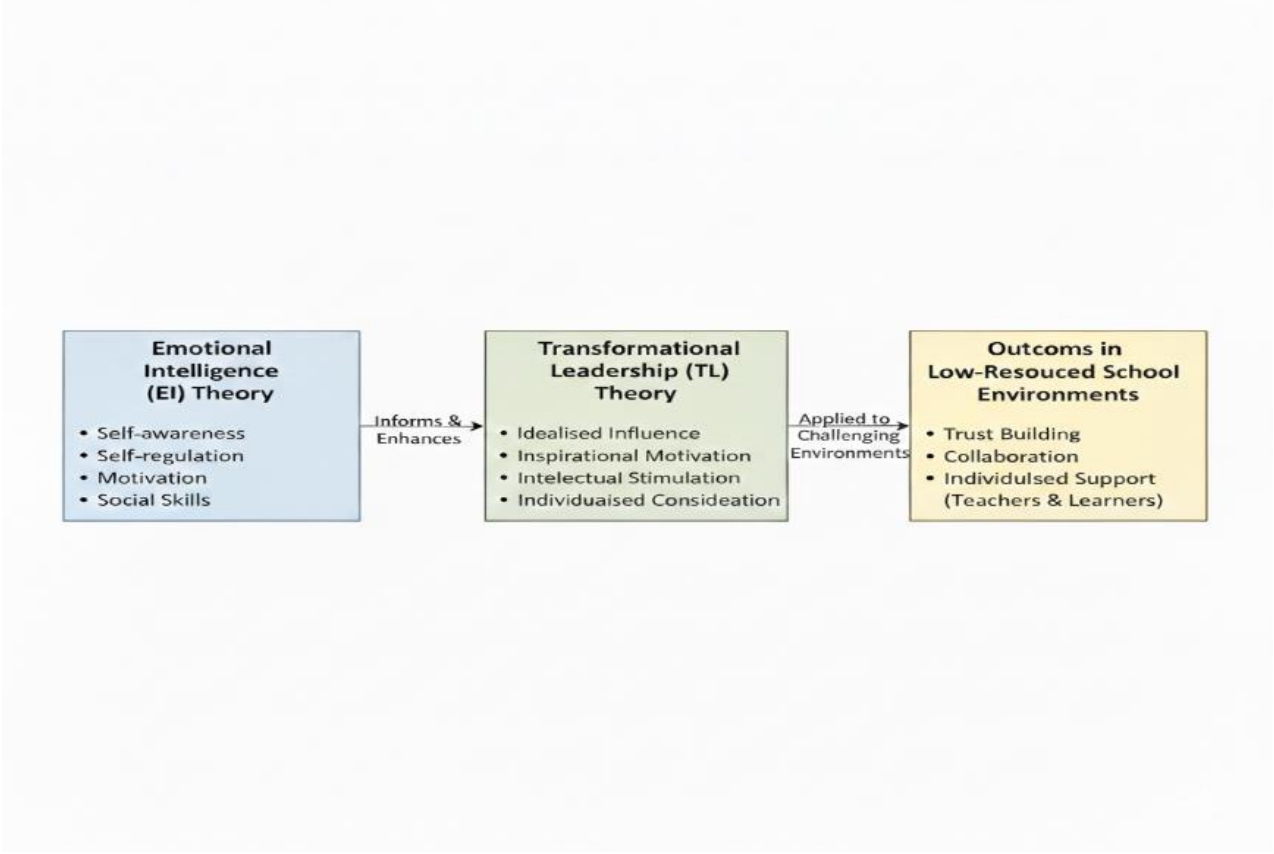


Figure 1 shows the Integrated Framework of the study.

2.2 Emotional mechanisms that enable transformational school leaders

Empirical research shows that transformational leadership and EI have a direct, positive, significant relationship that leads to successful performance(Kumari, 2024),(Gorges-Eckerman and Roux, 2021), Fareed, et al (2021), (Coronado-Maldonado, 2023), Transformational leadership, as postulated by Burns (1978) and Bass (1994), uses four dimensions of idealised influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation and Individual Consideration. Several studies have alluded to the linkages of the latter, Individual Consideration, and the constructs of EI (Fareed, Su, & Awan, 2021); (Gorgens-Ekerman & Roux, 2021). A review of literature demonstrated that constructs of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, empathy, and motivation, were directly and positively correlated with transformational leadership traits such as individual influence, individualised consideration, and inspirational motivation. As a result, leaders with higher EI competence are more likely to influence and motivate their followers effectively. Enhanced EI competency additionally strengthened empathy, enabling leaders to provide individualised consideration to their followers (Kumar, 2014).

Individualised Consideration (IC) is a game-changing leadership behaviour characterised by empathy, mentorship, and a customised approach, recognising that different individuals require different levels of motivation and support (Matandiko et al 2025). Bass (2018) indicated that individualised consideration had two sub-dimensions. The first was treating followers individually, including paying attention to those who seemed neglected. The second was identifying individuals' weaknesses and strengths and promoting their development and growth. Transformational leaders consulted their subordinates and involved them in defining organisational vision. They helped people not only succeed in their present jobs but also help them prepare for their future positions. They created opportunities for their subordinates to learn and develop into leaders (Matandiko, 2025).

Chen et al. (2020) stated that individual considerations created appropriate and encouraging environments in which individual differences and needs were considered, and the followers' thoughts were appreciated. Nthakyo, Mungai & Malela (2016) explained that individual considerations arose in which school head teachers provided support, encouragement, and development for teachers, students, and society. In addition, individual considerations included the ability of teachers' bosses to take care of every imitator, that is, teachers and non-teaching staff, giving them personal attention; the head teacher reacted to each of their needs, appreciating those needs and commemorated these achievements. An individual approach was also the result of continuous commitment and normative engagement (Njoroge et al., 2015). This served as an invitation to offer followers personal attention and to understand the individual words and the ways to modify their impact. When the school head teacher met the needs of others before their own needs, it was an exceptional act.

Khalil and Sahibzadah (2017) stated that leaders who foster individualised consideration promote a sense of inclusion and engagement among employees, leading to improved satisfaction. Njoroge et al (2015) also observed that individualised inclusion is a primary factor in the development of transformational leadership competencies. According to Matandiko (2025), Leaders who practice individualised consideration pay close attention to their followers, hear their concerns and opinions, develop strong interpersonal relationships, and treat each individual uniquely. This approach is associated with increased organisational commitment, which may result in greater employee productivity. A recent study by Mark et. al. (2025) assessed the relationship between individualised consideration and Succession management in the public sector in Kenya. The study examined 22 ministries in Kenya and concluded that individualised consideration had a considerable, positive relationship with succession management.

2.3 The Research Gap

Transformational leadership remains central to discussions of effective school governance and learner achievement. However, a significant gap exists in the literature concerning the combination of emotional intelligence (EI) and the leadership dimension of individual consideration within transformational school leadership frameworks. Although both constructs are recognised as influential, few studies have systematically synthesised them to clarify how emotionally intelligent leaders enhance transformational leadership in low-resourced learning settings.

This study tackles this gap through a hermeneutic qualitative investigation of headteachers' lived experiences and teachers' perspectives in low-resourced secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. By analysing and integrating the theoretical structure, the research proposes a conceptual model that clarifies the emotional mechanisms by which school leaders engage with teachers and learners. Furthermore, it explores how individual consideration as a leadership trait contributes to the development of school cultures that promote academic success.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research approach using a hermeneutic phenomenological design to investigate the relationships among emotional intelligence, social competence, and transformational leadership qualities among secondary school headteachers in resource-poor communities. Guided by an integrated framework of Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership Theories, the method was structured around two objectives: (1) to identify and analyse the emotional mechanisms that enable school leaders to engage

empathetically with teachers and learners in under-resourced school contexts; and (2) to develop and propose a conceptual model explaining how emotional intelligence and social competence shape transformational leadership practices.

3.2 Study Population and Sample Size

In this study, the study population comprised headteachers and teachers in secondary schools. The study used purposive sampling to select participants who were likely to give valuable insights. The researcher identified 5 long-serving headteachers and fifteen teachers with expertise to facilitate a collection of in-depth information through their lived-experiences. The study used homogeneous sampling because all the participants were in the teaching profession. The final sample size was determined upon reaching data saturation.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with headteachers and focus group discussions with teachers, supporting detailed descriptions of leadership behaviours and emotional processes. Thematic analysis was used to code and categorise responses, utilising the dimensions of Emotional Intelligence Theory (Mayer & Salovey; Goleman) and Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass) as sensitising concepts. Particular emphasis was placed on the theme of individualised consideration, which served as the study's focus. By mapping emotional competencies to leadership practices, the analysis showed how headteachers within low-resource contexts enacted transformational leadership through emotionally grounded mechanisms.

This methodological approach guaranteed that the conceptual framework was simultaneously conceptually sound and empirically grounded in the lived experiences of school leaders and teachers.

3.4 Data Analysis

Using Thematic analysis, the researcher followed six procedures as postulated by Caulfield (2022), and these are: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, naming themes, and writing up to identify themes from the perspective of the factors that account for individualised considerations and the forms of empathy that affected teachers.

The conclusion stage was based on the generation of a code table, with the researchers utilising sub-themes that emerged from the main themes to discuss the overarching themes and to support the discussion with the views of the participating teachers. At this point, the interpretation of the findings was included to construct meaning. This aspect involved the content of the research questions. A qualitative study is highly interpretive, and therefore, structured measures were taken to reduce potential errors and enhance the trustworthiness of the explanations provided in this study (Yin, 2014). Themes that emerged were thoroughly scrutinised and entered into the code table.

3.4 Trustworthiness in the Study

To ensure credibility, the researchers adapted their interview strategies to collect the necessary data. Responses were cross-checked and validated against member-checking criteria. Dependability was established by collecting data from multiple perspectives through interviews and focus group discussions. The data were compared and cross-checked to guarantee consistency and minimise individual biases. Additionally, two peers participated in the focus group discussions and interviews. Conformability was addressed by maintaining a diary to log significant activities, schedules, and dates, as recommended by Polit & Beck (2014), and by preserving audio recordings, transcripts, field notes, and detailed descriptions. Transferability was supported through the use of critical case sampling to obtain a representative sample, and the analysis process was carried out transparently. Authenticity was ensured by purposively selecting participants who were most appropriate for the study sample.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All key ethical issues were followed in the current study. Some of the key ones being: seeking permission from authorities, and issues of confidentiality were taken into account. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the identities of the participants and the types of data they provided were not disclosed to anyone. Participants' privacy was respected at all times. In the data analysis, the names of specific communities and research participants involved in the study were not disclosed to protect their image and integrity. When creating the verbalism, codes were used to denote the participants and the schools involved.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Data Generation Procedure

The coding matrix in Appendix A improves the methodological rigour of this study by providing a transparent, organised framework for thematic analysis. Each theme and subtheme was clearly defined, with explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to secure consistency and minimise researcher bias. The integration of Emotional Intelligence Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory as sensitising concepts anchored the analysis in established scholarship, while the contextual focus on low-resource schools ensured relevance. Example quotes illustrated the operationalisation of codes, thereby enhancing the credibility of interpretations. This structured strategy supported dependability by enabling replication of the coding process and aligning themes with research

objectives to ensure analytic coherence. By mapping emotional competencies to transformational leadership practices, the matrix serves as an efficient tool for identifying the emotional mechanisms underlying individualised consideration in school leadership, thereby reinforcing the validity and trustworthiness of the findings. Table 1 below summarises the table from the appendices.

Table 1 presents the theme codes, the inclusion criteria, and quotes from participants.

Theme	Definition	Inclusion Criteria	selected Quote
Theme 1: Emotional Intelligence Competencies	Principals' ability to recognize, regulate, and apply emotional skills in leadership contexts.	Statements about self-awareness, empathy, or social skills that influence leadership decisions.	"I know when I am frustrated, and I try to pause before addressing teachers so that my emotions don't cloud the discussion."
Theme 2: Transformational Leadership Dimensions	Leadership behaviors that inspire, motivate, and support teachers and learners through transformational practices.	References to idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration.	"I mentor new teachers one-on-one, because each has different challenges and strengths that need attention."
Theme 3: Emotional Mechanisms Linking EI and TL	The processes through which emotional intelligence competencies drive transformational leadership practices.	Explicit links between emotional skills (e.g., empathy, self-regulation) and leadership actions (e.g., individualized support, motivation).	"Because I empathize with teachers' struggles, I adjust my leadership style to give them more individualized support."
Theme 4: Contextual Challenges in Low-Resource Schools	The constraints and adaptive strategies principals employ to sustain transformational leadership in under-resourced settings.	Accounts of resource limitations, emotional strain, and adaptive responses to sustain leadership practices.	"We don't have enough textbooks, so I encourage teachers to use group discussions as a way to stimulate learning."

5.0 FINDINGS

5.1 Theme 1: Emotional Intelligence Competencies

The study found that the headteachers were sympathetic and highly caring to their subordinates and applied self-awareness skills in their leadership. This was evidenced by HT 1, who said, *"I know when I am frustrated, and I try to pause before addressing teachers so that my emotions don't cloud the discussion."* According to Fareed, Su, & Awan (2021), Gorgens-Ekerman, & Roux (2021), Individual Consideration and the constructs of Emotional Intelligence, such as self-awareness, empathy, and motivation, have a direct positive correlation with Transformational leadership traits, particularly individualised consideration.

5.2 Theme 2: Transformational Leadership Dimensions

The study also found the headteachers to be mentors who paid special, personal attention to each teacher to bring them on board in their teams. This was clearly stated by HT 3, who said, *"I mentor new teachers one-on-one, because each has different challenges and strengths that need attention."* This behaviour from transformative leaders is consistent with scholars such as Nthakyo, Mungai & Malela (2016) highlighted that emotionally intelligent school leaders positively affect school culture, teacher morale, and decision-making activities. This reflects Bass's dimension of individualised consideration. Scholars support this assertion that secondary school principals with high EI and social competence demonstrated significantly stronger transformational leadership qualities, particularly in developing trust, collaboration, and individualised support (Hatta A. M & Abdullah, 2020).

5.3 Theme 3: Emotional Mechanisms Relating EI and TL

The study found that emotionally intelligent competencies among headteachers led them to practice the dimensions of transformational leadership. According to HT4, *"Because I empathise with teachers' struggles, I adjust my leadership style to give them more individualised support."* This behaviour is supported by Jiang et al. (2017), who stated that individual considerations created appropriate and favourable environments in which individual differences and needs were taken into account, and followers'

thoughts were appreciated. Also, Hera (2024) explained that individual considerations arose in which school head teachers provided support, encouragement, and development for teachers, students, and society.

5.4 Theme 4: Contextual Challenges within Low-Resource Schools

The study illustrated the contextual realities of low-resourced schools, where emotionally intelligent headteachers, in resource-constrained, emotionally strained environments, were needed to offer flexible responses to sustain transformative leadership practices. This was clearly attested when one headteacher said, *"We don't have enough textbooks, so I encourage teachers to use group discussions as a way to stimulate learning."* This finding is consistent with Kumar (2014) and Matandiko (2025), who argue that enhanced EI, particularly empathy, enables leaders to provide individualised consideration and create opportunities for teacher development even in strained environments.

5.5 Synthesis of Findings with Theory

Collectively, the findings show that emotional intelligence provides the ways through which transformational leadership is enacted, with individualised consideration emerging as the central practice. In under-resourced schools, EI competencies, such as empathy and self-awareness, enable leaders to adapt, mentor, and inspire, thereby connecting theoretical notions with practical realities. This integration reinforces the proposed conceptual model, demonstrating that emotionally intelligent leadership is both theoretically solid and context-dependently responsive.

5.6 Proposed Unified Conceptual Model for Emotionally Intelligent Transformational School Leaders in Low-Resourced Settings.

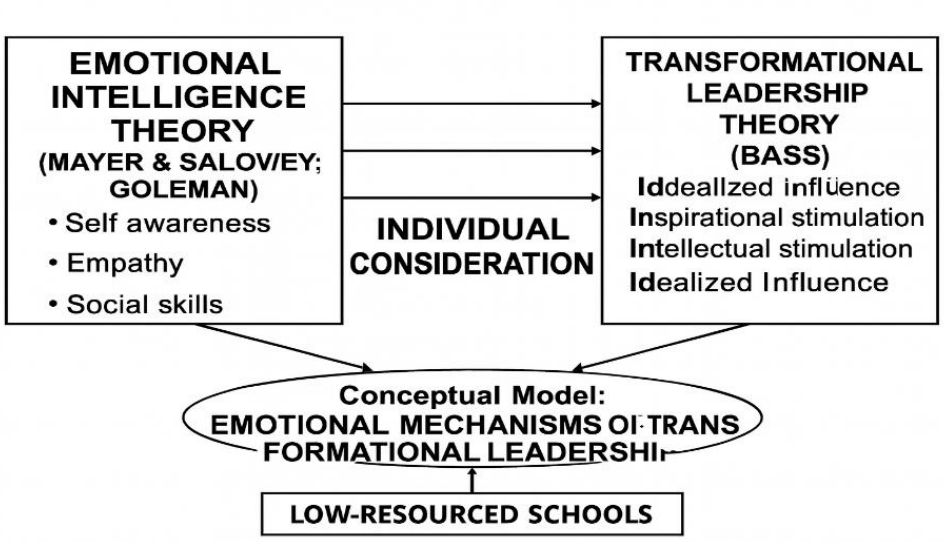


Figure 2 is constructed from EI (Mayer & Salovey, Goleman,) and TL (Bass, 1985)

Figure 2 depicts the integration of Emotional Intelligence Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory into a unified conceptual model. Emotional intelligence competencies, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, form the basis for transformational leadership behaviours such as idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. The model shows how these emotional mechanisms shape leadership practices, while the contextual component highlights their application in low-resourced schools. Overall, the model illustrates how emotional and social competencies enable transformational leaders to encourage trust, collaboration, and individualised support in challenging school environments.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research adds to both theory and practice by demonstrating that emotionally grounded transformational leadership delivers a sustainable approach to school improvement in resource-limited communities.

Subsequent research should examine the longitudinal impact of emotionally intelligent leadership on teacher retention, learner outcomes, and school culture in resource-limited communities.

Comparative studies across multiple contexts, such as urban versus rural and resource-abundant versus resource-poor settings, could improve understanding of how emotional intelligence interacts with transformational leadership practices. Mixed-methods

approaches are recommended to quantify the correlation between EI competencies and transformational leadership outcomes, thereby complementing qualitative evidence.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The combination of Emotional Intelligence Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory in this study emphasises the central role of emotional competencies in fostering individualised consideration among school leaders in low-resource communities. The findings show that self-awareness, empathy, and social skills enabled headteachers to implement transformational practices, such as mentoring, motivation, and intellectual stimulation, even under considerable resource constraints. This interplay itself indicates that individualised consideration is not simply a leadership dimension but a contextually adaptive mechanism grounded in emotional competence. By embedding these practices within the realities of under-resourced schools, the study promotes a conceptual model that illustrates how emotionally intelligent leadership strengthens resilience, inclusivity, and developmental support for teachers and learners.

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DECLARATION OF INTEREST: None of the authors declared any conflict of interest.
DECLARATION AI USE: The study used AI to correct spellings, clarity and cohesion.

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APPENDIX

Codebook Matrix for Thematic Analysis

Theme	Subtheme	Definition	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Example Quote
Theme 1: Emotional Intelligence Competencies	Self-Awareness	Principals' recognition of their own emotions and their influence on leadership decisions.	Statements about reflecting on personal feelings, emotional triggers, or self-reflection in leadership.	General references to school challenges without linking to personal emotions.	"I know when I am frustrated, and I try to pause before addressing teachers so that my emotions don't cloud the discussion."
	Self-Regulation	Ability to manage emotions, stress, and conflict constructively.	Narratives about patience, adaptability, or conflict management.	Complaints about stress without describing regulation strategies.	"I take a deep breath before responding to difficult situations so I don't escalate tensions."
	Empathy	Understanding and responding to the emotional needs of teachers and learners.	Accounts of listening, compassion, or acknowledging others' struggles.	Generic mentions of support without emotional engagement.	"When a teacher is struggling with overcrowded classes, I make time to listen and reassure them that their efforts are valued."
	Social Skills	Building trust, collaboration, and	Examples of teamwork,	Administrative instructions	"I encourage open dialogue so

		effective communication.	relationship-building, or communication strategies.	without relational focus.	teachers feel comfortable sharing their challenges."
Theme 2: Transformational Leadership Dimensions	Idealized Influence	Modeling ethical, value-driven leadership that inspires respect.	References to role modeling, integrity, or earning trust.	General authority statements without ethical emphasis.	"I lead by example, showing teachers that honesty and fairness guide my decisions."
	Inspirational Motivation	Articulating a compelling vision that motivates staff despite constraints.	Statements about motivating teachers, encouraging perseverance, or vision-sharing.	Administrative directives without motivational elements.	"Even though we lack materials, I remind teachers that our shared vision is to give every child hope through education."
	Intellectual Stimulation	Encouraging innovation and critical thinking among staff and learners.	Narratives about problem-solving, creativity, or challenging assumptions.	Routine instructions without intellectual engagement.	"I ask teachers to explore new methods of teaching even when resources are scarce."
	Individualized Consideration	Providing personalized support, mentoring, and recognition of individual needs.	Examples of tailored support, coaching, or recognizing unique strengths.	General encouragement without individualized focus.	"I mentor new teachers one-on-one, because each has different challenges and strengths that need attention."
Theme 3: Emotional Mechanisms Linking EI and TL	EI as Driver of Leadership Practices	Emotional competencies directly shaping transformational leadership behaviors.	Explicit links between emotional skills (e.g., empathy) and leadership actions (e.g., individualized support).	Emotional references without connection to leadership practice.	"Because I empathize with teachers' struggles, I adjust my leadership style to give them more individualized support."
	Social Competence as Mediator	Emotional and relational skills facilitating transformational practices.	Accounts of collaboration, trust-building, or balancing emotional demands with leadership.	General teamwork references without emotional dimension.	"My ability to connect with teachers helps me guide them through difficult reforms."
Theme 4: Contextual Challenges in Low-Resource Schools	Resource Constraints	Emotional strain of inadequate facilities and materials.	Narratives about lack of resources and its emotional impact.	Generic mentions of shortages without emotional reflection.	"It is emotionally draining to see learners share one textbook among five."
	Teacher and Learner Needs	Emotional demands of supporting under-resourced staff and learners.	Accounts of principals responding to staff	General references to needs without	"I often feel the weight of teachers' frustrations

			or learner struggles.	emotional engagement.	when they lack basic teaching tools."
	Adaptive Leadership Responses	Strategies principals use to sustain transformational practices despite limitations.	Examples of creative problem-solving, resilience, or adaptive strategies.	Complaints about limitations without describing adaptive responses.	"We don't have enough textbooks, so I encourage teachers to use group discussions as a way to stimulate learning."

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