

Seeking the Golden Fleece: a quest to evaluate the way Emotional Intelligence influences the work of primary school leaders

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ABSTRACT

What is already known? This article offers a methodology for researching Emotional Intelligence (EI) within the working contexts of educational leaders. Existing methodologies included numerous, sometimes contradictory approaches, none of which precisely fitted the project's aims. This article explores the various contradictions emerging from these, and justifies the final choice of three methods for securing the necessary data.

What does this article add? The methods themselves are not new; what was innovative was their combined use to interpret how leaders believed they deployed EI to influence teamworking and sharing of vision. Issues of translation arising from the context of the research are also briefly addressed. The whole is framed through the lens of research as a journey for which methodology is the map.

What are the implications? This article is intended for school leaders, teacher researchers and academics who wish to explore the impact of leaders' EI rather than merely attempting to measure it. It emphasises the importance of evaluating EI in context by describing one project which attempted to gather deep understanding of the links between EI and school leadership in three Cypriot primary schools.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; leadership; research as quest; methodology as map-making.

Introduction

Cultural understandings are often underpinned by stories. All countries have tales of quests, from the journey of the Chinese monk Xuanzang to India to recover ancient Buddhist texts (Encyclopaedia Britannica) to the Arthurian quests retold in *The Mabinogion* (Johnson, 2021). Many of these stories are myths, but this does not render them less valuable for illuminating understanding about human emotions, motives and actions.

The history of Greece and the Greek islands is illuminated by a range of myths (Graves, 1992), many of them recounting ambitious heroic quests such as that of Jason for the Golden Fleece which would enable him to claim his rightful inheritance. Jason set out to find something which he could not be certain existed and with very limited ideas about how to find it. Twenty-first century researchers seeking to understand Emotional Intelligence (EI) find themselves somewhat better placed than Jason, for others have already verified the existence of EI, among them Goleman, (1998), Salovey and Mayer (1990), Mayer et al (2004), Antonakis (2004) and Crawford (2009). However, though its existence is acknowledged, EI remains a controversial concept. It is challenging to explore empirically because there is no agreed definition of it and many different models attempt to explain it. Moreover, multiple methods have been used to collect evidence about it. In this article we present the methodological map of a research quest to establish the reality of EI as a factor within the leadership styles and strategies of three primary school headteachers in Cyprus. This required construction of a research approach which explored the influence of EI on leadership activity instead of merely attempting to measure it.

This article begins by examining definitions of EI, explaining reasons for choosing the perspective which underpinned the subsequent research project. This project was undertaken by a teacher-researcher who wished to examine how EI influenced the leadership practice of Cypriot primary school headteachers, with a specific focus on vision-sharing and team-working. Exploration of the literature failed to identify sufficiently precise methodological approaches to researching EI in extant research, so a new way forward had to be found. The choices made when developing this are explained and critiqued. Finally, the benefits of this approach for future researchers are considered.

Point of departure for the voyage

The voyage of discovery could not be launched before careful consideration of the many interpretations of EI. Emotions are perhaps most concisely summarised as the “language of relationships” between humans (Crawford, 2007, 88). However, EI is too broad to be so concisely pinned down. Salovey and Mayer (1990) coined the term to describe the skill set required both to understand and to use emotions within relationships. This skill set covers four domains: recognising and understanding one’s emotions, regulating them, recognising emotions in others, and using emotions to facilitate performance (which could also be described as managing relationships and promoting motivation). Goleman (1995, 328) incorporated this “body of skills that emotional intelligence represents” into his understanding of characteristics of personality, reminding his readers of Etzioni’s (1993) view that such characteristics undergird moral conduct. We suggest that this is important when considering EI within school contexts, for while moral conduct may not necessarily be expected of all leaders, it is likely to be expected of school leaders by all stakeholders in their surrounding communities.

Leaders are humans with specific roles and responsibilities within their organisations but they are still also emotional beings, therefore their feelings are connected with their leadership (Goleman, 1998; Beatty, 2002; Crawford, 2009), a fact recognised since the earliest emergence of management theories in the late 19th century (Gronn, 2003). Leaders’ emotions are inextricably tied in with the life of their organisations, and they have to lead and manage others, thus their EI skills are vital components of that leadership (George, 2000; Crawford, 2007). However, despite all this general agreement there is still no precise definition of EI to which all authors subscribe (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Bar-On, 1997a; Goleman et al., 2001). In consequence, selecting a definition is the first methodological challenge facing researchers wishing to examine this concept in operation.

The definition chosen for this research is outlined by Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) EI ability model. Mayer and Salovey (*ibid*) propose four distinct abilities operating within EI: i) appraisal and recognition of emotions in self, ii) appraisal and recognition of emotions in others, iii) regulation of emotions in self, and iv) use of emotions to facilitate performance. The beneficial clarity of this model for researching leadership in action arises from the fact that the abilities are not related to personality. The model explains EI as a mental ability identifiable through performance tests

(Smollan and Parry, 2011). Moreover it had already been used successfully by other researchers (Kafetsios and Zampetakis, 2008; Taliadorou and Pashiardis, 2015) for measuring EI, therefore it could be assumed to have potential as the basis for further EI research. Using this model made it possible to use its four clear sub-divisions for coding qualitative data (as discussed later), also enabling comparisons with other studies which used it. This model therefore seemed ideal as the port of departure.

However, as noted above, existing methodologies for collecting data about the four abilities of Mayer and Salovey (1997) were intended to **measure** them. Such measurement does not explain how leaders deploy them professionally within their leadership work. Paths had to be found to discover this information.

Educational leadership takes place in the context of schools within systems, and this context is itself “nested in a larger political, cultural and historical context which deeply affects the assumptions, beliefs and actual possibilities of the players” (Starratt, 1999, 22). Pashiardis and Johansson (2021, 693) concur that “school leadership is formed by local contextual characteristics which, in turn, shape principals’ leadership practices”. It is therefore essential to understand the context of the quest we are describing.

The journey’s context

The research for which this methodology had to be designed was carried out in Cyprus. Its educational system is characterised as highly conservative, centralised and state-controlled (Kyriakides and Campbell, 2003; Pashiardis, 2004; Kambouri, 2012). All schools must follow the regulations of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (MOEC), which is responsible for implementing laws and legislation and prescribes the curricula, syllabi and textbooks that schools are required to use. However, each school has the right to make some adjustments to these to provide for the specific needs of its local communities and/or students. Aspects of individualisation emerge in the policies and procedural guidance of each school, a key point with relevance to the research described here.

This education system is hierarchical, monitored by inspectors appointed by the MOEC, whose duties also include monitoring and evaluating schools’ staff. Teachers must report to headteachers; headteachers are obliged to inform inspectors who, after discussions with the chief inspector, may subsequently contact the MOEC. These procedures are followed for

such simple issues as leave for staff, whether for one day or longer, as well as for more complicated matters such as school events, problems or accidents. They involve a lot of bureaucratic processes and therefore, as in many small countries, keep a lot of people busy.

Teachers in Cyprus have tenure; once they are appointed their contracts are not terminated unless a serious legal or grave disciplinary infringement has occurred. Promotion to headteacher and to deputy headteacher is made according to seniority in the education service; deputy headteachers are therefore perceived as headteachers in waiting. Professional qualifications and excellence in service are only considered when the seniority of candidates is on the same level. The same criteria are used for all promotions: hierarchical principles are always followed.

Because of the centralised system, headteachers' responsibilities are characterised as administrative (Pashiardis et al., 2001), according to the educational law of Cyprus. However, headteachers are expected to guide deputy headteachers, to distribute responsibilities among school staff, and to supervise teaching and promote teachers' professional development. In addition, headteachers must maintain healthy relationships with the inspectorate, the church, community, local authorities and parents' associations. All these activities must be fitted round their teaching duties, because they retain some classroom teaching, the load depending on the size of the school's population.

Newly-promoted headteachers receive free compulsory training in their first year in post, provided by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, requiring attendance at weekly meetings which mainly discuss administrative issues (CPI, 2019). Any knowledge or understanding of EI which headteachers possess has thus arisen from their personal and professional life experience, not from any formal training. Headteachers are therefore likely to have individual rather than collective understandings of the concept of EI.

To understand this research expedition fully, readers should understand that the individual setting out on it was a teacher-researcher, herself in full-time employment as a primary school teacher in Cyprus. These circumstances constrained resources of time and access, but her knowledge of the national and local context of the research was a useful asset.

The quest

The specific quest of the research described here was to discover how EI influenced teamworking and vision sharing in three Cypriot primary

schools. It made sense to consider how previous researchers had also set out in search of EI.

Maps of previous expeditions: navigating by numbers

Examining the maps of previous research expeditions, it became apparent that extant publications about EI, though fairly modest in quantity, used a variety of methods. These were examined as possible models, not least because using one of them might have provided data for comparison with this project's findings, always useful when a study is small-scale.

Salovey and Mayer (1990), early researchers in this field, produced a three-branched model of EI which they then further evolved into a four-branched model (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). From this they designed an ability-based test, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), to measure an individual's EI abilities. Mayer et al. (2016) subsequently claimed that a person's EI abilities are best measured by posing problems to people to solve and examining the results. Because of this focus on problem-solving, they distinguished MSCEIT from other self-reported tests which measure EI. Later still, Fiori and Vesely-Maillefer (2018) agreed that EI, as a cognitive process, is best measured through performance tests that require respondents to solve specific problems.

Bar-On (2006), however, suggested using a different source, the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), as the basis for evaluating EI. The EQ-i is a self-reported measure that estimates social and emotional intelligence. It contains 133 items, assessed on a five-point Likert scale with a textual response ranging from "very seldom true of me" (1) to "very often true of me" (5). Bar-On used this source to develop his Emotional-Social Intelligence model (ESI), subsequently adopted by other researchers. Proponents of this approach ask people to judge and report how good they are at perceiving others' emotions. An obvious drawback of such an approach is its reliance on respondents' judgement about their own capabilities. It might be argued that their accuracy in self-reporting could itself reflect their EI skills but there is no reliable way to test that hypothesis!

Other self-reporting tests of EI also exist. The complexity of this range of tests is due not only to the numerous and contradictory approaches that have attempted to explain the concept of EI (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Bar-On, 1997b; Goleman et al., 2001), but also to the fact that each of these approaches has produced different tests to explore and evaluate the

concept. For instance, Kafetsios and Zambetakis (2008) and Taliadorou and Pashiardis (2015) used the Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, 2002). The scale has 16 items and four subscales that explore the four abilities of EI suggested by Mayer and Salovey (1997). In contrast, Plastidou (2010) and Chang et al. (2012) preferred to use the Emotional Intelligence Scale of Schutte et al. (1998), which affords comparison between studies of EI and explores with consistency both the ability model (Mayer and Salovey, 1997) and ESI model (Bar-On, 1997b) of EI. These also, however, have the disadvantage of relying heavily on hoped-for accuracy of respondents' self-reporting. This is not only problematic because respondents may lack self-awareness, but also because they may provide socially acceptable answers rather than honest and truthful ones (Brackett et al., 2011; Boyatzis et al., 2000; Smollan and Parry, 2011; Chang et al., 2012). Antonakis (2004) also criticised such tests because many of them were trying to measure personality constructs as well as EI.

Self-reporting tests can be attractive because of their convenience, for they are easy to administer. They are also inexpensive, a major consideration for cash-strapped academic travellers! However, for the expedition described here, which required real depth of detailed understanding about EI operating in specific contexts, they were not fit for the intended purpose and had to be discarded. The quest in hand demanded a different kind of map.

Fineman (2003, 2004) argued that complex questionnaires can be restrictive instruments for measuring EI precisely because of their statistical approaches. In offering this reason to be cautious about using them, he also suggested an alternative way forward. Fineman claimed that feelings are embedded in all the stories we tell: these stories might not be objective truth but they contain examples which illuminate emotions felt at the time of the events described. Fineman therefore suggested that qualitative research methods such as interviews, or observation, are better research tools to use when researching emotions.

Furthermore, Antonakis (2004) criticised the use of single sources of any kind for evaluating EI. Antonakis et al. (2009) suggested it is better not to use self-reporting tests alone, but to use at least one other source, both to collect fuller evidence and to allow for triangulation. They acknowledged too that individual respondents might have potentially divergent interpretations of the questions asked.

Using more than one source of data, as recommended by Antonakis et al (2009) raises the question, of what should the best sources be comprised

for successful triangulation? Helpfully, we are reminded by Smollan and Parry (2011) that a crucial element of successful leadership, particularly the leadership of change, is engaging and motivating staff. They are likely to have a good understanding of the effectiveness of their leaders' EI, yet careful searching of the literature revealed that it lacks evidence of followers' perceptions about EI (Stavrou Theodotou, 2020). Collecting their views, therefore, would not merely offer one useful form of triangulation but also present insights from followers, whose perspectives about the impact of leaders' EI have previously been overlooked.

Responding to all the arguments so far, and given that the research discussed herein sought to provide insights into how participants' perceptions of EI influenced aspects of school leadership, quantitative methods of data collection were largely rejected as a broad strategy. Interpretive methods were considered instead. This decision also enabled triangulation of data.

Maps of previous expeditions: navigating interpretively

As no previous studies offered a suitable methodology for an intimate focus on EI in operational settings, methods for the case study described here had to be selected and combined for the specific research context by drawing from other areas of social enquiry.

Interpretivist approaches aim to provide interpretations and understanding of social phenomena (Blaxter et al., 2010). Choosing an interpretive research paradigm offers opportunity to interpret leadership behaviours as well as providing meaning, reasons for and understanding of participants' actions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). For the quest undertaken here, this meant attempting to understand the phenomenon of head-teachers' EI and how it influenced teamworking and vision sharing by collecting rich and extensive detail about these activities. The enquiry needed to be sufficiently broad and open-ended to enable participants to discuss their own meanings of any specific situations. Qualitative methods, particularly interviews, can be very effective at capturing the richness associated with EI by providing detailed data (Fineman, 2000).

In addition, participants in research are usually conceptualised differently when qualitative methods are used. They act more as volunteers and active shapers of the situation being investigated (Bell, 2005). However, it is also possible that respondents may not report fully, or that they may

shape or limit the data through omissions, intentional or inadvertent (Smollan and Parry, 2011; Chang et al., 2012). In such circumstances, the advice of Antonakis et al (2009) to use more than one source of data becomes particularly apposite.

Making the final choice of route

Three schools were chosen to allow a multi-site case study approach. This decision afforded an intimate, in-depth look at situations and events at a given time (Opie, 2004). Such a multi-site case design allowed conclusions to be drawn from a group of cases to confirm or replicate the results (Yin, 2014) and provide in-depth data to answer the research questions (Kafa and Pashiardis, 2019).

Three is not a large number, and the subsequent findings cannot be generalised, but the data collected ultimately justified this decision, provided plentiful depth as well as pointers to possible future research. By following Yin's (2014) advice to use exactly the same methods for all cases, three cases proved sufficient to make comparisons. Moreover, researching three schools was manageable within resource constraints. Data were collected from three groups of staff: headteachers, deputy headteachers and classroom teachers, and from appropriate school documents.

Methods used in case studies of this kind have to be chosen for their suitability for the particular inquiry (Bell, 2005). Kvale (2007) asserted that interviews can provide an intimate look into other people's lives, emotions and interactions and that made interviews the best choice of method for collecting the views of headteachers. Kvale also noted that interviews can be a robust method for securing understanding of human experiences and thoughts. Information yielded by interviews can explain causal and factual meanings; they also permit a detailed focus on a specific topic or issue and for complex responses. Interviews with the headteachers could allow those respondents to explain in detail how they perceived and used EI in their schools. These possibilities were confirmed by an extensive empirical study by Mittal and Sindhu (2012), which suggested that evaluating leaders' EI through their perceptions does reveal how those leaders use EI to think and act effectively.

In addition to giving valuable information about an interviewee's motives and feelings, their tone of voice, facial expression and even hesitations are all clues that written responses might fail to provide (Bell, 2005;

Blaxter et al., 2010). Given that EI is a personal construct for each individual, this was an important reason for using interviews, and it did prove possible from this study's interviews to pick up the strength of feelings about challenging issues from the respondents' body language.

The requirements for flexibility needed to collect rich data from respondents (Bell, 2005) also dictated the choice of interview format. An unstructured interview might have allowed respondents to ramble beyond the specific focus on teamworking and sharing of vision, whereas a tightly-focused group of questions could have inhibited breadth and depth of information. Semi-structured interviews are midway along the continuum of interview formats: they can constrain discussion to topics that need to be covered, but they are also sufficiently flexible to elicit and embrace interviewees' stories, allowing the interviewer to rephrase and investigate a question in depth (Opie, 2004; Kvale, 2007). Semi-structured interviews therefore provided the best option, allowing the researcher to review the same terrain across all nine interviews but also to probe in different directions to allow for accurate understanding. Using this format also minimised the risk of a less experienced researcher failing to identify all topics related to the research questions (Rabionet, 2011).

As mentioned previously, Antonakis (2004) criticised EI research that is based only on self-reported tests. In consequence alternative sources of information were also needed for this research journey, to provide triangulation, strengthen reliability and validity of findings (Yin, 2013; Hancock and Algozzine, 2013), and increase their accuracy (Miller and Fox, 2004) by reducing potential bias of the findings towards the headteachers' views. An obvious source of data for how headteachers operate is their deputies, who must work closely with them and may be able to offer useful perspectives. To maximise this resource, schools with two deputy headteachers were chosen for this study and all six were interviewed.

Creating the interview protocols

The aims of a study influence the formation and structure of the interview questions for it (Kvale, 2007). For this journey the interview protocol for the headteachers started with straightforward questions chosen to 'warm up' the interviewee and establish a relationship between participant and interviewer (Crawford, 2004). They explored the professional and academic background of the participants and collected brief descriptions of their schools. Subsequently respondents were asked questions about

leadership and emotions. For these questions careful decisions had to be made to ensure that information was not just collected about how respondents had used EI for enacting leadership but also how their tacit and conscious knowledge of EI had influenced these actions. To cover a fair breadth of possibilities, some of the questions about emotions and EI were taken from Wong and Law (2002) which evaluated EI as a range of abilities, some were taken from Crawford (2004, 2009), which used emotions as a lens to scrutinise social phenomena, and some from Goleman et al. (2001) to look at EI as a way of managing people. Further questions were derived from wider school leadership literature, including Bennett et al. (2003) and Hulpia and Devos (2010).

Table 1. Data collection methods

<i>Method</i>	<i>Data type</i>	<i>Purpose of collection</i>
Semi-structured interviews with 3 headteachers	80- minute tape-recorded interview	To identify headteachers' perceptions about the impact of leaders' EI on teamworking and shared vision.
Semi-structured interviews with six deputy headteachers	40-minute tape-recorded interview	To triangulate data from headteachers' interviews; to explore deputy headteachers' perceptions about the impact of leaders' EI on teamworking and shared vision.
Questionnaires from 30 teachers	15- minute paper-based questionnaire	To further triangulate data from headteachers' and deputy- headteachers' interviews; to explore teachers' perceptions about the impact of leaders' EI on teamworking and shared vision.
School policy documents	Documents pertaining to the school vision; documents that concern allocation of responsibilities to staff and external stakeholders. The school's timetable	Further triangulation: seeking evidence of the impact of headteachers' claims upon their practical actions

By this point, the methodological map for the journey had become very specific to this particular quest.

Deputy headteachers' interviews

The deputy headteachers were also interviewed. For them a different approach was required, to secure their views not as direct actors in the headteachers' leadership but as observers of it. The interview protocol for them was therefore derived from the Leadership Questionnaire developed by Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2009), selected as the best way to collect data. This questionnaire drew on a long-term study which has been used successfully more than once (see Taliadorou and Pashiardis, 2015). Furthermore it had the value of being structured in Greek and English, so the possibility of misunderstandings arising from translation was reduced (Sopromadze and Moorosi, 2016, discussed further below).

The original questions of Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2009) were transformed from a closed to an open-ended semi-structured format, for example asking questions such as "How are decisions made in your school?" Only questions that concerned shared vision and teamworking were included in the interview protocol for the deputy headteachers.

Questionnaires for teachers

Itinerants sometimes have to cover ground they would rather avoid in order to reach their desired destination. Earlier discussion has argued that questionnaires are not the best way to obtain in-depth views, and the researcher's preference was to collect qualitative data, so ideally, all teachers in the schools would have been interviewed. It was essential to collect data from them, because as close everyday co-workers with their headteachers all staff were potentially influenced by their EI. Teachers' perceptions about this were likely to be of significant value. Furthermore, because all were working in a hierarchical system like that of Cyprus, it was possible they could bring different perspectives on the impact of the headteachers' actions to those of senior leaders. Teachers' views were also important because, as Smollan and Parry (2011) noted, there are very few studies that have investigated both leaders' and followers' perceptions on EI and leadership ability. There was certainly no previous research offering that depth of scrutiny in the Cypriot context (Stavrou Theodotou, 2020).

However, as a full-time teacher in another school, interviewing all teachers in three other schools was beyond the researcher's limited resources of time. The only effective way to secure the contribution of all staff within a sensible time frame was, force majeure, to use a questionnaire.

Such a pragmatic decision was not without precedent. In qualitative research, using a quantitative method to provoke beneficial reflection and resolve a problematic situation, such as time limits, is necessary (Archibald et al., 2019). Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) agree that taking pragmatic decisions when conducting research studies to contribute useful and actionable knowledge. Kimmons (2022) actively encourages the use of mixed methods approaches to resolve problems of practicality in collecting data from a wide array of stakeholders.

Moreover using questionnaires was convenient: the fact that the researcher did not have to be present to administer them (Cohen, et al 2005), and the efficient use of time (Robson, 1993; Opie, 2004) so all data could be collected within a single school year, were inescapable advantages which could not be ignored. Happily, for those invited to respond this seemed to be an acceptable approach, as thirty out of a possible thirty-four staff completed and returned it. They may have been encouraged by the anonymity which is one obvious benefit of this method (Opie, 2004), and a factor which school leaders scrutinising their own practice may wish to consider.

Though designing a good questionnaire is not an easy process (Opie, 2004; Bell, 2005), for the purposes of this research it was possible to use a map which already existed. The Greek version of the Leadership Questionnaire of Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2009) was appropriate for the research focus on teamworking and vision sharing because it included questions on these areas. Additionally, it had been employed in other studies, so its trustworthiness is generally accepted.

Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2009) used a five-point Likert scale. This scale moves equally from value 1: *strongly disagree* to 5: *strongly agree*, with 3 as a neutral mid-point. Allowing respondents to hold neutral middle ground seemed appropriate in case respondents genuinely did not have a view, or any evidence, for making a stronger positive or negative judgement.

Despite the broadly quantitative nature of the questionnaire, it proved fit for purposes in collecting data for a study employing a broadly qualitative approach (Blaxter et al, 2010) because it enabled the researcher to

triangulate in some depth the claims made by the headteachers about how they used EI in their leadership roles.

Analysis of policy documents

All the methods described so far depended on the personal views of individuals, and their responses may have been influenced by personal motivations not visible to an outsider. However, within schools there is also a source of evidence which, while created by humans, does not have feelings and can thus be interrogated frequently and at any time convenient to the researcher. We refer to school documentation, specifically the policy documents and protocols which leaders put in place. Documentary analysis is widely used in projects that need to supplement or triangulate information obtained by other methods (Bell, 2005). It enables researchers to search what is not spoken (Blaxter et al., 2010). Documents may offer evidence to support what other methods reveal (Bell, 2005), as in this study. They can also be “inadvertent sources” (Bell, 2005, p. 126), if they are used for research purposes in ways other than those they were created for. For this study’s focus on vision-sharing and team-working, they were particularly relevant because documents present a headteacher’s vision ‘on the page’ both for explaining and for directing the professional actions of staff teams.

Analysis of documents can give a different reflection on leadership activity if they are scrutinised by a ‘problem-oriented’ approach (Bell, 2005, p107), i.e. before meeting their author. In this study, documents were collected before headteachers were interviewed, to seek a glimpse into each school’s leadership before the interviews, and identify further probes for use during interviews.

Many different kinds of documents exist in a school (Pashiardis, 2004). In Cypriot schools documents may be national, e.g. from MOEC, such as student registration forms, or may be locally constructed for and by school personnel, such as policy documents. The documents used for this study were selected carefully, comprising only those necessary for the school’s function which each school headteacher would normally develop for their individual school. Moreover, to evaluate the school’s current vision, only policy documents created for the specific year in which the research was carried out were chosen. To help to assess teamworking, documents listing staff and student responsibilities were collected, with a copy of the school’s current timetable and calendar.

Challenges of translation

Mythic travellers like Jason seem to have made themselves understood wherever they travelled. Twenty-first century travellers are less fortunate, often having to invest in dictionaries or translation apps in order to communicate, and modern researchers working in two or more languages have to address issues of translation.

In Cyprus, a local form of Greek is widely spoken, but the researcher for this project had the advantage of being both a Cypriot and a teacher, so she and all her potential respondents, working as professionals in education, were therefore also familiar with Standardised Greek. Since research exemplars already existed in Standardised Greek, both interviews and questionnaires were carried out in Standardised Greek.

However, this research quest had a further goal, in that it was to be submitted formally for a doctorate to be validated by a British university. Data were collated and analysed in Standard Greek, thus internally within the project there were no issues of translation, but ultimately they had to be presented in English. Like Jason, the researcher's quest for credible methodology eventually had to confront the challenging dragons of translation and cross-cultural comparability through careful research design (Sopromadze and Moorosi, 2016).

If translations of the interview transcripts for this study had been made for the purposes of analysis, despite every effort of ensuring accurate translation, there would have been the risk of failing to draw on the exact meanings they contained. For this reason the texts for analysis remained in Standardised Greek and were analysed using Standardised Greek terms for emerging themes.

The questionnaire used drew on one which already existed in Standardised Greek and had been used in another study exploring EI in the Cypriot context (Taliadorou and Pashiardis, 2015). Consequently there was less danger of respondents misunderstanding a question because of inaccurate or inappropriate translation. Data were analysed in Standardised Greek.

Documents did not require translation into English. They were analysed in Standardised Greek.

Following the guidance of Sopromadze and Moorosi (2016), not until analysis was completed was all relevant exemplar evidence translated into English for presentation in the final thesis. However if a researcher and a translator are the same person, translation may be influenced and limited

by biographical, cultural and knowledge issues of the translator (Birbili, 2000). For this reason, transcribed material from interviews, questionnaires and documentary analysis was checked meticulously for accuracy by a bilingual critical friend of the researcher.

The pursuit of analysis

All data collected were thematically analysed within Mayer and Salovey's (1997) four EI domains. The researcher identified patterns and interpreted them (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017) following the "six-phase guide" of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 5). This approach was chosen because using themes and codes allowed for detailed levels of analysis to be applied (Gray, 2014). The researcher considered using software packages for analysis, but ultimately rejected them, preferring to analyse data manually across the transcripts, documents, and questionnaires to reflect upon each headteacher's responses to identify how, and how fully, their claims were supported by the responses of deputy headteachers, staff, and school documents which they had written.

Retrospectively reviewing the quest

This article offers a new perspective on collecting data about the influence of headteachers' EI on teamworking and vision. All methods had been used before but not for this specific purpose. Was the mission fulfilled?

The methodology evolved was successfully used in three Cypriot primary schools, and justifies the use of qualitative approaches to seek a deep understanding of these social phenomena (Blaxter et al., 2010), to interpret EI leadership behaviours and understand participants' actions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The headteachers' perceptions, collected through semi-structured interviews, were triangulated by analysis of documents which they had written, interviews with deputy headteachers, and questionnaires to classroom teachers.

Early clarity about defining EI through Mayer and Salovey (1997) enabled comparison with other studies which used this source, most notably those of Kafetsios and Zampetakis (2008) and Taliadorou and Pashiardis (2015) who also recommended the ability EI model. In turn this study

itself further validated the trustworthiness of the Mayer and Salovey (1997) model for scrutinising EI.

The decision to use qualitative rather than quantitative approaches enabled interpretation of how leaders' EI influences their leadership. The data were fruitful, supporting Clifton's (2011) claim that case study with qualitative approaches is an effective way to gather data for in-depth scrutiny. Moreover, it was manageable for a single researcher to collect in-depth information about the impact of leaders' EI on shared vision and team-working in their schools. This means that future researchers with limited resources, particularly of time, can still be confident they can access such data. Furthermore, we suggest it would be possible by the same means to explore other leadership activities to identify how they are influenced by leaders' EI.

The choice of semi-structured interviews gave participant headteachers the chance to reflect on their perceptions and talk about their daily, emotional, social interaction in their workplace. The level of detail in the findings is something which no quantitative research, however large-scale, would be likely to provide.

The quest described here ultimately adhered to its aims. Moreover the researcher duly collected her own personal Golden Fleece, the doctorate she desired to achieve.

In light of the scarcity of existing research relating to this specific context, the study has not only provided greater insights into EI and leadership, but it has also given voices to a group of people whose perceptions of EI have not been explored extensively in the leadership literature. Some of their followers have also been given a voice. However, resource constraints made it impossible to explore the views of non-teaching staff, or of parents and the wider local communities of the schools. This is information which future research Argonauts may wish to seek, and for whom it is hoped this methodological map may be useful.

Since this project, a worldwide pandemic has profoundly affected educational leaders, whose operational contexts may have been considerably reframed by it (Harris, 2020). However, early research findings such as Gurr and Drysdale (2020), Beauchamp et al. (2021) and Greany et al. (2021) suggest that leaders' emotional resilience has been a key factor in their capacity to lead in such challenging times. We suggest therefore that there is urgent need for more enquiry into the conscious use of EI, to enable educational leaders and their followers to understand how best to use it to promote effective outcomes and sustain personal wellbeing of both leaders and followers.

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