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# Exploring Interpersonal Emotional Intelligence Awareness of School Leadership in Enhancing Social Justice in Schools

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to explore the interpersonal emotional intelligence (EI) awareness of school leadership in enhancing social justice aspects such as equity, access, and inclusive participation in selected schools in the Libode Educational District of the Eastern Cape Province. This District, like many other rural Districts in South Africa, faces serious leadership issues that impact how school leaders enact social justice practices in schools. In this study, the relevance of EI, especially as it relates to school leaders' attitude towards social justice practices and their expected ability to interpret and manage their own emotions and therefore act in an appropriate way in their leadership role, cannot be underestimated. This qualitative study employed twelve in-depth interviews with research participants that included six purposively selected principals and six deputy principals. Further data collection and content analysis consisted of six focus group (FG) interviews with heads of departments (HODs) and school governing bodies (SGBs). The iterative interaction between data collection, analysis and interpretation was utilised. This was done in order to enhance reliability and validity. This was also intended at evolving categories and sub-categories from which findings might arise. Inductive reasoning was employed by utilising supportive statements gathered by means of analysing the explorative and descriptive interview results, as well as by using accessible and appropriate literature connected to the topic being discoursed. The key findings that emerged through the descriptive, exploratory, and social interpretive perspectives used in this study were supportive of the interconnectedness between the interpersonal EI abilities of social-awareness and relationship-management in enhancing social justice practices with regard to equity, access, and inclusive participation.

**Keywords:** Access, Emotional Intelligence, EI, Equity, Social Justice, Inclusive Participation

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## 1. Introduction

The education system within the present South African political milieu is emotionally charged, DoE [12]. This is because more work is expected from school leaders (SL), as the education system experiences a paradigm shift from autocratic to democratic and socially just forms of leadership, DoE [12]. During the South African apartheid period, communities and schools experienced social exclusion, Miller and Martin [31], Mafora [26]. Social exclusion, according to Mafora [26], Penteado and Skovsmore [37] is a practice during apartheid rule where people, particularly the black population were disadvantaged of their social,

economic and human rights like the right to equal education.

The Libode Education District is one of the most rural school districts in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, DoE [13]. It is also amongst the least resourced educational districts in the country in terms of infrastructure, coupled with inadequate teachers, DoE [13], Mafora [26]. There is a defining feature of South Africa's educational labour market in that principals and educators are unequally posted across schools, with these leaders often reporting marked differences in terms of qualifications and school governing experience, DoE [13]. Another observation from the South African Labour Ministry is that there is an unequal provision of educational resources to schools such as those in rural

areas like Libode, Mncube [33]. These factors, according to current studies, have adversative effects on how fairly and sufficiently schools align with social justice aspects like equity, access, and inclusive participation, Mafora [26], Mncube [33]. It is for this reason that Mafora [26] contends the need for the country to hold social justice discourse in schools, especially in respect to Apartheid's history of social injustices, in order to enhance social justice transformation.

During the apartheid period in South Africa, social exclusion was broadly practiced in communities, and especially in schools, Mafora [26]. Within the existing, democratic, South African political dispensation, Pastor [36] confirm that schools in diverse communities, such as those in the Libode District, with encounters pertaining to social justice need leadership that can attend to the social, political, and emotional needs of teachers, learners, and parents (i.e. all stakeholders) in a school.

Research shows that most school leaders in South Africa, and particularly in rural educational districts like Libode, attain their certificates from universities and state-funded teacher-training colleges that stress compliance with the apartheid central government, Bush [6]. This could suggest that school leaders may disregard social justice values in their leadership approaches even in the post-apartheid age where every state policy is geared towards social justice, Pastor [36]. According to DoE [13], school leaders may refute social justice reforms because of their lack of understanding pertaining to current social and democratic transformations. Miller and Martin [31] avow that school leaders need to develop emotional intelligence (EI) abilities for efficacy and efficiency in their leadership role. The authors also suggest that EI could spur approaches that foster social justice practices and emotionally sound relationships for the diverse needs of school stakeholders, Miller and Martin [31].

The birth of democracy in 1994 in South Africa did not only kindle political transformation in the country, but also sparked a paradigm shift towards educational change and social justice, Mafora [26], Mafora [27], Mncube [33]. After 1994, the country embarked on a national agenda to address the social, economic, political, and educational injustices of the past with regard to equity, access, and inclusive participation in schools, DoE [13]. It is in this respect that the South African Schools' Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996 was introduced in order to spearhead the transformational process in education towards social justice Bush [6]. Due to the dynamic nature of the country's educational system in the post-apartheid era, leaders of schools who are often referred to as school management teams (SMTs) and school governing bodies (SGBs) need to develop strong interpersonal EI abilities, Miller and Martins [31]. SMTs usually comprise of principals, deputy principals and heads of departments (HODs). SMTs and SGBs ensure the effective day-to-day running of a school, DoE [13]. Pastor [36] proposes that enhanced EI in these leadership areas may empower school leaders to better deal with the transformational processes taking place in the present

political and educational environment. This is because improved EI could boost school leaders' abilities to effectively deal with the complex and sensitive social justice issues they may encounter in their schools, Notman [35], Farahbakhsh [16]. As part of the national agenda for social justice practices in society, school leaders are expected to advance practices that promote social justice and acknowledge people's emotions Pastor [36]. Nevertheless, Farahbakhsh [16] posits that there seems to be a comparative lack of social coherence in South Africa's politically multifaceted school environments, which sometimes tends to create tensions in schools. Miller and Martin [31] further maintain that school leaders with high EI capabilities are likely to become key players in dealing with social justice challenges. The authors also note that interpersonal EI appears to be essential for people's social-awareness and relationship-management for building socially sound relationships, particularly in diverse and transformative learning environments, Miller and Martin [31]. In addition, Singh, Manser, and Mestry [44] declare that interpersonal EI has become essential on how leaders, today, engage with issues of anxiety, conflict resolution, collaboration and teamwork, and ambiguity in the workplace. Waite and Brook [48] also reason that current trend in school leadership are geared towards a process that embraces individuals' feelings and aims at meeting social justice ends. This could suggest that the most effective leaders within the South African schooling context would be those who are able to combine not only EI and their intelligence quotient (IQ), but also social justice practices, Miller and Martin [31]. This present case study, therefore, sought to explore the interpersonal EI awareness of school leadership in relation to their enhancing social justice in schools.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Integrated Theoretical Framework

For researchers and the academia to augment the understanding of how effective and efficient their efforts are, they have a propensity of utilising incorporated, manifold theoretical approaches (Crosby, DicClemente and Salazar [10], Spence, Lachlan, and Rainer [46]. In this study, Goleman's [19] model of EI, as well as Rawls's [38] and Miller's [32] social justice theories were integrated to devise the theoretical framework of this study.

### 2.2. Emotional Intelligence Concept

Goleman's [19] model categorises EI in terms of a broad scope of competencies, namely: self-awareness, which is related to knowing how one feels; self-management, which relates to an individual's ability to regulate stressful emotions, such as anxiety or anger, to restrain emotional impulsivity, and to be unperturbed in tense situations; social awareness, which is related to an individual having empathy and the capacity to pick up on non-verbal signs, especially with regard to unconstructive emotions, such as anger, fear,

or threat, and to judge the trustworthiness of other people; and relationship management, which focuses on an individual's ability to adjust themselves according to the emotions of others, their capability to motivate, and their level of skill to develop others while resolving differences. For the purposes of this paper, the last two branches of EI, namely 'social-awareness' and 'relationship-management', have been chosen. These concepts relate to school leaders' interpersonal EI abilities that may make them better aware of others as school leaders, recognise others' strengths and limitations, and to manage them in a way that, they could freely articulate their feelings and opinions appropriately.

It should be noted that Goleman's initial work on EI has been condemned for indicating, from the start, that EI is a type of intelligence. For example, Locke [24] claims that the concept of EI is, in itself, a delusion of the intelligence construct, and provides an explanation that 'intelligence' can only ever be intelligence – that there is not another type of intelligence. However, Locke's [24] assertion has not held up under more recent research hence this study is aligned to Goleman's model Notman [35], Farahbakhsh [16]. EI, when integrated in a school leadership concept, Goleman's model of intelligence may, perhaps, enhance school leaders' ability to understand how others' emotions work in order to augment their social justice practices with regard to equity, access, and inclusive participation.

### **2.3. Social Justice as a Construct**

Waite and Brooks [48] state "that social justice means eliminating structural inequities in society by dissolving supremacy and privileges while promoting fairness for marginalised people". In this study, the social justice construct is informed by the popular notion held by various critical theorists that studies on social justice should entirely consider assisting those who are marginalised in society in terms of equity, access, and inclusive participation (Karpinski [21], Theoharis [47], Zembylas [49]. Bell [2] refers to social justice as the full and equal participation of all those within a society; that the society, in turn, is mutually shaped to meet peoples' needs, and protect the rights and opportunities for all. Thus, social justice has to be grounded on subverting the advancement of marginalisation and exclusive ideas, Adelman and Taylor [1], Fennimore [17], Theoharis, [47].

In this study, social justice is considered to be the reclaiming and advancing of school stakeholders' rights in accordance with equity, access, and inclusive participation. It is asserted, in this study, that these social justice aspects may be enhanced by school leaders' EI interpersonal dispositions.

### **2.4. Interpersonal EI and Social Justice**

Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton [5] contend that school leaders are purposefully placed in school leadership; hence, the role they play significantly influences the school atmosphere in relation to ensuring social justice practices. Singh and Manser [45] also claim that in order for leaders to sustain social justice practices in schools, it is very

imperative that they become acquainted with others' emotions and preconceptions, and that they should be able to identify issues that may stir up emotions. These claims align with other research that has proven that school leaders with good interpersonal EI are more likely to become good leaders, Bryk et al [5], Harkness, Kefalas, Delgado, McCloughen, and Foster [20].

Current researchers have observed progressively a linear connection between EI and interpersonal competencies, Ruiz-Aranda, et al [39], Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka [42]. Ruiz et al [39] are of the opinion that leaders with high interpersonal EI competence are likely to collaborate more with others, which serves as a signal indicating a pleasant relationship between individuals. This could mean that EI interpersonal competence may assist school leaders in familiarizing to other's behaviour and live well with them owing to sound interpersonal relationships. Literature abounds with discussions about the interconnectedness between leaders' ability to perceive, comprehend, apply and manage emotions in themselves and their aptitude to do the same with others' feelings, which constitutes a distinct form of intelligence Mayer & Salovey [29], Ruiz et al [39]. Extremera and Rey [14] note that workplace conflicts like those in schools are naturally unavoidable, as leaders may hurt their followers or vice versa. However, the authors assert that leaders with EI interpersonal competence may be able to easily forgive others by creating a good rapport with them. These may undoubtedly promote effective management of schools owing to good interpersonal relations. Brackett, Warner, and Bosco [4] argue that EI augments leaders' skills with regard to promoting social justice practices. Moreover, emotionally intelligent leaders may have a positive outlook and work hard to avoid conflicts with other people.

Fantini-Hawel, Brasseur, and Mikolajczak [15] maintain that people with high interpersonal EI competence are often able to identify others' emotions, express themselves in a more socially acceptable way, understand causes and effects of emotions, and use them to enhance judgment and actions. Pastor [36] admit that interpersonal EI competence in individuals, especially leaders, could help influence and ease relationships among people, which may contribute greatly to sound social cohesion and emotional self-control. This could mean that leaders with interpersonal EI competence may be able to create strong social relations that will promote equity, access and inclusive participation in schools. Goleman [19] agree that interpersonal EI competence could assist leaders in developing social competencies like social skills and empathy and in analyzing their behaviour and others in an institution. Goleman [19] reveals that social skills enhance good communication, conflict management, and team collaboration, which are clear signs of leadership that may lead to social justice. Goleman [19] explains that empathy fosters understanding and the leveraging of diversity to maintain social justice practices in institutions like South African schools with diverse populations.

Singh, Manser, and Mestry [44] affirm that interpersonal

EI could propel school leaders to create a platform that is conducive to all, who are involved in the day-to-day running of a school, having a say. Singh [43] mentions that, for all stakeholders to feel welcome in the school, it is imperative that leaders afford them the chance to play a participatory role in the school leadership as a principle of social justice practice. Goleman [18] is of the view that interpersonal EI could help school leaders to connect smoothly with others, be able to recognize the feelings and reactions of others and lead schools according to social justice principles. This study believes that school leadership is more about the interaction between leaders, learners, teachers, and parents alike. This could mean that effective leadership would be solidly grounded in the interpersonal EI ability to provide solutions to complicated social issues, such as equity, access and inclusive participation in schools, Pastor [36].

To this end, interpersonal EI may enable school leaders to learn from their mistakes and correct themselves in order to better relate with others in the future, Singh [43].

Based on these assertions, in this study, the integration of the constructs of EI and social justice were used to generate a reasonable theoretical framework that could be used to address the following research question:

*How can interpersonal EI awareness of school leadership be related to equity, access, and inclusive participation as an aspect of social justice?*

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

With regard to the multifaceted theoretical framework formulated, this qualitative and explorative study utilised the social-constructivist perspective to engage in the co-construction of meaning-making between the research participants and the researcher (Merriam [30]). In so doing, six focus group (FG) interviews with six participants in each group, together with twelve in-depth interviews comprising six school principals and six deputy principals as well as document analysis were conducted for the purposes of data collection, emergent and inductive data analysis, and interpretation. Merriam [30] states that research design for qualitative research is flexible and emergent in nature. This is so because, the researcher is able to restructure interview questions for participants' easy understanding and also allow questions for clarity so that participants can provide credible answers, Merriam [30].

The purposive sampling approach was used to select research participants. This was to find relevant people to answer interview questions, in this case Principals, Deputy Principals and teachers. In essence, it assisted in choosing information-rich research participants, Chaska [7]. Ethical considerations were taken into account and were deemed cardinal to the research in order to gain access to the research field. As such, an ethical clearance from Nelson Mandela University (the awarding University) was obtained to conduct research interviews in the Libode Education District Schools, Kimmel [23]. Furthermore, permission was sought from the Libode District Director of Education as well as the

purposively selected schools' Principals and the research participants. This was done after participants were informed about the rationale of the research study, Chaska [7]. Research participants were also informed about the manner in which the research would be carried out, Kimmel [23]. Written consent was obtained from all interviewees, and all of them were assured of confidentiality, Sakalta, Hunziker and Shaw [40]. For participants to be certain of research confidentiality, they were given a guarantee that all information concerning their identity would be treated confidentially, Chaska [7]. In this regard, all responses provided by the research participants were treated with strict secrecy, Creswell and Clark [9]. Ethical confidentiality was maintained to ensure that participants provide credible and reliable information with the sense that their identity would not be exposed. In ensuring this, participating schools and participants were assigned codes instead of names. For instance, schools were named School 1, 2, and 3, for example, while participants were named Focus group (FG) and In-depth 1, 2, and 3 and so on. In this study, reliability and validity were seen as paramount. Reliability is the extent at which participants responds and research findings can be relied upon, Davies and Dodd [11]. In this study, reliability was used for the purpose of creating understanding and obtaining insights into school leaders' awareness of interpersonal EI in enhancing social justice aspects like equity, access, and inclusive participation. On other hand, Validity is the extent of sureness of participants' responses, Davies and Dodd [11]. In this study, validity was established by utilising quality, rigour and trustworthiness, for the purpose of establishing confidence in the findings, Davies and Dodd [11] thus, the qualitative methodological strategies employed included triangulation, researcher reflexivity, member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, structural corroboration, and thick description.

Triangulation was used to explain the richness and involvedness of the interconnectedness of EI and social justice perceptions of school leaders. Triangulations were done on responses from In-depth and focus group participants as well as on document analysis.

The utilisation of triangulation afforded the researcher the confidence to reflect on the research assumptions, as well as the social constructivist perspective. This resulted in prolonged engagement in the field. Thus, data generated through triangulation was not simply artefacts of one specific method of collection but became a structural corroboration of all the research methods employed. Although triangulation on its own was not enough for purposes of qualitative reliability and validity, its advantages could be linked to the methodological strategies that sought a more holistic view of school leaders' perceptions on EI and social justice. Triangulation provided a rich description of the phenomena and prolonged engagement in the field.

The methodological strategies were employed during the process of investigation so as to avoid the risk of threats to reliability and validity at the end of the investigation, Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers [34].

It became essential to move back and forth between design and enactment to ensure congruency among question construction, literature, sampling, data collection, strategies, and analysis, Morse et al [34]. Responses were thus methodically checked, focus was sustained, suitability of data and the conceptual work of analysis and interpretation of the research participants' perceptions were analysed, confirmed and verified continually to ensure basic validation and thick description.

## 4. Findings

The data was structured under two broad themes: understanding school leadership awareness of interpersonal EI social-awareness to enhance social justice practices with regard to equity, access, and inclusive participation; and understanding school leadership awareness of interpersonal EI relationship-management to enhance social justice practices with regard to equity, access, and inclusive participation. The themes were organised by undertaking cautious analysis of the data and utilising relevant quotes from all the data sources to support findings.

### 4.1. Theme 1: Interpersonal EI Perception of School Leadership Social-awareness and Social Justice

This first theme focussed on social-awareness and how this aspect of EI might facilitate the ability of school leadership to become acquainted with other's feelings. Denzin and Lincoln [12] explain social-awareness as taking into consideration others' feelings, needs and concerns which mainly revolves around acknowledging emotional state of those around you. The authors note that such understanding can cause people to become more honest with themselves and others, Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston Greeson, and Jedlicka [42], Goleman [18]. Interpersonal EI determines one's ability to sustain good working relationships with others, Manser [28]. Social-awareness interpersonal EI abilities according to this study include empathy; developing others; service orientation, leveraging diversity, and political awareness, Manser [28]. For the purpose of this article and this theme perceptions of school leaders on empathy as interpersonal EI social-awareness ability to enhance social justice in school was considered. Goleman [19], Luca and Tarricone [25] contend that empathy is understanding and interpreting others' feeling and being able to identify with their views on issues through their perspective. The authors further describe empathy as cultivating rapport with people from different culture or races. This explanation can best be suited to the South African context with diverse racial and cultural groupings. The central objective of this first theme was to understand the research participants' perceptions of their social-awareness capabilities in relation to social justice. For example, focus Group 6 stated that:

*We always try to show love and concern to everyone irrespective of their background, race, and gender or belief system in the school as leaders. By so doing we win their trust because they get to know that we care about them. They,*

*in turn, show their commitment and appreciation to us.*

The above response showed that the school leaders were sensitive to the social needs of all stakeholders of the school and gladly offered appropriate assistance to them. This response revealed the empathetic nature of the school leaders. Book [3] defines empathy as the capacity to see the world from another persons' perspective. Goleman [19], Luca and Tarricone [25] affirm that an empathetic leader has an awareness of the diversity of personalities, and accepts the diversity of people and the impact culture can have on interaction within a team environment with regard to equity, access, and inclusivity. In-depth 5 also stated that:

*I am someone who has a soft heart to always help those in need. In my assistance, I don't discriminate. I also appreciate every small effort that learners or teachers may put up. I see this as a motivating factor for them to keep on trying and doing their best.*

The response from this participant indicated that the school leaders always put themselves in the position of their learners and teachers and were ready to offer help when needed. This response revealed that the school leaders saw those around them as equal and therefore showed no partiality when the need arose for them to provide a helping hand. This indicates a practice regarding equity, access. In-depth 3 also stated that:

*I don't concentrate much on people weakness to judge them, rather when I see any of their setbacks; I find goods means of helping them to overcome them. More especially assisting teachers in chapters which are difficult for them to teach. I also provide assistance to teachers with diverse problems.*

Considering the above response, the school leaders were conscious of how they perceived and treated other people. The response suggested to a large extent how the school leaders had the emotional desire to help others rather than accusing them. The response further indicated how leaders were prepared to offer assistance to others for them to be at the same level in order that they can collectively work.

Generally, these responses show that school leaders were aware of the potential values of sound social interactions and were taking initial steps of doing what they deemed to be the right things so as to ensure equity, access, and inclusive participation in their schools. The response further advances Goleman's [18] view that people with high levels of interpersonal EI could help enhance the integrity of their organisation by not making bad decisions through impulse behaviours. This could mean that interpersonal EI could help school leaders stay calm, make thoughtful decisions, and manage their emotions when dealing with social justice issues in their schools.

### 4.2. Theme 2: Interpersonal EI Awareness of School Leadership Relationship-Management and Social Justice

This second theme dealt with school leaders' relationship-management. The theme involves skills that could stir up satisfying responses in others. Denzin and Lincoln [12]

explain that, relationship-management, focuses on managing others' internal states and impulses to foster cordiality, particularly in relation to handling of social justice issues such as equity, access, and inclusive participation. Relationship-management interpersonal EI abilities according to this study include communication, influence, conflict management, leadership, change agent, building bonds, teamwork and cooperation. For the purpose of this article and theme perceptions of school leaders on communication as interpersonal EI relationship-management ability to enhance social justice in school was considered. This sub-category on communication involves data on the proficiency of school leaders in fostering open conversation and staying receptive to both good and bad news. It is also about how clear and convincing the stance of school leaders are on social justice practices in their schools is. On this note, In-depth 4 stated that:

*I don't say what I think but what I know. I discuss with my teacher's policies on social justice practices like equity, access, and inclusive participation in my school and motivate them to accept them in a positive way. Really, there are some state policies favouring learners which teachers actually find difficult to accept. But I do advise them to take them as they are because there is nothing, we can do to change them.*

This response indicated the participant's self-assertiveness. The response showed that the participant read in order to know and understand more about issues before discussing them with his staff. The interview also revealed how the principal sought to maintain social justice practices, which ensured that learners' rights to access and equity in education were enhanced. The response further suggested to a great extent the need for school leaders to learn how to persuade people to embrace a difficult stance, even if they have reservations. It also was clear that soft words not coercive ones can soften even the hardest heart of individuals to tune in to authority. Regarding the same response, Focus Group 2 stated that:

*We try not to use abusive words but always try to remain polite so that our teachers can listen and understand us. We as leaders need to be good communicators, we need to also listen to our teachers, learners and the SGBs members and understand their views. We must also develop an intelligence of reading the emotions of the people.*

In this interview, the HOD believed that being a good listener helps people, especially leaders, to hear and know more about what is happening around them and what people want them to do. This could eventually help school leaders to modify and reshape their original speech. According to this participant, registering emotional clues and tuning to comments from others could help read and identify the right time to speak or act.

In-depth 8 stated:

*There are many things I don't ask my learners or teachers to do. I first start doing what I want them to do, and immediately they see me doing it they will also follow. So I believe we leaders need to do the basic things about leadership and get in-service training in leadership skills.*

In this response, the deputy principal argued that it was also prudent sometimes for school leaders to remain silent and allow their actions to speak for them. In this regard, people may be more than committed to doing something, even if it is abusive without complaining, because they were not forced to do that. The deputy principal, however, admitted the need for an on-going training of leaders to equip themselves with demands that come with social justice practices in schools. In support of the statement above, Focus Group 1 stated how they go about utilizing all channels of communication in their school:

*We make sure that we utilized all the channels of communication in the school in a decision-making process. This includes the SMTs, SGBs, teaching and non-teaching staff, and representative council of learners. This enabled all stakeholders to freely express their opinions on the matter and to come to a concrete agreement on what should be done. When this happens, they tend to own what is agreed upon.*

This response gave an account of HODs who understood and were applying the structural channel of communication in their schools. The findings revealed how school leaders were ready to listen, seeking mutual understanding and welcoming sharing of views and information in their schools. The response again expressed that people tend to own, implement, monitor, and assess what they were fully involved in. Kaur [22] and Clark [8] argues that the biggest challenge facing today's school leaders is how they could make schools work effectively and equitably for all its stakeholders. The authors maintain that society is looking for socially just leadership, which includes school leaders employing better communications and inclusive participation procedures to discuss complex social issues faced by schools. Document analysis reflected that all the schools of the study were involved in proper channels of communications to bring all stakeholders on board. In general, the findings suggest that school leaders who could develop their interpersonal relationship-management abilities would be well equipped to handle social justice practices in schools.

## 5. Discussion

Base on the understanding that school leadership is concerned with influencing other stakeholders, the theoretical framework of this study, as well as the reviewed literature, highlights that in order for school leaders to effectively and positively influence others, they need to be able to utilise their EI abilities in leading, inspiring, and guiding the social interaction between school stakeholders and the school community to enhance social justice practices, Pastor [36]. The interpersonal EI capability, which was the main focus of this study, was aimed at equipping school leaders with the abilities and skills needed for better understanding others' emotions in order to foster and implement social justice transformation in their schools.

The integration between these constructs (i.e. EI and social justice) is refined in school leaders' interactions that are

informed by their school atmosphere and experiences, as well as by the values that eventually shape their leadership profiles and direct their performances, Scott [41]. Thus, based on this study's findings, as school leadership work and learn from their past experiences, their perceptions of interpersonal EI may well allow them to recognise emotional attitude of others in response to the challenges they experience in their schools with regard to social justice. Recent literature further indicates that South Africa has a range of policies and legal frameworks to intensify social justice practices in the post-apartheid era, especially in education, Mafora [26].

The findings of this study indicate that school leadership's developing of interpersonal EI social-awareness and relationship-management abilities could help them to better understand and manage other stakeholders' emotions, which, in turn, could help them to facilitate and promote social justice practices in their schools. It is recommended, therefore, that relevant stakeholders, such as the government and teaching programmes, work to empower school leaders' understanding of their interpersonal EI. In addition, it is recommended that school leadership be equipped through in-service training to see themselves as, and to become, social justice change mediators within their school contexts. This would capacitate school leadership to become more aware of others' emotions and be better able to manage emotions in others as they work to enhance social justice aspects like equity, access, and inclusive participation. Further research is still needed in other areas, like putting programmes in place to investigate how interpersonal EI might improve quantitative studies and comparisons between schools with high-level EI leaders and that of those with low-level EI leaders. It was rich from the data gathered in this study that school leaders could acknowledge others' interpersonal EI abilities. Nonetheless, the school leaders still needed to improve their ability to understand and manage others' disruptive emotions in order to relate well with them for the purpose of social justice. Inductively contended, the school leadership in this study needed a better understanding of the link between other school stakeholders' emotions and their behaviour. Such an understanding becomes even more important when it is clear that interpersonal EI is essential, particularly when taking into account the interconnected theoretical framework between EI and social justice.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore the interpersonal EI awareness of school leadership in enhancing social justice aspects like equity, access, and inclusive participation in selected Libode Education District schools in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This study added to the body of literature on EI, particularly as it referred to the capacity of school leaders. As social justice is one of the key factors in the national agenda in the post-apartheid era, and in schools in particular, the addition of EI, mainly in the improvement of the interpersonal EI of school leadership, could serve

school leaders greatly, as they are task to enhance social justice practices in schools. The literature review Goleman [18] indicated that leadership success often depends on their development in EI. This means that one of the crucial roles that teacher-training and tertiary institutions in the country could play would be to provide grounds and programmes that promote the development of interpersonal EI. Such EI improvement, in turn, could arouse, guide, and mould the creative and rational abilities of school leaders to better promote social justice practices in the country.

This study also contributed to the research on social justice, which aims to redress the injustices of the past political regime in South Africa, Waite and Brooks [48]. In this study, social justice was regarded as practices in society, especially in schools which could enhance equity, access and inclusive participation for all stakeholders. Furthermore, this study established that the relevance of interpersonal EI, especially as it relates to school leaders' attitudes towards social justice practices and their expected ability to interpret and manage others' emotions and, therefore, act in an appropriate way in their leadership roles, cannot be ignored.

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