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Online Instructors' Use of Emotional Intelligence in Higher Education Distance Learning

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Aprile Marie Williams

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University

2021

Abstract

Online Instructors' Use of Emotional Intelligence in Higher Education Distance Learning

by

Aprile Marie Williams

MEd, Concordia University, 2014

BS, Western Connecticut State University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2020

Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been related to facets of higher education success in brick and mortar environments. Little is known, however, about how EI manifests in higher education distance learning (HEDL) environments. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore HEDL undergraduate and graduate instructor perceptions of their use of EI so that best practices could be identified for online teaching. Guided by transformative emotional intelligence theory and the emotional learning system model, the 3 research questions were designed to clarify online instructors' EI knowledge, EI skills and strategies used by online instructors, and instructors' perceptions about the importance of instructor-student relationships for online student success. A purposeful sample of 13 participants was recruited using 2 online social networks and 1 university instructor participant pool. Selection criteria stratified the sample based on gender, level taught (undergraduate/graduate), and years teaching in HEDL. Semi-structured interview transcripts were analyzed using first-cycle ad hoc coding followed by second-cycle NVivo coding. Member checks and peer debriefs validated the data analysis and resulting themes. The primary themes included (a) identifying, understanding, and managing emotions, (b) using positive influence in dealings with students, and (c) the importance of instructor-student rapport. Interpreting the themes with recent literature revealed that EI-centric skills modeled by HEDL instructors improve self-management skills, engender positive emotional connections, and increase cognitive awareness for instructors and their students. Higher education instructors who model EI in HEDL environments improve instructional practice in ways that lead to positive social change by improving the quality of the HEDL experience for themselves and their students.

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Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this study to my husband, Army LTC Eugene Unique Williams; without your support and encouragement this entire process would not have been possible. Thank you for pushing me, giving me reasons to move forward, and providing me with the means to work on my doctorate that I otherwise would not have had. You have been my number one support and I cannot thank you enough. I love you always, forever, and a day.

More than anything, I am humbled by the patience, understanding, perseverance, and pure FAITH that God has instilled in me throughout this journey. In times when I wanted to give up God pushed me to keep going in ways only He is able to provide. In providing the space in the Universe for me to write, focus, and keep my sanity during trying times, my faith had been tested... I prevailed. Thanks to ongoing meditation and yoga practices, I centered myself in the Universe in a peaceful way that allowed me to be successful in this endeavor.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background	3
Problem Statement	6
Purpose of the Study	9
Research Questions	9
Conceptual Framework	10
Nature of the Study	12
Definitions	13
Assumptions	14
Scope and Delimitations	16
Limitations	16
Significance	17
Significance to Practice	17
Significance to Theory	18
Significance to Social Change	19
Summary	19
Chapter 2: Literature Review	21
Literature Search Strategy	22
Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation	24

Emotional Intelligence Models	24
Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory.....	30
Appreciative Inquiry	40
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts.....	45
Self-Awareness	45
Social Awareness	47
Motivation.....	49
Community of Inquiry	50
Distance Education	53
Summary and Conclusions	54
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	57
Research Design and Rationale	57
Role of the Researcher	60
Methodology	61
Population and Participant Selection	61
Instrumentation	62
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection	63
Data Analysis Plan.....	67
Trustworthiness.....	71
Credibility	72
Transferability.....	73
Dependability.....	74

Confirmability.....	74
Ethical Procedures	75
Summary.....	77
Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	79
Setting	79
Data Collection	82
Data Analysis	84
Results	87
RQ1: Instructor EI Knowledge and Experience	88
RQ2: EI Skills Used by Online Instructors.....	91
RQ3: Importance of Instructor-Student Relationships	103
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	113
Credibility	113
Transferability.....	117
Dependability.....	118
Confirmability.....	118
Summary.....	119
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	122
Interpretation of the Findings.....	123
RQ1: Online Instructors' EI Knowledge and Experience.....	124
RQ2: EI Skills Used by Online Instructors.....	125
RQ 3: Importance of Instructor-Student Relationships	130

Limitations of the Study.....	135
Recommendations.....	136
Implications.....	141
Community of Inquiry, Transformative EI, and Emotional Learning System	142
Conclusion	143
References.....	144
Appendix A: Google Form Demographics Questionnaire.....	159
Appendix B: LinkedIn Participant Recruitment Post	160
Appendix C: EITRI Recruitment Letter	161
Appendix D: Interview Protocol.....	162
Appendix E: Emotional Intelligence Skills from the ESAP®	164
Appendix F: Permission to Use Emotional Skills Assessment Process® (ESAP®).....	167
Appendix G: NVivo 12 Word Trees in Their Entirety	168

List of Tables

Table 1. Epstein’s Comparison of the Experiential and Rational Systems.....	31
Table 2. Alignment of Research and Interview Questions	68
Table 3. Themes Identified by RQ.....	87
Table 4. Participant Experience with EI Research.....	91
Table 5. NVivo12 Word Frequency List RQ2.....	92
Table 6. NVivo12 Word Frequency List RQ3.....	104
Table 7. Participant use of “Important” Related to Answering RQ3.....	112
Table 8. Participant use of “Learning” w/ TEI Skills, Composite Scales, and Tenets. ...	128

List of Figures

Figure 1. The Paradigm Fulcrum	42
Figure 2. 4d model of appreciative inquiry and the ELS	43
Figure 3. The Emotional Learning System	47
Figure 4. Data Collection and Analysis Process	67
Figure 5. Participant Demographics by Gender.....	81
Figure 6. Participant Demographics by Years' Experience.....	82
Figure 7. Word Tree for the Root Word “Emotions”	89
Figure 8. Word Tree for the Root Word “Others”	90
Figure 9. Partial Word Trees for “Help”, “Helping”, and “Helps”	95
Figure 10. Partial Word Trees for “Learning”, “Learn” and “Learned”	98
Figure 11. EI Skills by Order of Frequency in Participant Interviews	130

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

An online instructors' ability to think critically about the strengths and weaknesses of emotional intelligence (EI) and its role in their own instructional practice is an important part of modelling EI with students and constitutes one level of self-awareness (Ebrahimi, Khoshsima, & Zare-Behtash, 2018; Gill, Ramsey, & Leberman, 2015). Self-awareness is described as a deep understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, motivations (Gill et al., 2015). Critical thinking requires deep thinking about topics, while EI contributes to self-efficacy and personality characteristics that either propel individuals or hold them back from success (Ebrahimi et al., 2018). Two EI dimensions that are important for adult learner engagement and success are self- and social-awareness, and these EI dimensions are most predictive of success when modelled by instructors (Ebrahimi et al., 2018). Emergent themes related to this topic include the importance of self-awareness to the development of EI (Gill et al., 2015) and that EI is related to both instructor efficacy (Majeski, Stover, Valais, & Ronch, 2017) and student success (Nelson, Low, & Hammett, 2017). Understanding EI and its tenants is a part of the self-reflective process through which online instructors become more aware of their use of EI to effectively model for students.

Online instructors' awareness of EI could affect their students' overall success in the online learning environment. The Community of Inquiry (COI) framework is strongly associated to online learning best practices. According to Majeski et al. (2017), EI skills are directly linked with teacher presence, social presence, and cognitive presence, which are the three presences found in the COI framework. The three presences are integral to

engendering successful online learning environments. Through the discovery of EI and the development of EI skills and dimensions, instructors engage learners and provide opportunities for personally meaningful learning, leading to more healthy and successful learning outcomes (Nelson et al., 2017). Online instructors' attentiveness to their words, actions, and influence over the observer is an important factor of self-awareness (Gill et al., 2015). EI can be implemented in the best practices of COI, resulting in instructor modeling of effective use of EI skills.

There are multiple models of EI found in the literature, and the challenge for researchers is deciding which EI model is best suited for their research. An additional challenge for this study was that EI has yet to serve as a theoretical or conceptual framework for a study of online learning, according to my review of the literature. Researchers have developed various models of EI, such as the ability model (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2012), trait model (Bar-On, 1997), and competency model (Goleman, 1998). Multiple models and definitions help in clarifying approaches to the conceptualization of the construct of EI (Emmerling, Shanwal, & Mandal, 2008). Yet, they do not provide a comprehensive framework for studying the phenomenon of EI as it relates to online learning.

Instructors' awareness of the impact of their use of EI modelling and teaching strategies in the online classroom can lead to stronger relationships with students and more successful course outcomes. Nelson and Low's (2011) educational model of transformative EI (TEI) emerged in the early 2000s, and provides a way to examine aspects of EI and their relationships to online learning. TEI is the learned ability to use

constructive thinking to behave wisely, leading to the confluence of developed skills and abilities to facilitate success (Nelson et al., 2017). The importance of strong EI indicators of self-motivation and self-awareness, along with social awareness, provides an association for the importance of instructional strategies and modelling tasks to take place. For this research, I focused on the EI skill of self-awareness to gain an understanding of online instructors' EI self-awareness and its effects on their practices.

The implications for this study for social change include enhancing understanding of how online instructor best practices involve EI self-awareness and modelling of EI skills. When instructors model EI, students learn to use their own EI strengths and awareness of weaknesses to excel both academically and personally (Nelson & Low, 2011). Because of the curative nature of self-awareness, a change occurs when individuals conscientiously pay attention to what they want to do and what they actually do (Gill et al., 2015). In this chapter, I present the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions (RQs) that inform the study. This chapter also includes sections on the theoretical foundation for the study; the nature of the study; and the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

The focus of this study was on instructors' self-awareness of their use of EI in the online learning environment. Majeski, Stover, and Valais (2018) found that instructors' emotional understanding and perception of their learners' emotional and cognitive needs set a foundation for learner success. Yet, researchers have not sufficiently studied online

instructors' modelling of EI with their students despite the evidence that EI is improved by promoting and modeling the use of active imagination, self-directed coaching, and guided mentoring (Nelson & Low, 2011; Nelson et al., 2017), all of which should be important behaviors for success in online learning environments. Therefore, it is up to instructors and trainers who teach from a framework of EI to provide adult learners with opportunities to develop EI meaningfully through their participation in online courses.

The link between EI and the emotional growth of adult learners is well established. Ebrahimi et al., (2018) found, for instance, that educators who assume responsibility for improving the emotional growth of their adult learners may be situated to achieve better learner engagement and facilitate higher academic achievement. Other researchers have found that, once a pattern is recognized, self-awareness is increased, resulting in impactful behavior change which is reflected on self and others (Gill et al., 2015). As Jafari (2017) noted, the recognition of EI as a teachable and crucial skill for effective practice in school, work, and life also helps develop in adult students an understanding of EI that equips them to gauge their stress levels and manage stress more efficiently. Jafari called for new EI research on the implementation of teaching strategies to inform and improve students' EI to help them succeed in the online learning environment. Through an understanding of online instructors' perceptions of their self-awareness of their use of EI, these strategies may be developed.

The effects of EI on the success of adult learners in distance education programs is worthy of attention. Researchers have shown a positive correlation between EI measurements and academic and professional achievement (Bao, Xue, & Kong , 2015;

Hamilton, 2017; Nafukho, Muyia, Farnia, Kacirek, & Lynham, 2016; Trejo, 2016). Bao et al. (2015) conducted a study on the role of EI on the disposition of mindfulness and stress finding that people with high levels of mindfulness were more likely to use their emotions to motivate themselves to enhance performance. Well-designed training to improve EI is attainable to both teach and learn the EI skills necessary for success both academically and in the workplace (Nafukho et al., 2016; Trejo, 2016). Other researchers have found that improving EI bolsters educational effectiveness and that EI may be a predictor of academic and career performance (Buzdar, Ali, & Tariq, 2016; Hamilton, 2017). Furthermore, with increased self-awareness, learners can take action to modify unhealthy thinking and behavior and proactively respond resulting in transformational outcomes (Gill et al., 2015). Self-awareness follows that instructor modelling of EI can help students focus on areas of strength to assist them in their success and to have a mindful understanding of areas in need of improvement to develop throughout their educational journeys.

In this basic qualitative study, I used open-ended interviews to gain an understanding of instructors' awareness of their use of EI in the online learning environments. The goal was to obtain knowledge about the effects of EI modelling and strategies on instructors' practices. Gaps in research include a lack of studies on the teaching of EI in the online platform (Cotler, DiTursi, Goldstein, Yates, & DelBelso, 2017; Jafari, 2017) and on online instructors' realization of the importance of EI in improving classroom practices (Hamilton, 2017). There is a need for further studies about instructors' efforts and effectiveness in creating an awareness of the importance of EI

(Dolev & Leshem, 2017). These gaps are important to explore due to the increased interest and availability of online learning programs especially at the higher education level.

Problem Statement

The problem investigated in this study was the need for understanding of instructor use of EI in higher education distance learning environments. Majeski et al. (2017) found that cultivating EI in higher education online course design and instruction helps to develop emotional astuteness, which in turn enhances student learning outcomes through heightened engagement. The focus of the authors' research was on the EI of students, however, and they concluded with the call for similar research on how online instructors cultivate EI through their own practices (Majeski et al., 2017). Because students who possess increased levels of EI skills do better in higher education environments, instructors who model those skills in online postsecondary learning environments may enhance student success by teaching EI through their example (Buzdar et al., 2016; Lanciano & Curci, 2015; Nelson et al., 2017; Stillman et al., 2018).

According to Hamilton (2018), the perceptions online instructors have about the use of EI may be critical to student success, yet how this phenomenon occurs in online environments is not well researched (Hamilton, 2017). For example, instructors' self-awareness is important for incorporating emotion in learning activities to create memorable learning experiences, but what instructor self-awareness looks like in online environments remains largely unknown (Hamilton, 2018). Although researchers have found that embedding EI improves educational effectiveness and performance for adult

learners (Buzdar et al., 2016; Ebrahimi et al., 2018; Hamilton, 2017), how EI manifests in higher education distance learning environments remains unclear (Hamilton, 2018; Jafari, 2017; Majeski et al., 2017). The phenomena under investigation mitigated the lack of research in this field.

With the expansion of online learning (Knapke et al., 2016), research has focused on decreasing attrition rates and developing strategies to engage and motivate online learners (Boton & Gregory, 2015). The challenges of student attrition in online environments have been related to meaningful engagement based on culture, motivation, the effectiveness of learning management systems, and the andragogical practices of instructors (Boton & Gregory, 2015), but not their EI. Instructors' perceptions of their own EI practices, and how those practices impact their students was a fundamental aspect of this study. In addition, instructor use of EI in face-to-face environments has been shown to be related to student engagement and meaningful student development (Nelson et al., 2017), but these relationships have been studied less in online environments (Hamilton, 2018; Lanciano & Curci, 2015; Majeski et al., 2017). Lanciano and Curci (2015) also reported that students who were skilled in emotional perception were able to perceive, use, understand, and manage their emotions to perform better in school, earn higher GPAs, and control anxiety related to increasing levels of academia.

Although the same relationship between emotional perceptiveness and outcomes would be true for online instructors, how online instructors display those critical self-awareness and self-control competencies remain unclear (Lanciano & Curci, 2015). Like Lanciano and Curci (2015) and Majeski et al. (2017), Buzdar et al. (2016) concluded that

the prevalence of EI had a significant effect on students' readiness to learn. More recently, researchers have suggested that EI is related to increased self-awareness of adult learners and facilitates rapport building that enhances chances for success in online learning (Ebrahimi et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2017). It stands to reason, yet remains unconfirmed, that EI among higher education instructors facilitates similar efficacy qualities for teaching in online environments.

Although online instructors' ability to model EI likely contributes to the facilitation of constructive thinking in students, Lanciano and Curci (2015) did not explore the EI of higher education online instructors. Stillman et al. (2018) conducted a long-term case study in which they measured the use of EI as a central pillar to assessing data to build a favorable school climate. The researchers used multifaceted EI assessments to provide effectiveness at increasing performance indicators of students (Stillman et al., 2018). The reflective practices of the students instilled by the instructor provided evidence to enhance the students' performance outcomes (Stillman et al., 2018). A conclusion drawn is that being aware of emotions makes instructors more effective at their jobs. In the teaching profession, effectiveness includes not only teaching ability but also emotions and an understanding of others' behaviors (Choi Sang Long et al., 2016). With a better understanding of EI competencies and skills, reflective practices can be instilled by online instructors.

With increased understanding of EI competencies, skills, and procedures used by online instructors, modeling strategies can be developed to increase the prevalence of EI in this dynamic education environment. EI is an essential factor in educational

achievement with an emphasis on self-direction and self-directed learning that can be taught in any classroom (Nelson et al., 2017). In distance education, self-directed learning and motivation are keys to the students' success and a pertinent aspect of instructor practices (Kauffman, 2015). The research questions for this study were aimed at understanding online instructor use of EI based on the transformative model presented in the conceptual framework of this study. Completing this study clarified how higher education instructors use EI in online environments, as well as documented best practices for doing so.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore instructor perceptions of their use of EI to guide their practice in undergraduate and graduate distance education courses. The use of EI in educational settings provides a constructive thinking process supported by the confluence of skills and abilities that are developed through experience, and it facilitates individual performance and success (Nelson & Low, 2011). EI, therefore, is essential for achieving academic success. Exploring instructor perceptions about their EI self-awareness through qualitative interviews helped to clarify the use of EI by instructors in higher education distance learning environments.

Research Questions

Researchers formulate research questions (RQ's) to guide their research in a focused, purposeful manner (Butin, 2009). The following research questions were used to guide my study.

RQ1: What are online instructors' knowledge and experience with EI, including consuming or supervising EI research?

RQ2: What emotional intelligence skills and strategies are used by online instructors to encourage productive online learning environments?

RQ3: What are online instructor perceptions about the importance of instructor-student relationships for fostering online student success?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was EI, more specifically, Nelson and Low's theory of TEI (Nelson & Low, 2011). TEI is research-derived, person-centered, skills-based, and relationship-focused (Nelson et al., 2017), and these tenets can provide clues about when online instructors are employing EI. When giving and receiving information is accomplished using balanced emotional and cognitive systems, individuals can learn to develop deliberate behaviors based on constructive and critical thinking, which is called *intentional behavior* (Nelson & Low, 2011). TEI is the learned ability to think constructively and act intently and wisely (Nelson & Low, 2011). Based on the theory's emphasis on balancing the cognitive and emotional systems to produce intentional and wise behavior, TEI was an appropriate framework for this study. Because of the premise related to the research problem, clarity is needed about specifically how online instructors may include EI in their practice.

Several recent studies provide additional rationale for using TEI as a conceptual framework in education research. For example, Tang, Chang, and Chou (2016) operationalized TEI using the Personal Excellence Map (PEM) by Nelson, Low, and Ellis

(2007). Tang et al. reported the positive relationship between experiential and cognitive thinking and the psychological constructs of emotional adjustment, personal well-being, and intrinsic motivation for success among university faculty. Tolbert and Justice (2015) selected TEI as a framework for their study in higher education because of its emphasis on EI as a learning process rather than a fixed trait. Using the tenets of TEI, specifically its principles of being research-derived, person-centered, skills-based, and relationship-focused, I explored instructors' awareness of EI and their perceptions about using EI in higher education undergraduate and graduate distance learning courses.

Nelson et al. (2017) discussed the learned ability of EI to be the most critical variable and factor in achievement, career development, and career and life satisfaction. Within the TEI theory, EI skillsets essential to effective, productive, and meaningful work are learned and applied through the systematic application of the Emotional Learning System (ELS) to help individuals behave in a healthy and productive manner (Nelson et al., 2017). Finally, Tolbert and Justice (2015) found TEI to be the most efficient model for their study because it emphasized EI as a learned trait rather than fixed.

Recent studies affirmed my choice to use TEI as a grounding framework in my education research (Nelson & Low, 2011; Nelson et al., 2007, 2017; Tang et al., 2016; Tolbert & Justice, 2015). I intended to investigate the awareness of instructor use of the principles of TEI in the online learning environment to enhance instruction and learning. I used the TEI framework in my research and interview questions to explore instructor

awareness of their use of EI skills and principles to enhance instruction and learning in the higher education online learning environment.

Nature of the Study

Basic qualitative research is used to gatherer data that can reveal opinions and perspectives that may not be visible or obvious, and in turn, positively inform practice (Butin, 2009). Considering EI is characterized as a phenomenon for the study, I chose the basic qualitative tradition to pursue my research into EI in higher education online learning. EI is an essential factor in educational achievement with an emphasis on self-direction that can be learned in any classroom (Nelson et al., 2017). In distance education, self-directed learning and motivation are keys to success (Kauffman, 2015). The research questions for this study were designed to gain an understanding of instructors' awareness of the use of EI to guide practice, facilitate engagement, and offer a more successful online learning experience.

The qualitative researcher seeks answers to how social experience is created and given meaning through the situational constraints that create meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The qualitative approach is imperative to gain an understanding of the narratives and experiences of online instructors. Qualitative research allows the researcher to delve into the lives of participants to derive an understanding of their lived experiences. The qualitative researcher makes sense of the things they study in their natural setting and attempt to interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). This study focused on the perceptions of online instructors based on their first-hand experience with EI use in their instructional practices.

Definitions

Assertion: The ability to clearly and honestly communicate personal thoughts and feelings in a comfortable, direct, appropriate, and straightforward manner (Nelson & Low, 2011).

Cognitive Presence: The ability for online learners to construct meaning through communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration (Majeski et al., 2018).

Emotional Intelligence: The ability to be aware of your own and others' emotions and act according to your own and others' emotions, with the use of inter and intrapersonal skills to drive decision making of actions. Nelson and Low (2011) define emotional intelligence as the learned ability to think constructively and behave wisely.

Emotional Intelligence Models: The various models used to define emotional intelligence, typically described as either trait models, ability models, and mixed models (Ackley, 2016). Each model emphasizes understanding the five main elements of emotional intelligence including (a) self-awareness, (b) self-regulation, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) motivation (Ackley, 2016). The TEI model was used in this research because it was developed in higher education environments and has been used extensively in higher education research (Nelson et al., 2017).

Mindfulness: Being consciously aware of your existence in the present moment; awareness and acceptance of one's thoughts and feelings (Bao et al., 2015; Cotler et al., 2017).

Online Learning / Distance Education: Formal and informal learning that takes place through technology, typically with the use of the internet, delivered through a computer or electronic device (Montelongo, 2019).

Self-Awareness: An attempt to understand thoughts, feelings and behaviors of self and others in everyday situations and environments (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016).

Self-directed Coaching: The initiative to pursue deeper understanding of a topic through auditory means by setting goals, developing a plan, and directing efforts with intention, consistency, and skilled attitudes and behaviors (Nelson & Low, 2011).

Social Presence: The ability for online learners to project themselves in a social and affective manner to become part of the online community of learners (Majeski et al., 2018).

Teacher Presence: Important aspect of the Community of Inquiry (COI) framework that entails teachers' responsibility for delivering relevant curriculum content, engaging learners, and promoting social and cognitive presence (Fuller, Risner, Lowder, Hart, & Bachenheimer, 2014).

Assumptions

The assumptions relevant to this study included that online instructors may unknowingly employ EI in their current courses because EI is learned in many different ways through our various cultures. With this assumption, the study helped to bring awareness of the use of EI in the online environments by clarifying the extent to which EI is modeled based on the four fundamental TEI tenants.

Another assumption was that instructors would respond authentically to open-ended questionnaires, providing the insight sought in this study. An open-ended questionnaire is a versatile tool that allows for data collection many different research designs, which, if adequately adapted for qualitative research, makes it an appropriate collection tool for this study (Thomas, 2010). In an open-ended questionnaire format, instructor use of EI as a tool for enhancing practice was assessed. Each interview question was member-checked to ensure relevancy, reflect individual responses from each participant, and yield varied responses to the acknowledgment of EI tools and personal use of the tools in the online teaching and learning experience. The data obtained from the questionnaires informed more in-depth investigations through other methods, such as personal interviews (Lambert, 2012).

It was also assumed that instructors would be candid and honest in their responses to my interview questions. Individual qualitative semi-structured interviews were a follow-on tool with questions created based on responses from participant questionnaires. The use of semi-structured interviews, rather than structured or unstructured, allowed me to pursue new lines of inquiry based on respondent answers to initial questions (Lambert, 2012). The interview questionnaire and initial interview questions are provided in Appendix A and E. The interviews provided a secondary analysis of the questionnaire data obtained (Single & Reis, 2010). Through semi-structured interviews, instructors had the opportunity to tell their story about their online teaching practices and their use of EI self-awareness in those practices.

The final assumption was that the vast array of participants from various online learning environments and varying years in service and levels of courses taught provided a large enough sample to provide data for this study. It was assumed that the participants would have a sincere interest in participation and would provide open, honest input to my queries, the answers to which lead to emergent relevant themes.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was also delimited to online instructors in higher education. The growth of distance education offerings and instructional opportunities was a driving factor of this study. Therefore, I purposefully did not include face-to-face or blended learning instructors, nor did I include instructors in the K-12 arena. However, these would be good candidate populations for future studies of EI in online environments.

Limitations

The following limitations were expected for this study. First, the use of volunteer participant selection resulted in a small sample size, but sufficient for qualitative research. Qualitative studies by nature are not able to be generalized for a larger population (Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, volunteer participants may not have provided diversity in years in teaching experience, subject matter, geographic location, or gender, although I mitigated this limitation through purposeful stratified sampling (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, I am certified to conduct EI assessment and training, and I am well-versed in EI and familiar with my own EI strengths and weakness as an online instructor. Having an awareness of my own biases about the importance of EI in online instruction

allowed me to record and transcribe participant responses without interjecting my thoughts, beliefs, or values.

Due to the qualitative design, transferability was limited (Saldaña, 2016). To address this limitation, follow-up interviews were conducted to collect additional information to contribute to the most accurate and detailed description of participant responses. Combining the findings from the questionnaires and interviews provided the opportunity to form at least two forms of data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of my results. Member-checking were also used to ensure the accuracy of participants' responses after transcriptions occurred.

Significance

This study addressed the problem by focusing on instructors' perceptions of EI self-awareness in online course design and instruction in distance higher education courses. This study addressed an underrepresented topic in higher education distance learning (Cotler et al., 2017; Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Hamilton, 2017). The results of this study provided additional insight regarding instructors' use of EI in their andragogical practices with the ability to create strategies to enhance future practice.

Significance to Practice

Significant aspects of EI and students' readiness for online learning are positively and significantly correlated variables (Buzdar et al., 2016). Insights from this study provided a personally meaningful understanding of the use of EI in teaching practices, and in turn, suggest ideas for enhancing learning outcomes from their practices (Majeski et al., 2017). Through the exploration of teachers' EI self-awareness of instructional

practices to enhance adult learners' success in the online classroom, a framework can be developed for online programs' first year of coursework to introduce adult learners to EI and its role in their success. Curriculum enriched with principles of TEI could result in a more balanced, relevant curriculum that addresses the need for equality and high standards in the educational setting (Nelson et al., 2017).

The acknowledgment of one's EI can optimize the learning experience, prepare for novel learning experiences, and contribute to the awareness of needs, goals, and other emotions (Khademi & Farokhmehr, 2016). As per Jafari (2017), the recognition of EI as a teachable and crucial skill for effective practice in school, work, and life also helps adult instructors develop an understanding of EI that equips them to gauge their stress levels and manage stress more efficiently.

Significance to Theory

Nelson et al. (2017) claimed that EI was the most critical factor in academic and career achievement. EI dimensions for facilitating learner success, an exploration of the prevalence of and how EI manifests in online higher education courses have positive social change implications for students. Nelson et al. discussed the learned ability of EI to be the most critical variable and factor in achievement, career development, and career and life satisfaction. TEI principles are essential cognitive, experiential, and behavioral properties of emotionally intelligent behavior (Nelson et al., 2007). Other studies have found that improving EI improves educational effectiveness, and that EI may be a predictor of performance (Buzdar et al., 2016; Hamilton, 2017). By helping higher education online instructors clarify the role and application of EI, they have a more

explicit focus on areas of strength to assist them in their success and a mindful understanding of their areas of improvement to develop throughout their instructional practices.

Significance to Social Change

Majeski et al. (2018) found that instructors' emotional understanding and perception of their learners' emotional and cognitive needs set a foundation for success. EI is improved by promoting its use through modeling active imagination, self-directed coaching, and guided mentoring (Nelson & Low, 2011; Nelson et al., 2017). Therefore, it is up to instructors and trainers who teach from a framework of EI to provide adult learners with opportunities to develop EI meaningfully through online courses. Strategies of engagement that model the principles of TEI are essential for instructors who want to facilitate the meaningful development of students' EI (Nelson et al., 2017). The importance of positive TEI interpretation is one such principle (Nelson et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2017). Educators who assume responsibility for improving the emotional growth of their adult learners may be situated to improve practice.

Summary

Various research studies provide an understanding about the use of EI to enhance success and readiness for online learning, though there is minimal research to understand the use of EI by online instructors to engage students, model EI, and enhance professional practice (Jafari, 2017; Mehmet Yüksel & Geban, 2014; Nelson & Low, 2011; Nelson et al., 2017; Parker, Wood, & Keefer, 2009; Trejo, 2016;). Additional research is needed to understand how higher education online instructors use EI. Such research will inform the

practice of online instructors and can be beneficial to incorporate into the COI framework in online instructor preparation courses.

Chapter 1 provided background information related to the topic of study, an understanding of the conceptual framework, and definitions for concepts discussed. The problem and purpose were explained to provide alignment to the guiding research questions. Significance and limitations were addressed to provide a clear scope for the study. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth review of the supporting research, including search strategies, background of the conceptual framework, and research based on key concepts associated with this study. The connections between the research topic and conceptual framework became evident as the literature review describes various theories and topics related to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Online instructors' use of EI in the classroom has previously shown to increase student success and satisfaction. Fostering TEI self-awareness in online course design and instruction in existing discipline-based, online higher education courses helps develop EI self-awareness of instructors. Personally meaningful development, in turn, enhances learning outcomes (Majeski et al., 2017). The problem investigated in this study was the effects of the use of EI self-awareness on instructors in higher education distance learning. To provide an environment that promotes EI dimensions for facilitating learner success in distance learning, an examination of instructional practices and tasks related to the EI self-awareness development was necessary (Buzdar et al., 2016). Instructors' awareness in identifying specific strategies in the online post-secondary learning environment can enhance student success by helping learners acknowledge their EI strengths and mitigating their weaknesses.

The growing trend in adult online learning calls for an exploration of online instructors' EI self-awareness in their practices. Self-awareness involves the conscious process of identifying and understanding one's emotions and the appropriate responses to them. In online learning, instructor response to students via feedback and discussion participation is a regular part of their practice, and these practices have a substantial effect on students satisfaction of their online learning experience (Boton & Gregory, 2015; Montelongo, 2019). Attrition rates for online students are 36% higher than those of traditional face-to-face instruction (Montelongo, 2019). Attrition in online learning has been linked to student dissatisfaction with the online instructors' lack of relationship

building, in addition to a lack of strategies that engage the learner in the critical thinking process (Montelongo, 2019). Instructors' EI self-awareness can contribute to more effective practices resulting in student satisfaction.

Nelson et al. (2017) claimed TEI as the most critical factor in achievement. Through the enhancement of instructors' understanding of the role their EI self-awareness plays in their practice, strategies need to be implemented to make instructors more aware of what their EI consists of and how to use it effectively to model for students. Significant aspects of EI and students' readiness for online learning is also positively and significantly correlated (Buzdar et al., 2016). Positive social change may be realized by integrating EI skills more overtly and thereby increasing faculty, student, and even an administrators' satisfaction and success. The purpose was to explore instructor perceptions of their use of EI to guide their practice in undergraduate and graduate distance education courses. This chapter includes the specific problem and purpose of the study, the search strategies and keywords used to find literature relevant to this study, the literature concerning the theoretical foundation, a review of recent and historic literature relevant to online instruction and EI, and the role instructors' use of EI plays in student success contributing to the importance of the instructors' awareness as related to the current study.

Literature Search Strategy

Current literature was reviewed using an in-depth search for relevant journal articles, books, and dissertations dated from 2013 to 2019 using Google Scholar, Walden University library database, and the *International Journal for Transformative Emotional*

Intelligence archive catalog found on the Emotional Intelligence Training and Research Institute website. Walden University library was used to search education databases EduSource, ERIC, SAGE, Academic Search Complete, Science Direct, and Taylor and Francis Online. Psychology databases included PsychINFO, SAGE, and SocIndex. The reviews were directly linked to the problem of online higher education faculty's lack of awareness of the use of their EI. The four inclusion criteria of all articles were (a) available in English, (b) peer-reviewed, (c) full text, and (d) published between 2015 and 2020. The exclusions were articles not available in English, not peer-reviewed, and not available in full text. Dissertation reviews were completed using ProQuest, Scholarworks, and Walden University's dissertation database.

Key search terms used to search the literature on topics included in the literature search were: *emotional intelligence, higher education, college, undergraduate or graduate education; distance education or online education; instructor perceptions, higher education instruction, student success, instructor best practices, adult education, emotional intelligence, and transformative emotional intelligence, mindfulness, self-awareness, EI models, and community of inquiry*. Articles were reviewed for their reference section to identify further reading related to the current study. With the exception of seminal works, the focus of literature searches was from 2015 to the present with the goal of a large portion of sources for this study being less than 5 years old. Seminal works were used to support the theory and framework for this study supporting the current research used. The literature search generated peer-reviewed journals published since 2015 and seminal articles to support the conceptual framework and

research methods. Additional studies dated before 2015 were used to support the literature and current study when needed.

The literature search identified a gap in studies directed at instructors' perceptions of their EI self-awareness and its effects on practice. This chapter includes the problem, purpose, and theoretical and conceptual foundations for this study as well as a review of historical and recent literature related to EI, instructor self-awareness of EI, and support for the conceptual framework of TEI as an educational theory.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

Emotional Intelligence Models

There are varied approaches to the conceptualization of emotional intelligence based on competencies and measurement. The approaches can be categorized into three theoretical approaches: the ability model, trait model, and competency model (Emmerling et al., 2008). While there are three models, there is an overlap between them that share facets of the traits (Landy, 2005). EI's sharing of common elements that relate to abilities and competencies concerned with recognizing and regulating emotions of self and others was identified in a large factor analytic study by Emmerling et al. (2008). Some of the most widely researched concepts relevant to the theoretical approaches of EI include the ability model of Mayer, Salvo, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), trait model of Bar-On EQ-I mixed model, and competency model of Emotional Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) mixed model; the emerging educational model of TEI education is the primary theory of the current research.

Overall, each model identifies five common facets of EI which have been theoretically identified as: (a) Emotional Self-Awareness; (b) Emotional Awareness of Others; (c); Emotional Reasoning; (d) Emotional Self-Management; and (e) Emotional Management of others (Emmerling et al., 2008). While these dimensions are slightly different from those discussed by Ackley (2016), the chapter by Emmerling was on the epistemology of the construct, considering the myriad of available models and definitions. Through the confluence of the various models, EI has emerged as a construct for explaining behavior variance not accounted for by measures of academic acumen or personality factors (Landy, 2005). It is these behaviors that drove the purpose of the existing study to explore instructor perceptions of their use of EI to guide their practice in undergraduate and graduate distance education courses.

MSCIET ability model. The MSCIET was designed to measure EI while separating variables aligned with the personality traits of openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Salovey and Mayer limited the scope of EI to individuals' understanding and interpretation of their own and others' emotions, as well as the individuals' ability to control their emotions (Trejo, 2016). This model is based strictly on ability and is therefore known as the ability model of EI. The theory of EI constructed by Mayer and Salovey was based on factor analytic research of abilities and skills associated with comprehending emotions, emotional information, and the use of emotional knowledge to advance cognition (Mayer, et al., 2012). Based on these dimensions, the MSCEIT includes the four branches of (a) perceiving emotions accurately (i.e., comprehending one's own and the emotions of

others), (b) using emotions to facilitate thought, (c) understanding emotions, and (d) managing emotions (Mayer et al., 2004; Mayer et al., 2012). The MSCEIT has been used in studies in areas of psychology, education, government, and business, primarily in studies of leadership competencies and measurements (Ali, Ali, & Jones, 2017; Landy, 2005; Mayer, DiPaolo, & Salovey, 1990).

The ability model was criticized by Epstein (2011) for three reasons. First, Epstein suggested that it is an objective, performance-oriented approach that includes scales that are only related to emotions and disregards scales measured by other models that have been highly correlated with the EI construct in other studies, including self-esteem, time management, and others (Cox & Nelson, 2008). Second, the MSCEIT measures “people’s intelligence about emotions and not the intelligence of people’s emotions” (p. 110). The learned ability to learn from one’s emotional experiences to improve behavior, effectiveness, and quality of life is an important aspect of what emotional intelligence is (Epstein, 2011). Finally, Epstein’s third criticism of the ability approach was its absence of personality theory to explain how it works.

Epstein’s (2011) three criticisms of the ability approach suggest caution for its use in my study. If my study were concerned only with online instructors’ knowledge about emotions, then MSCEIT would be an acceptable approach to ground the study. For the reasons suggested by Epstein, however, the ability approach would not be suitable to ground a study concerned with *how* online instructors use EI in their courses. According to Epstein, the construct of EI becomes less useful when it is too narrowly defined. What was needed for my study, therefore, was a broader approach to thinking about what EI is

that also has demonstrated evidence of measurement reliability and construct validity.

The Bar-On mixed model. The Bar-On model comprises five categories of intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood. Bar-On indicates that EI is a collection of non-cognitive competencies and skills that influence the ability to be successful in coping with environmental demands and pressures (Ackley, 2016). The Bar-On model differs from the ability model by incorporating stress-management and mood into the emotional-awareness paradigm (Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, & Bar-On, 2012). The high dependency on personality characteristics makes this model problematic because it is difficult to assess or modify. The assessment used with the Bar-On model is the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I), which is a self-report instrument designed to evaluate emotional and social intelligence.

The 15 subscale scores cover five competencies: intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood (Stanimirovic & Hanrahan, 2012). Each scale evaluates varied attributes to an individual's EI from the (a) understanding of their emotions, (b) understanding of others' emotions, (c) ability to manage and control emotions, and (d) ability to adapt emotions based on circumstance. While it does not replicate the four dimensions measured by the MSCEIT, the EQ-I seems to suffer similar shortcomings. For example, its four dimensions seem focused primarily on measuring thoughts about emotions rather than the use of emotion to guide behavior in constructive ways.

The mixed model method has been used in educational studies focusing on students' EI levels and academic achievement (Chamorro-Premuzic, Arteche, Bremner,

Greven, & Furnham, 2010; Han & Johnson, 2012; MacCann, Fogarty, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2011; Qualter, Gardner, Pope, Hutchinson, & Whiteley, 2017). The weakness identified in the mixed model is the non-cognitive aspect. The integration of emotions with cognition is what impacts performance; therefore, emotions without logic are problematic (Ackley, 2016). Additionally, Joseph, Jin, Newman, and O'Boyle (2015) explain the lack of theoretical works on the construct of mixed EI results in the discussion of the measures of EI rather than the construct because it is not clear what the construct is. The theoretically underdeveloped construct was a limitation to the current study, and therefore the Bar-On mixed-method model was not suitably aligned with the purpose of this study to identify how EI manifests among online instructors in higher education.

The ESCI mixed model. In 1999, the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) was redesigned by Goleman and Boyatzis to include the social competency measurement. The ESCI is an adaptation of this instrument while adding the components of social competencies (Boyatzis, Good, & Massa, 2012). Goleman codesigned the multi-rater tool that assesses EI competencies identified by Goleman, Hay/McBer's Generic Competency Dictionary, and Boyatzis's Self-Assessment Questionnaires (SAQ; Bangun & Iswari, 2015). The ESCI measures four significant skills that makes up EI self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. The definition of EI for the use of the ESCI is a combination of Goleman's EI definition, Goleman's definition of emotional competence, and Boyatzis' definition of job competency (Segon & Booth, 2015). This combination resulted in Boyatzis's (2009) explanation of EI for use with

ESCI measurement instrument as:

- An emotional intelligence competency comprises the ability to identify, understand, and utilize emotional information about the self that causes or results in superior performance.
- As social intelligence competency comprises the abilities to identify, understand, and utilize emotional information about others that causes or results in superior performance.
- A cognitive intelligence competency comprises the ability to conceptualize or analyze information and contexts that cause or results in superior performance.

This definition is comparable to others in that the competencies can be learned and developed. However, the difference argues that all competencies are not required; rather, it depends on the role of the individual in the organization in which competencies are most relevant (Faerman & Quinn, 2017). This idea of chosen competencies of EI allow individuals to pick and choose which to use under particular circumstances. This model implies that it is based on the assumption that motive or intent is purely goal-related and accessed using some measure of utility (Segon & Booth, 2015). Because this model primarily measures emotional competencies resulting in performance, it holds a bias towards output aspects of performance, which rely on emotional management and awareness (Segon & Booth, 2015).

For the purpose of this study, EI related to personal awareness was an important consideration. The understanding and managing of one's emotions and ability to be

aware of others' emotions were integral to EI skill development that results in modeling EI. This study focused on the perceptions of online instructors about their use of EI with their students and not on external metrics of their job performance based on EI competencies. Therefore, the ESCI model was not be an adequate framework for pursuing how online instructors manifest EI to help their students succeed on a personal level.

Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory

The cognitive-experiential self-theory (CEST) is a personality theory that includes aspects of learning, cognitive, psychoanalysis, and self-theories which assume that people process information with two independent, interactive systems referred to as the experiential and rational systems (Epstein, 2011). The experiential system is based on the premise of learning from experience whereas the rational system is based on reasoning and logical inferences. The experiential system is that which governs automatic learning from experience via classical conditioning, operant conditions, and observational learning with the purpose to allow for adaptation to environments (Epstein, 1998).

CEST relies heavily on intuition, as it is reflected in vague awareness, gut feelings, and intuitive knowledge as knowing without knowing why (Burton, Heintzelman, & King, 2013). The rational system consciously operates relying heavily on logic and reason and is characterized by slower processing (Burton et al., 2013), it is based on logical inferences, is analytical, and involved cognitive effort. The rational system is voluntary and cognitive resource-dependent (Ivan, 2011). Table 1 provides a comparison of the attributes of the two systems (Epstein, 1998).

Table 1

Epstein's Comparison of the Experiential and Rational Systems

Experiential System	Rational System
1. Solves problems in living by what was automatically learned from experience	1. Solves problems by conscious reasoning
2. Nonverbal: Encodes information often in images	2. Verbal: Encodes information in abstract symbols, including words and numbers
3. Motivated by hedonic principle: Pursues what feels good and avoids what feels bad	3. Motivated by reality principle: By what is regarded as logical and accurate
4. Emotional	4. Affect-free
5. Associative connections between stimuli, responses, and outcomes	5. Cause-and-effect relations among stimuli, responses, and outcomes
6. Behavior mediated by automatic representation of events and feelings	6. Behavior mediated by conscious appraisal of events
7. Holistic	7. Analytical
8. Effortless and minimally demanding of cognitive resources	8. Effortful and demanding of cognitive resources
9. Rapid processing: Oriented toward immediate action; impulsive	9. Slower processing and capable of long-delayed action
10. Resistant to change: Changes with repetitive or intense experience	10. Changes more readily: Can change with speed of thought
11. More crudely differentiated: Broad	11. More highly nuanced and differentiated
12. More crudely integrated: Context-specific, organized by cognitive-affective networks	12. More highly integrated: Organized by context-general principles
13. Experienced passively and preconsciously: We are seized by our emotions and ego-alien thoughts	13. Experience actively and consciously: Reasoning considered under conscious control
14. Self-evidently valid: Experiencing is believing	14. Requires validation by logic and evidence

Note. Comparison of Experiential and Rational Systems. S. Epstein (2011). Adapted with Copyright holder permission.

As provided in Table 1, Epstein (2011) concluded that the rational-cognitive system operated innately different than the experiential-emotional system. According to Epstein, (2011), “The experiential system is an associative learning system, whereas the rational system is primarily a verbal reasoning system...the experiential system is an automatic, associative learning system, whereas the rational system is primarily a verbal reasoning system” (p.13). The rational system is used as a comparative tool for

experiential processing in this theory. CEST provides theoretical explanations about the biasing influence of the experiential system on logical reasoning (Epstein, 1998). As people rationalize, they attempt to solve problems through use of logic and evaluation. In thinking about the possibilities, the experiential system is engaged, though this is not an automatic, conscious awareness in the person.

The ELS is a guide to understand immediate experiences by using information received from both cognitive and experiential systems to learn to choose behaviors based on constructive and critical thinking (Nelson & Low, 2011). Epstein's use of these two systems contributes directly to the theory of TEI that guides this study. The focus on experiential learning on the CEST is consistent with TEI's emotional learning aspects. While Epstein's theory concerned facets related to constructive and destructive thinking, it is too nuanced and specific for an exploration of online instructors' use of emotional intelligence; yet, the theory is most consistent with TEI (Nelson et al., 2017).

Transformative emotional intelligence. The foundation of this study was centered on TEI to elucidate how instructors' EI affects both professional practice and student outcomes. The importance of Epstein's (1998) CEST is acknowledged in TEI's operational definition as *the learned ability to think constructively and act wisely* (Nelson et al., 2017). The most important aspect of TEI is that it is understood as a confluence of learned skills and abilities rather than a fixed trait, which makes it relevant for the educational setting. TEI is research-derived, person-centered, relationship-focused, and skills-based (Low, Hammett, & Nelson, 2019). TEI is an essential factor in educational achievement with an emphasis on self-direction and self-directed learning that can be

taught and learned in any classroom (Nelson et al., 2017). The transformative qualifier in this theory derives from the higher education roots of the model (Low et al., 2019). In distance education, self-directed learning and motivation are key factors to students' success (Kauffman, 2015).

Nelson and Low (2011) described colleges and universities as having two relevant curricula. The *overt* curriculum, the one that administrators and instructors write out in lesson plans and enforce through policy standards and produce cognitive engagement within the formal disciplines of study. Conversely, the *covert* curriculum, the one seldom addressed in lesson plans, may be more important for teaching and learning valuable life lessons and keeping adults in school. The covert curriculum, according to the authors, is just as critical to academic and career success as is the overt curriculum. The emotional, covert curriculum consists of "skill-related attitudes and behaviors that occur both inside and outside of the classroom" (Nelson & Low, 2011, p. 9). Four decades of studies conducted by the authors confirmed the value of TEI-principled engagement for instructional services, thereby providing educators with a sound research-based rationale for incorporating EI content, knowledge, and learning into the formal curriculum (Nelson & Low, 2011).

Currently, the overt online curriculum has not included EI knowledge or learning, both of which can immensely improve the success of distance learners based on the various indicators that can enhance the students' online experiences. In TEI the central theme of a learned ability is a feature that provide a sound framework for implementation of education curricula and learning organizations (Low et al., 2019). As learners discover

the positive contributions of their own emotions, awareness can be brought to their learning experience, and they can be more focused on healthy and successful outcomes (Nelson et al., 2017).

TEI as an educational model. The educational model of EI presented by Nelson, Low, and Vela (2003) makes use of a self-report instrument that identifies cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics of the individual. The most important aspect of the educational model is that EI is not considered a fixed-trait and can therefore be learned. The educational model of EI is assessed using the Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP). The ESAP is an instrument suitable for the educational setting as it provides a scale of ten emotional skills and three potential problem areas, all of which are positively correlated and interrelated (Teliz-Triuque et al., 2015). There are five steps to the ELS to ensure learner-centered development to include: (a) Self-Assessment: Explore; (b) Self-Awareness: Identify; (c) Self-Knowledge: Understand; (d) Self-Development: Learn; and (e) Self-Improvement: Apply and Model (Nelson & Low, 2011). As individuals move through each of the five steps they learn about themselves in ways that help them to identify their areas of strength, but also to learn and apply methods to help them strengthen EI skills they wish to improve.

TEI Principles and Tenants. The grounding principles and tenants of TEI provide teaching and learning connections for academic achievement throughout the educational journey. The enhancement of meaningful, person-centered growth, and ongoing development are incorporated through these principles and tenants (Nelson et al., 2017). The main tenants of TEI are that it is research-derived, skills-based, person-

centered, and relationship-focused (Nelson et al., 2017). The authors have also described 12 hallmarks of TEI that underpin the basic tenets. Nelson et al. (2017) stated the 12 TEI hallmarks as follows:

Hallmark 1. EI is an integrated set of learned skills and skillsets to think reflectively and constructively to act wisely and make more constructive decisions. When a person learns to think reflectively and constructively, it is hard to think destructively.

Hallmark 2. EI learning is an important influencing variable in achievement, success, and being well. Learners discover that pathways to positive change and leadership begin with exploring their own strengths and areas to develop. Self-awareness is a necessary first step.

Hallmark 3. The experiential system is the lead system for meaningful change, personal growth, and effective learning. Adaptability and transition learning are more easily learned within a framework of EI skill sets, skills, behaviors, and strategies.

Hallmark 4. Emotional (affective) learning is different from traditional cognitive learning. The ESAP and integrated learning steps were created to develop the affective dimension of life by blending EI learning and constructive thinking to guide behavior.

Hallmark 5. Breaking the habit of negative emotional reactivity is a requisite life skill that students can relate to from their own experience. Learners are

empowered when they discover they can change reactivity to reflective and constructive thinking.

Hallmark 6. EI learning enables and activates emotional influence to enhance academic and career learning. Positive emotional learning (developing a healthy mind) leads to happier, healthier, and more successful outcomes. EI learning builds a solid platform for building academic, career, and life excellence.

Hallmark 7. Students learn (often for the first time) that authentic, honest self-assessment is a necessary first step to personal responsibility and intelligent self-direction in school and life. In our model EI learning and self-directing learning are similar in strategy and scope.

Hallmark 8. Reflective and constructive thinking processes engender intentional, wise choices, decisions, and good behaviors. The education and learning model of emotional intelligence can be effectively included and embedded into key courses at the beginning of the college experience. Because of the emotional system's need for positive repetition to develop healthily, emotional intelligence lessons should be included throughout the curriculum.

Hallmark 9. Intelligent self-management is the behavioral reflection of higher-order thinking. Academic and personal success are enhanced with a two-mind learning process . . . cognitive + affective learning.

Hallmark 10. Interdependence and team learning are needed for academic and career development. Healthy, effective relationships are essential for superior performance and leadership. Team building, mentoring, and coaching processes

are key to building and maintaining healthy and effective personal and work relationships.

Hallmark 11. Excellence is self-defined and self-directed. Self-direction has been identified as the most important employability (career success) skill in the 21st Century. EI behavior is intentional, positive, goal-directed, and self-valued.

Hallmark 12. EI learning is a key skillset for improving student engagement, student effort, achievement, course completion, retention, and success in education. The overarching goal of person-centered learning and achieving personal excellence is learning to develop, apply, and model transformative EI in academic, personal, career, and life endeavors. (p. 200)

The 12 hallmarks, according to Nelson and Low (2011), form the foundation for learning and developing EI for high achievement, career excellence, personal leadership, and quality performance. It would be a reasonable expectation, therefore, to see some of these hallmarks reflected in participant interview responses by instructors who manifest EI in their work with students.

Recent education research using TEI. TEI has been used in numerous studies on topics related to education, leadership, and career success. Teliz-Triuque et al. (2015) used the ESAP, a TEI measurement instrument, to identify patterns of the EI skills of Mexican students and the relationship between EI skills, age, and gender. The purpose of the study was to validate the Spanish version of the ESAP with Mexican college students in the field of agriculture. Using the quantitative approach, Teliz-Triuque et al. (2015) collected and analyzed data in order to validate, describe, and identify the patterns

of EI skill characteristics. Academic and educational implications of EI were discovered by this research to include that academic and career needs of students include the further development of EI skills as part of the curricula and career planning (Teliz-Triuque et al., 2015).

Chapman (2015) qualitatively assessed EI skills students identified as having an influence on their academic success. The study was created surrounding the EI skills identified in the ESAP with student and faculty responses emphasizing those skills. An important recommendation from this study is the importance of professional development that could teach EI skills to faculty in order to create a common understanding with demonstrated ways to model these skills to students (Chapman, 2015).

Tolbert and Justice (2015) used Nelson and Low's theory of EI in their phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of college students who successfully completed their first year with a specific focus on their EI skills. The nature of EI and the interpersonal experience of college students living away from home was an emphasis of this study. Nine TEI specific skills were identified in student success to include: assertion, commitment ethic, decision-making, drive strength, motivation, self-awareness, stress management, time management, and social skills. The authors assert that success rates will increase when higher education institutions successfully embed the development of EI skills within the curriculum (Tolbert & Justice, 2015).

Tang et al. (2016) developed a short-form measure of personal excellence for use among Taiwanese university students with the construct of TEI. The focus on psychological factors and mental processing related to performance in career and

education, through the use of the Personal Excellence Map (PEM), allowed the researchers to develop an instrument to measure the impact of emotional capacities on cognitive functions (Tang et al., 2016). The integration of TEI as part of the PEM provides a measurement of personal well-being, excellence, and self-renewal through the use of an EI-centric model of personal excellence with the purpose of informing transformational self-directed learning needs (Low et al., 2019).

How TEI informs the study. TEI informed this study by providing a model of EI that was framed and developed through higher education. In recent research studies, it has been shown that the effectiveness of EI can be enhanced in individuals (Grant, 2007; Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Hansenne, 2009; Turner & Lloyd-Walker, 2008). In the education model presented by Nelson and Low, the focus is on the premise that EI can be learned and enhanced through active imagination, guided mentoring, and self-directed coaching. In agreement, Epstein (1998) viewed constructive thinking as the key to emotional intelligence. Based on these tenets, Nelson and Low (2011) developed the EI-centric learning model referred to as the ELS that has been used in research to embed TEI content, knowledge, and learning within curricula. Supported by TEI, which is operationalized briefly as the learned ability to think constructively and act wisely (Nelson et al., 2017), the ELS uses a five-step process that encourages thinking to become more emotionally reflective and constructive; a system that helps balance feelings and thoughts by choosing intentional behaviors that are referred to as emotional intelligence skills (Nelson & Low, 2011). The five steps of the ELS are (a) explore, (b) identify, (c) understand, (d) learn, and (e) apply and model. Integral to the model, Nelson,

et al. (2003) identified 10 EI skills and three potential problem areas that were shown to be related to academic success.

The ELS model was created to imbed EI content, knowledge, and learning within current curricula to enhance learner outcomes. The model relies on principles of transformative emotional intelligence and has been used recently in education research, and earlier studies, since its development. Tang et al. (2016) found the EI-centric model of personal excellence appropriate for their study because it connected the experiential and cognitive thinking of minds to a set of psychological constructs that measure emotional adjustment, personal well-being, and intrinsic motivation for success. Through their study, the authors found instructors and other support staff at the university level being jointly responsible for helping students pursue meaningful development through challenging transitional phases and strive for excellence through a disciplined, transformational learning approach. Within the TEI theory, EI skill sets essential to effective, productive, and meaningful work are learned and applied through the systematic application of the ELS to help individuals experience behaviors of healthy and productive being daily (Nelson et al., 2017). Tolbert and Justice (2015) found TEI to be the most efficient model for their study because it emphasized EI as a learned rather than fixed trait. These recent studies in higher education help to affirmed my choice to use TEI as a grounding framework in my higher education research.

Appreciative Inquiry

EI has been identified as a foundation for productive relationships in both personal and professional environments. Researchers have suggested that EI skill acumen

also enhances academic success (Buzdar et al., 2016; Ebrahimi et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2017). Similarly, appreciative inquiry (AI) is an approach that advocates harmonious relationships and positive interactions by generating spontaneous, transformational action on the part of all stakeholders in an organization (Laarakker & van Kesteren, 2019). The transformation aspects of AI and EI work together to create effective change in self to transform change in organizations. With the use of AI, the acknowledgment and amplification of the positive potential of individuals transform thinking about change and innovation, providing a strengths-based foundation where organizational creativity and innovation can flourish (Hollywood, Blaess, Santin, & Bloom, 2016). Self-awareness is the constant between AI and EI that drives the necessary positive change in individuals to become their best selves.

The Paradigm Fulcrum (PF), a theoretical framework based on AI, serves as a pivotal point of change that moves people from thoughts to actions (Davis, 2019). The EI skill of self-awareness is a critical component of the PF as it motivates individuals toward transformative, positive change. Self-awareness is the distinction of the PF moving people from thoughts to action, both positively and negatively (Davis, 2019). According to Davis (personal communication, March 1, 2020), AI represents the cognitive mind, EI the emotional mind, and the PF is how we choose to think about and ultimately react to an event. In short, the PF is the way we do things based on the way we feel (see Figure 1). The cognitive mind is based on the idea of doxastic logic, which effects our beliefs, whereas the emotional mind is epistemic logic, which is based on our knowledge. The evidence of impact on individual behavioral changes is tied directly to the new learning

people get from the doxastic logic of beliefs, the epistemic knowledge of what they think, and the mindset (paradigm) they hold (Davis, 2019).

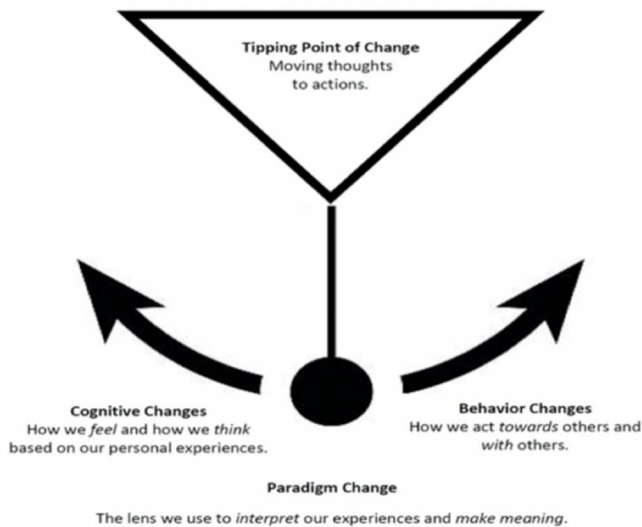


Figure 1. The Paradigm Fulcrum. Copyright by K. Davis (2019). Reproduced with author's permission.

A side-by-side comparison of AI and EI is presented in Figure 2. The AI process includes the four stages of (a) discover, (b) dream, (c) design, and (d) destiny. In a coached leadership or organizational development process, the discovery stage provides clients the opportunity to reflect on accomplishments and strengths through positive reflection; to acknowledge strengths based on self-assessment and feedback (Hollywood et al., 2016). The dream stage encourages reflection of past strengths in order to articulate future possibilities and goals, whereas design involves prioritizing and establishing goals and strategies to build on strengths (Hollywood et al., 2016). Finally, the destination stage involves execution, re-assessing, review, and affirmation that will, through a cyclical process, lead to leadership development and positive organizational change (Hollywood et al., 2016).

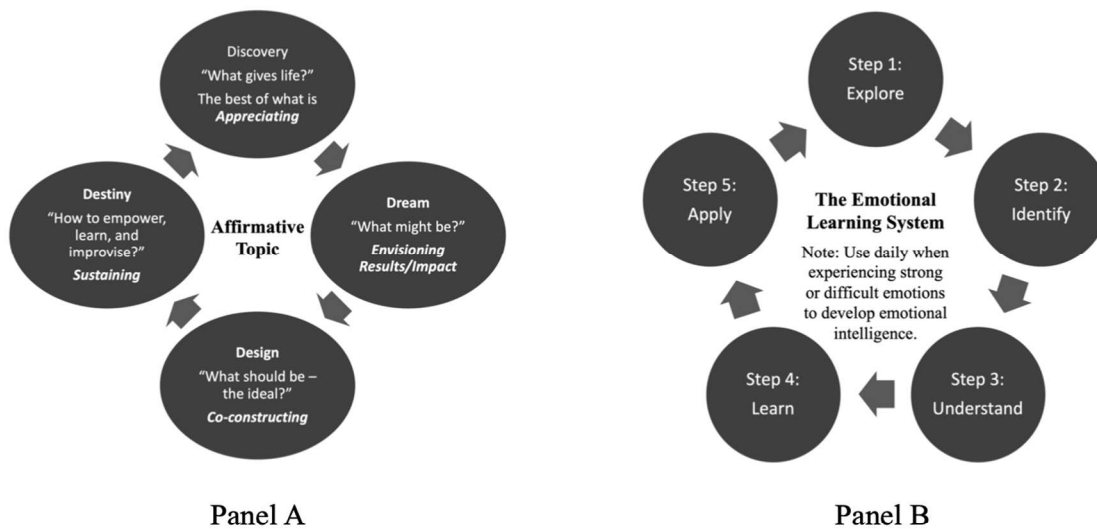


Figure 2. Side-by-side comparison of the 4d model of appreciative inquiry (Panel A) and the ELS (Panel B). AI-4D model is adapted from K. Davis *Determining Impact of Appreciate Inquiry: A Case Study* (2018) and used with the author’s permission. The ELS is adapted from G. Low’s 2019 keynote program and used with author’s permission.

Rather than organizational development, the ELS focusses on personal development using a similar cyclical structure. It is a strengths-based, cyclical change model for personally meaningful growth (Nelson et al., 2017). The ELS uses five steps to encourage emotional reflectivity, constructive thinking, and wise behavior. The explore stage encourages self-assessment to develop accurate self-awareness and appreciation. In the identify stage, individuals use self-reflection to identify EI skill strengths they currently use, as well as areas for improvement. The understand stage begins to develop new self-knowledge about how identified growth opportunities can improve the effectiveness and quality of life from the subjective perspective of the individual. In the learn stage, individuals practice developing an EI skill using active imagination, self-directed coaching, and guided mentoring. Finally, in the apply stage, an individual uses

the new skill reflectively for creative problem solving and action goal setting (Nelson et al., 2017). As with the AI process in an organizational setting, the ELS process is to be repeated multiple times each day to achieve personally meaningful goals through the effective application of EI skills (Nelson et al., 2017).

The holistic approach to mentorship and success coaching connects AI and EI through the constructs of self-efficacy and self-awareness. The goal of holistic mentoring and coaching is to facilitate the development of leadership strengths, EI, communication skills, and team management (Hollywood et al., 2016). The holistic model is supported by various frameworks to include EI and AI, respectively. Strengths-based leadership is the pivotal theoretical framework in holistic mentoring, which focuses on the identification and development of personal strengths (Hollywood et al., 2016). Instructors of higher education are, in essence, strength leaders and holistic mentors.

With the use of their own EI, instructors motivate students and model effective use of EI in their courses. McQuain, Neill, Sammons, and Coffland (2016), found AI strategies to be effective strategies to influence student motivation and achievement positively and that integration of even a partial list of AI phases enhanced student motivation and attitudes. Additionally, effective mentors and coaches (i.e., instructors) can develop the EI capacity of individuals through an ongoing process because leaders with highly developed EI have the potential to implement sustaining changes that impact performance and productivity (Hollywood et al., 2016). When AI is then incorporated into the holistic approach, the focus is on what an individual does well, and the

acknowledgment and amplification of positive potential transforms thinking at the individual level through mentorship.

While AI is a strong theoretical framework to support this current study, it is not the basis of the exploration of instructors' perceptions of EI. AI frameworks can complement the TEI framework of this study in many ways, as described earlier. AI was not chosen as a primary framework due to my focus on instructors' andragogical practices, rather than their roles in the organizational context.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Self-Awareness

The construct of self-awareness focuses on the ability to understand thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of self and others in everyday situations and environments. Goleman (as cited in Caldwell & Hayes, 2016) declared self-awareness as the keystone of EI. EI development relies on self-awareness as it provides a reflective practice for instructors to purposefully reflect on their words, actions, and behaviors with an understanding of how it impacts their students. Those teaching EI viewed self-awareness as central to development, though challenging to manage (Gill et al., 2015).

Self-awareness is found in all discussions of EI and is measured specifically in some EI assessments. Instructors who are not cognizant of their EI self-awareness may lack empathy or interpersonal skills, which may negatively impact their students (Hamilton, 2018). Self-awareness also serves as an ongoing motivation for pursuing priorities by providing an overarching purpose to life (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016). Self-awareness is embedded in the TEI model in the second *identify* step of Nelson and Low's

(2011) ELS, which encourages self-awareness in multiple ways. This step involves the process of identifying thoughts and feelings associated with an event or experience and the learned ability to accurately identify the thought and then labeling any emotion being experienced (Nelson & Low, 2011). This step also involves learning about personal skill strengths as well as opportunities for growth.

Self-awareness, then, engenders and requires constructive and critical thinking, which are cognitive processes necessary for developing and modeling EI daily in life (see Figure 3). In theory, self-awareness may be related to the intrapersonal skills of self-esteem and stress management, and as suggested by Hamilton (2018), seems logically related to the inter- and intra-personal skills for managing functional relationships with self and others. Candidate skills from TEI for developing good inter- and intrapersonal relationships likely include the skills of empathy, assertion, positive change, self-esteem, stress management, anger control/management, and anxiety control/management.

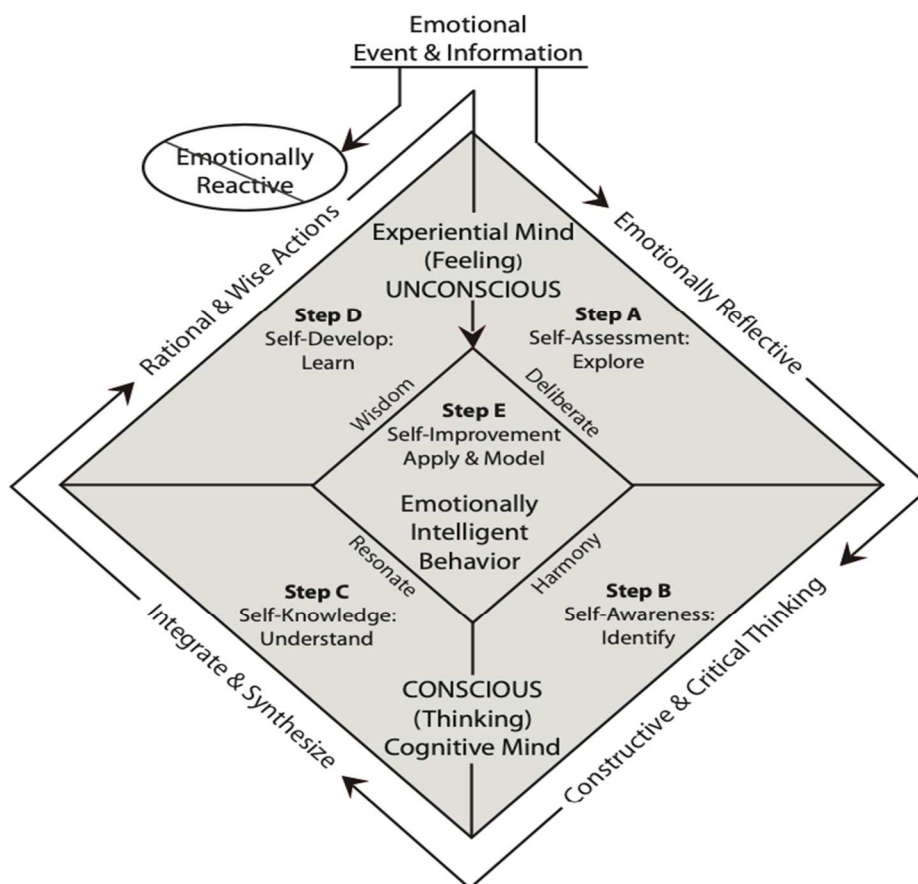


Figure 3. The emotional learning system. Adapted from D. Nelson and G. Low's *Emotional Intelligence: Achieving Academic and Career Excellence in College and Life* (2011, Pearson Higher Education). Reproduced with author permission.

Social Awareness

Social-awareness is an individual's ability to recognize the emotions of others to decide if they can or should be trusted (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Concerning TEI, social awareness is identified under the EI skill of comfort. Nelson and Low (2011) described social awareness as the ability to choose the appropriate emotional, social, and physical distance during verbal and nonverbal interactions with others with the ability to affect and influence others in a positive way. Social-awareness skills include creating

rapport and developing trust through open communication, honesty, and being self-assured (Nelson & Low, 2011).

Social awareness can be found as the primary topic of research encompassing EI in areas of leadership, education, and the medical profession (Ahmed, 2015; Liswandi & Hutabarat, 2019; Mansel & Einion, 2019). Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2004) included social awareness as one of the 18 competencies of EI in their model and assessments. Bar-on also included social awareness in the assessment of the EQ-I measurement for EI, which has been used for studies exploring the relationship of social awareness to work performance (Rasiah, Turner, & Yew Foo Ho, 2019). Social awareness has been significantly related to both work performance and academic success (Ahmed, 2015; Rasiah et al., 2019). According to Goleman, (1998) social awareness is necessary for the development of relationships with others as an individual must be confident and aware of their emotions and have empathy, the ability to read social cues in a group setting, and the ability to anticipate the needs of those in their professional environments.

Social awareness as a component of instructor EI was an important aspect of this study. In the use of COI in distance learning instruction, social awareness is key to teacher presence and social presence, respectively (Majeski et al., 2017). Instructors' modeling of social awareness provides an environment conducive to trust and empathy, allowing students to communicate more effectively. In a study aimed to explore the relationship of EI to job satisfaction among university teachers, the highest correlation existed between social awareness and motivation (Ahmed, 2015). The leadership skill of

social awareness was an essential aspect of this study in understanding online distance educators' perceptions of the various EI component on their practices.

Motivation

As an intrapersonal process, motivation and drive are needed to achieve meaningful goals (Nelson & Low, 2011). Instructors and students alike benefit from motivation as it is a driver of personal and professional success. When one sets goals, it is the motivation that drives reaching their goals. Barzegar and Sadr, (2013) posited motivation among the most important prerequisite of successful language learning among university students. Dornyei (as cited in Barzegar & Sadr, 2013), presented a framework for motivational strategies based on the four facets of (a) creating the basic motivational conditions, (b) generating motivation, (c) maintaining and protecting motivation, and (d) encouraging positive self-evaluation. Emotional components are an integral part of these strategies as basic motivational conditions require successful interpersonal relationships, self-confidence, perseverance and patience, and positive self-evaluation (Barzegar & Sadr, 2013). Each of the emotional components required for motivation is also present in EI. Online instructors who are more aware of their EI intra and interpersonal skills can use the motivational strategies suggested to model effective motivational techniques for their students.

With the popularity of virtual education, the studies of virtual leaders in higher education are useful for understanding the role of online educators in motivating students. Alward and Phelps, (2019) explored the success factors of virtual leaders in higher education and ascertain their leadership influence on team performance; the qualitative

phenomenological study revealed leaders' behaviors and practices successful in leading virtual, academic teams with motivation being one of the seven major themes identified. Participants of this study reported motivational factors of appreciation and acknowledgment, positive feedback on performance, and personal contact as pivotal attributes to their personal motivation. These aspects can translate to the higher education classroom environment through instructor awareness of their interpersonal skills of EI to motivate their students using the same motivational factors noted in the study. Gaining an understanding of instructional perceptions of EI used in online instructors' classrooms is integral to further research to identify strategies in online instructional best practices.

Community of Inquiry

Community of Inquiry (COI) is a framework commonly used for effective online teaching. According to the COI theory, the three interacting and overlapping principal elements of teacher presence, cognitive presence, and social presence is critical to the successful development of online learning environments (Fuller et al., 2014). Each element comprises behaviors and skills for instructor and student success in the distance learning environment. The three presences are invalid without one another. Therefore, the COI framework relies on the concept of equal exposure of the three presences at any given time. The model is based on the belief that more profound levels of learning occur through a community of learners who practice reflective thinking and discussion in the online classroom (Majeski et al., 2018).

Teaching presence entails three sets of responsibilities for thoughtful, focused, and attentive teaching practice. The first is establishing curriculum content, learning

activities, and timeliness; the second is monitoring and managing collaboration and reflection, and the third is ensuring learning outcomes are met through a diagnosis of needs and timely information and direction (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010). Teacher presence is the primary influence to students cognitive and social presence in the online classroom. The instructor's role of setting the climate and selecting appropriate content for course development is emphasized as a critical element of teacher presence in the COI (Fuller et al., 2014). The teacher in this discourse is a facilitator rather than a lecturer. The teacher guides the student on how to build their learning networks and management systems, differentiate between valid sources and propaganda, organize information accurately, and synthesize the information logically (Drexler, 2008). For engendering an atmosphere of trust, communication, and group cohesion, teacher presence is essential in setting the stage for purposeful, collaborative learning (Garrison et al., 2010).

Cognitive presence provides the basis for inquiry and learning. Cognitive presence in the eLearning community defines the communication of and between students, instructors, and the eCommunity at large, as their means of constructing meaning. It is formally defined by the Practical Inquiry model with four phases in the inquiry process: definition of a problem or task, exploration of relevant information/knowledge, making sense of and integrating ideas, and testing plausible solutions (Garrison et al., 2010). By facilitating information exchange to increase understanding, exploration of key concepts, constructing meaning, and applying ideas, cognitive processing is enforced (Fuller et al., 2014). There is a direct, causal relationship

between teacher presence and cognitive presence with the assumption that the assignments and tasks require students to move through the phases of practical inquiry, engaged by teacher presence (Garrison et al., 2010).

A sense of community is an aspect of social presence that is important to students' comfort in communicating in the online classroom; this sense of community is created by the instructor first and foremost. While there are many different interpretations of social presence, Paquette (2016) defined it as, "the recognition, and possibly acknowledgment, of another intellectual and individual in the computer-mediated communication (CMC) environment" (p.85). As the early focus of online learning, social presence is the premise of online learning.

Social presence was defined by Garrison et al. (2010) as "the ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their personalities. It is in the creation of meaningful interaction between instructor and student, and student to student that successful learning outcomes are achieved in the online learning environment (Fuller et al., 2014). Theoretically, social presence is a variable of the responsibility of teaching presence and a condition for creating cognitive presence (Garrison et al., 2010). Social presence, therefore, is a mediating EI skill in the educational learning process.

COI, as conceptualized by Majeski et al. (2018), could be used to explore pedagogical applications of emotional intelligence through an emotional presence modeled by instructors. The findings suggest that particular qualities important to

innovative thinking, such as increased flexibility and creativity, may foster positive interactions and communication between learners, which enforces social presence (Majeski et al., 2018). Further, Majeski et al. (2018) suggested the need for further research for a full understanding of how strategies to enhance learners' awareness of emotional intelligence in the online learning environment engenders student academic success.

Distance Education

Distance education is what is considered online learning or eLearning. It entails learning through the use of technology, such as the internet. Distance learning has increased exponentially in the last decade leading to an increase in the implementation of online courses in colleges across the nation. In times of crisis, such as the 2020 Covid19 pandemic, distance learning became essential for the education of all levels by allowing students to continue learning from home. It is the fastest-growing sector of university-level education, with 32% of higher education students in the United States taking at least one course online (Brown, Hughes, Keppell, Hard, & Smith, 2015). Research has shown that individuals with strong EI guide their thinking, and therefore their actions, to create effective and productive relationships because they are more in tune with their own and others' emotions (Mayer et al., 2004). With the use of TEI, learning to model and apply EI skills greatly enhances online instructor practices (Nelson & Low, 2011). This study has the potential to address a prevalent gap in online instructor practice of how to effectively use their emotional intelligence skills to guide thinking and behavior, leading to a more enjoyable and successful distance learning experience. Through accumulated

knowledge, implementation of strategies, and creation of mentoring relationships, a framework can be created to implement a more meaningful design to online instruction for both the student and the instructor.

In the distance learning environment, there is a concept known as the eLearning ecosystem, which entails the combination of technology, support, and resources available to help individuals learn within the environment (Hung & Nam, 2014). This ecosystem shows the interrelationships between institutions such as education, government, and business. These three entities are known as the triple helix (Hutchings, Quinney, & Galvin, 2014). While becoming part of the eLearning ecosystem, it is essential to live the role and continuously move throughout the ecosphere of the digital world. Pillai, Upadhyaya, Balachandran, and Nidadavolu (2019) emphasized that managing a single learning resource is only a small portion of what the eLearning ecosystem consists of; it is about understanding and making the best use of the benefits of multiple learning resources, choice, and balancing the entire system of multiple resources in a way that provides greater support overall.

Summary and Conclusions

Distance education requires learners to have strong self-management skills and motivation. Cultivating emotional intelligence in online course design and instruction in existing discipline-based online higher education courses helps to develop emotional astuteness, which in turn enhances learning outcomes (Majeski et al., 2017). When instructors model EI, students can see how to use skills to strive and succeed in the online learning environments (Nelson et al., 2017). Majeski et al. (2018) conceptualized

pedagogical applications of emotional intelligence through emotional presence modeled by instructors through the use of the COI framework. The findings suggest qualities important to innovative thinking, such as increased flexibility and creativity, may foster positive interactions and communication between learners which enforces social presence (Majeski et al., 2018). Further research requires a full understanding of ways for instructors to implement strategies to enhance learner's awareness of emotional intelligence in the online learning environment.

Buzdar et al. (2016) examined students' emotional intelligence as a detriment to their readiness in online learning; however, the authors found that emotional intelligence is a significant factor on the effects of students' readiness for e-learning. Student's capabilities of technology use for academic purposes determine their readiness for e-learning. Through the study, Buzdar et al. (2016) found that students preparedness for online learning in the manner of technical competencies very low. The researcher also studied other readiness factors, including the students' potential for self-directed learning, learner control, and motivation, each of which was viewed as elements of emotional intelligence that could be enhanced through instructional practices.

While the students in the study were found not to be confidently prepared and ready to adopt online learning from a technical standpoint, the students' emotional intelligence areas of motivation and self-directed learning ultimately lead to their success. The adoption of pedagogical strategies that foster emotional intelligence to improve readiness for online learning was recommended with an emphasis on the development of

instructional strategies that promote student's awareness of the relationship between their emotional intelligence and their success (Buzdar et al., 2016).

In this section I have presented research evidence of a gap in the literature surrounding instructors' perceptions of their use of EI and how it affects their practice. The supporting research reviewed for this study indicated the need for instructor practices to include modelling EI by instructors for their students. What remains to be discovered are the actual best practices for accomplishing this task in online learning environments. Another important topic covered in this chapter was the conceptual framework for my study. The conceptual framework of TEI and key concepts associated with it were explained along with additional theories that undergird this research in more subtle ways. The relationship to distance education and COI also provided support for the need for this study. Chapter three addressed the research design, rationale, role of the researcher, and methodology of the study. Issues of trustworthiness and credibility are also addressed and summarized.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore instructor perceptions of their use of EI to guide their practice in undergraduate and graduate distance education courses so that this phenomenon can be better understood and best practices can be shared. Chapter 3 is divided into five sections that describe the research design and rationale for the chosen design, the role of the researcher, participant selection, instrumentation used to conduct research, procedures for the recruitment of participants, and criteria for participation. The chapter concludes with a detailed data analysis plan.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What are online instructors' knowledge and experience with EI, including consuming or supervising EI research?

RQ2: What emotional intelligence skills and strategies are used by online instructors to encourage productive online learning environments?

RQ3: What are online instructor perceptions about the importance of instructor-student relationships for fostering online student success?

To investigate participant perceptions and experiences, the basic qualitative research design was used (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Saldaña, 2016). Quantitative research design was appropriate because the measurement and comparison of variables; the primary tasks of the quantitative researcher are not needed to develop a basic understanding of the phenomenon based on people's experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2014). Conversely, the qualitative approach presents an understanding of the

structure, meaning, and essence of individual experiences through a reflective process (Patton, 2015). Additionally, qualitative research includes interpretive practices, providing meaning to specific data and thorough qualitative analysis techniques (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) described the general qualitative study as one that does not situate itself within a specific approach, instead using shared qualitative methods from varied approaches. This section explains why my basic qualitative study was most aligned with phenomenology and acknowledges the importance of the narrative tradition of qualitative studies.

In phenomenological qualitative studies, the research is intended to identify and elucidate a phenomenon through the perception of those who are actors in the situation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The phenomenological approach was most closely related to this basic qualitative study because it typically uses interviews as the primary source of data to understand participants' views and lived experiences (Turner, 2010). Although I used a basic survey to collect initial data that aided in the selection of interview participants, my primary form of data collection was audio-conferenced interviews with the selected participants.

The narrative approach, another form of qualitative research, describes participants' experiences in story form. This approach holds that individuals construct reality through the narration of their stories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The narrative perspective was relevant in my study because developing and using EI is an experiential and lifelong learning processes (Epstein, 2011; Nelson et al., 2017). A clear example of the narrative approach in this study was a participant responding to an interview question

by telling a story about one of their experiences related to using EI. While I did not focus my interview questions to elicit narrative responses, those responses were shared, and appreciating the genre through this discussion opens the possibility of a more thorough thematic analysis of such responses.

Ethnography and case studies are also well-known qualitative approaches. Case study research involves studying one or more cases of contemporary, real-life events, and is bounded by space and time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data collection includes direct observations, interviews, documents, artifacts, and other sources that can help the researcher understand each case. Case study research often results in new theory development through a process that connects one case to the next with consistent data collection and analysis (Dooley, 2002). The case study approach was not appropriate for my basic exploration of instructors' use of EI in online environments because of the nature of the case study approach to collect data using many different techniques.

Finally, ethnographic studies are similar to case studies in the sense that the researcher immerses themselves in the environment being studied. Being immersed in the setting allows the researcher to decipher cultural meaning and generate rich data that emerge concerning the study topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While I teach in, learn in, and create higher education online environment settings through my profession as an education technologist, my experiences in online learning and teaching are not the subject of my investigation. I was not immersed in the environment in which I am studied, nor did I observe my participants therein; therefore, the ethnographic approach was not used in this study.

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher is responsible for the construction, understanding, and implementation of the investigation under study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through data collection using analysis of semi-structured interviews and follow up questions, the researcher identifies themes to explain the phenomenon under study. This approach allows the researcher to best understand participants' perceptions using inductive methods to provide clarity about experiences (Patton, 2015). A subjective approach is necessary to determine the perceptions and experiences of participants. Qualitative researchers are the primary source for collecting data; therefore, I served as the observer-participant during in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I designed and conducted the interviews to collect the data that I later interpreted, analyzed, and reported.

I do not have any personal or professional relationships with the participants in my study. I did not hold positive or negative biases towards distance educators or their viewpoints, as I feel each person holds their own epistemological beliefs and processes that make them successful in their professional endeavors. I respect and value most cultural and personal perspectives, and I did not anticipate any conflict of interest as a result of my data collection efforts or study. I addressed member checking in two steps. First, each participant received the transcription of their interview and offered any corrections or modifications to ensure their perspectives and experiences were accurately represented. Later, after initial data analysis, I also shared my initial findings and themes with participants for comment prior to completing my final data analysis (Saldaña, 2016). Corrections were made based on feedback received in this process.

Methodology

The following methodology section is organized with explanations and justification for participant selection; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and a comprehensive data-analysis plan.

Population and Participant Selection

The population for my study was online instructors who teach graduate and undergraduate courses. To best inform practice, I used a purposeful sampling strategy that was stratified based on gender, level, and years of teaching in an attempt to recruit an equal number of female and male instructors teaching at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. I used an interest inventory survey instrument (see Appendix A) that I created to gauge basic interest and experience qualifications to purposefully screen-in candidate participants. The demographic inventory included three basic contact information questions and four questions to ascertain (a) gender/sex, (b) higher education online courses taught for an accredited college or University, (c) how long they had been teaching online, and (d) what level of courses they taught (primarily graduate or primarily undergraduate).

It was my hope that the participant pool yielded a diverse population based on gender, years of teaching online, and levels of education taught to provide a rich pool of data. The approach to sample size differs based on the type of study. Creswell (1998) suggested five to 25 participants for a phenomenological study or when the themes become saturated, when gathering new data no longer reveals new insight. Klenke (2008) and Morse (1994) suggested the use of a minimum of six participants. The sample

size of qualitative studies is generally small due to the point of diminishing return (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). My goal was to include 10 to 20 participants, or the number required for saturation to occur.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire is a versatile tool that allows for data collection in a number of different research designs, which if properly adapted for qualitative research, makes it an appropriate collection tool for this study (Thomas, 2010). The data obtained from the questionnaire, a research interest survey, guided my participant selection and informed more in-depth investigations through individual interviews (Lambert, 2012). In short, the interest survey facilitated the aforementioned sampling stratification by providing necessary demographic information for potential participants who were appropriate for the study based on the study's purpose. The research interest survey possessed face validity for the intended use based on the expert opinions of my research committee.

The researcher is the primary instrument when collecting data for qualitative studies (Saldaña, 2016). Individual semi-structured interviews were the follow-on tool to collect data based on my interview questions. The interview protocol I created for this study is included in Appendix E. The questions were constructed as to align with the research questions for this study. The responses provided data to be analyzed for themes and compared amongst each participant's responses. The use of semi-structured interviews, rather than structured or unstructured interviews, allowed me to pursue new lines of inquiry based on respondent answers to initial questions (Lambert, 2012). Three essential elements to a successful interview are (a) asking questions that identify rich,

detailed information, (b) asking open-ended questions allowing the interviewee to answer in any way they choose, and (c) ensuring the questions are not fixed with separate follow through questions prepared to gather more information based on the answers given (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The initial questions drafted gained insights specific to participant practices in the online learning environment. Rubin and Rubin (2012) provided an interview guide that outlines four stages of conducting interviews, including (a) introduction, (b) surface questions to elicit empathy, (c) harder questions with more depth, and (d) closing to include a recap of information and last chances to add more information or clarification. These stages improve the validity and reliability of the data collection process (Saldaña, 2016). By implementing these stages, I supported the goal of qualitative data gathering and the structure to maintain quality, rigor, and ethical standards.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from Walden University IRB (#07-29-20-0762244), I began recruitment for my study using a three-pronged approach. First, I invited my LinkedIn contacts using the LinkedIn invitation post in Appendix B. The rationale for using my LinkedIn network to recruit potential participants stems from my professional associations through LinkedIn with higher education teaching and technology professionals, combined with ease of communicating through this medium. Secondly, recruitment emails were sent to members of the EITRI by the institute's founding member, Dr. Gary Low (see Appendix C). My Walden University email was affixed for interested persons to reply. The purpose of this institute is to provide a forum for

communicating and sharing EI-centric information, ideas, and research, and the many of EITRI's members serve as online instructors in higher education. Finally, I sent an email to Flagship University's (a pseudonym) voluntary participant pool for the recruitment of interested individuals who qualified based on the demographics for this study.

I then used email to respond to potential participants who contacted me with interest. The email included the consent form. The consent email included a statement that reads, "If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about participating in the study, please share your demographic information by clicking on this google form. If you do not want to participate in this study, I thank you for your initial interest and consideration" (Appendix D). Attached to the email I included the definitions of the EI skills from the ESAP (see Appendix F) for participant review. When selecting participants, my goal was to select a stratified sample based on the select-in criteria. In that email, I also informed participants that they were welcome to ask questions regarding the study by email, phone, or Zoom audio conference before agreeing to the consent form.

Upon receipt of the google forms, I contacted each participant using email with a link to my scheduling calendar on Calendly to schedule a time for the individual, semi-structured interview using Zoom web conferencing. I began each interview by reviewing the signed informed consent. Participants were provided with a common vocabulary of EI skills and definitions (Appendix F) for discussing the phenomenon of interest, as was recommended for some forms of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). I offered

participants an opportunity to review the 10 EI skills and three potential problems presented in Appendix F.

The ESAP, according to Nelson et al. (2003), is an instrument that uses a three-point Likert scale to measure 10 skills within four composite skill areas and three problematic areas. For training and education, the problematic areas of aggression, deference, and change orientation are converted to the skills of anger control/management, anxiety control/management, and positive change, respectively. Assertive communication is the principal skill for maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships and comprises the interpersonal composite scale. The skills of comfort (social awareness), empathy, decision making, and positive leadership comprise the personal leadership composite scale. Drive strength, time management, and commitment ethic comprise the self-management composite scale. Finally, self-esteem and stress management comprise the intrapersonal composite scale. According to Nelson et al. (2003), the 213-item ESAP possesses an overall Chronbach's alpha internal reliability coefficient of .91. The instrument has demonstrated content validity through concurrent correlation studies with Epstein's (1998) constructive thinking measure of emotional intelligence (Cox & Nelson, 2008), transformational leadership (Tang, Yin, & Nelson, 2010), and leadership quality (Hammett, Hollon, & Maggard, 2012), as well as other aspects of healthy being (Nelson et al., 2003).

Before concluding the interviews, I asked participants if they have any questions or concerns for me or if they would like to add any additional information before ending the interview. A tone and atmosphere was set for participants to feel comfortable

speaking openly and honestly with me about their experiences and understanding of EI in their instructional practices. I ensured that participants did not feel any discomfort from taking part in this study.

After each interview, I transcribed the recording through TEMI software, and proofread the transcription. Once the data were analyzed and themes identified, I shared the findings with participants with an invitation to discuss via zoom conference, phone, or email, this is considered part of the triangulation process of member checking. Member checking is when the participants validate the findings and themes identified (Saldaña, 2016). If discrepancies were identified, we discussed in a follow-up Zoom audio conference, phone call, or via email (see Figure 4). Participants will be provided a one to two-page summarized report of the findings from the study after it has been approved by my committee and passes the oral defense. All data involved in the study will be kept secured in password protected. Microsoft Word documents will be password protected electronically, and all hard copy information will be locked in a file cabinet. I will be the only person with access to all data collected for the study. Data will be kept for five years as required by Walden University, after which time the data will be destroyed by shredding and permanent electronic document removal.

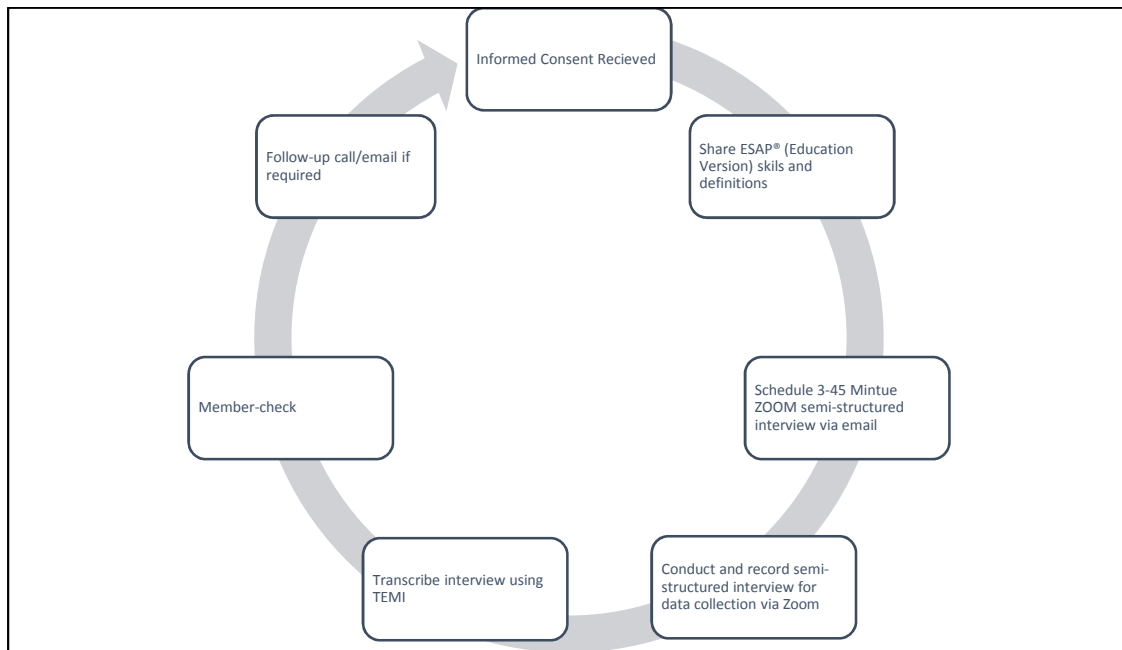


Figure 4. Data collection and analysis process.

Data Analysis Plan

For the data analysis plan to be feasible, the data collected must reflect upon the specific research questions that were designed to guide the study (Thomas, 2010). Table 2 presents the alignment of the interview questions in Appendix E with the research questions of the study.

Table 2

Alignment of Research and Interview Questions

Research questions	Related interview questions
RQ1: What are online instructors' knowledge and experience with EI, including consuming and/or supervising EI research?	IVQ1: Please describe emotional intelligence in your own words. IVQ2: Please share any emotional intelligence research or publishing that you have been involved with.
RQ2: What emotional intelligence skills are used by online instructors to encourage productive learning environments?	IVQ3: What emotional intelligence skills or competencies do you find helpful, if any, when working with students in distance learning environments? IVQ4: Please share examples of how you incorporate emotional intelligence when working with your students. IVQ5: What EI skills do you identify with online instruction best practices? IVQ6: What EI considerations would you include if you designed a college course for online delivery? IVQ7: Please share any examples of how you have used EI to help mitigate limitations of online course designs in the courses you have taught. IVQ8: What EI-centric practices do you currently employ with your students that you would suggest as best practices for all instructors?
RQ3: What are online instructor perceptions about the importance of instructor-student relationships for fostering online student success?	IVQ9: How do you think the use of emotional intelligence by online instructors relates to student success? IVQ10: Please share your perceptions about the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence when communicating with your students.

Upon completion of the research interest surveys and interviews, an adhoc thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes based on participant responses. Themes were operationalized as consistent phrases, expressions, or ideas that were common between multiple research participants (Turner, 2010). The analysis was used to answer the research questions with the hopes of capturing best practices for using EI by

online instructors. Immersive engagement took place during the analysis process to include multiple data readings, vetting of themes, and coding with dialogic engagement (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The following specific coding steps recommended by Lambert (2012) were taken during the data analysis process:

1. Recorded interviews were listened to several times; written interviews were read and re-read to ensure my familiarity with the data.
2. Common themes were identified, labeled, and noted in an excel document.
3. Perspectives were identified during the interview process using field notes, paying particular attention to participant behaviors and cues. Only when shared by the participant, cues were pursued with relevant follow up questions to increase the depth and breadth of the interview questions.
4. Identification of representative quotations and events supporting identified themes. Color coding was often helpful in this process (Lambert, 2012).

Analytic memos were used during the coding process. The memos were created in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with separate tabs/workbooks for each participant where memos were recorded. Analytic memos are similar to journal entries but more specific to investigation. These memos provided reflections on my coding processes and code choices, how the process of inquiry took its shape, and served as a record of how themes emerged (Saldaña, 2016). The spreadsheet included columns for time, theme, and notes. The time column addressed the exact time noted in the interview recording that initiated the memo. The theme column noted the theme based on the information heard. The note column included my rationale for the selected theme. When

identifying a theme, the analytical memo created helped me to reflect the deeper, complex meaning it invoked (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). With the use of analytic memos, further themes were identified and an understanding as to why I chose specific themes were evident.

Field notes were also used during audio conferenced interviews using the Zoom application. Field notes, according to Rubin and Rubin (2012), are written documentation of participant observations, which can lead to personal and objective responses to and interpretations of participants social actions. I used a composition book to hand-write the time mark during the interview that the observation took place along with a brief description of the observation. These notes were useful for recording follow-up questions based on participant cues that I returned to during the interview, thereby avoiding the interruption of the participant's train of thought. Field notes were kept during the analytic memo process for reflective purposes.

I used an inductive approach for analyzing the data. This approach is used when there is not a predetermined structure or expectation of findings based on participant responses (Creswell, 2014). The portion of data being coded during first cycle coding can range from a single word to a phrase, and even an entire paragraph (Saldaña, 2016). Descriptive coding was for first-cycle coding representing my understanding of what was being communicated. Descriptive coding stays close to the text and allows the researcher to use words and phrases used in the transcript to determine themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A variety of descriptive coding methods were used throughout to analyze the data as thoroughly as possible, to unpack succinct, applicable emergent themes. Qualitative

research often makes use of more than one coding method to ensure quality, rigor, and transferability, and the use of more than one coding method is often required in exploratory research (Creswell, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2016).

Accordingly, *please summarize here the different coding methods used.*

An important aspect to validity in the data analysis is the treatment of discrepant data. Discrepant data are data analyzed that does not fit the pattern or fit into the categories that have come up in other data analysis (Waite, 2011). These data pieces may have many of the same characteristics of the others, but the emergent themes do not relate to the current study. Qualitative researchers must not force data to conform to preconceived notions. Therefore, reviewing data multiple times to look for cases that do not fit the pattern of understanding is critical for effective data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Discrepant case analysis is a process where the outliers and odd cases shed light on more mundane concepts or themes (Waite, 2011). I handled discrepant cases by making use of the debriefing process. Peer debriefing verified that the peer also sees the discrepancies I identified before removing the data from the study, or clarifies what was meant by the response. Peer debriefing ensured that any unconscious biases were not driving my decision to eliminate data that did not fit into the themes that repeatedly emerged throughout the data analysis process.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is considered trustworthy to the extent that the researcher employs validation methods for the collected data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Also, reflection by the researcher is an important factor during the interview process, as there is

a strong emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between the researcher and participant (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). There are several methods of validating qualitative data for trustworthiness to include: credibility, transferability dependability, conformability, and intercoder reliability (Amankwaa, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). The following subsections outline the methods I employed to create trustworthiness in my research.

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility combines reliability and validity to help ensure that the study measures what it was intended to measure (Shenton, 2004). The accuracy and purposefulness of the research and the existence of repeatable themes reflect a higher degree of credibility (Golafshani, 2003). Credibility can be maintained by being familiar with the culture of participants, the use of varied data collection methods, establishing rapport with participants to allow honest engagement, and choosing participants directly related to the study purpose (Shenton, 2004). Each of these practices were implemented in my data collection process.

Credibility in this study was established through the use of member checks, reflective journaling, and timeliness in data analysis. Members checks are used in establishing credibility. I provided each participant with a transcript of the interview to review for accuracy prior to analysis. If there were any discrepancies in the transcript, I scheduled a phone or internet conference call with the participant. Reflective journaling includes keeping an ongoing real-time chronicle of reflections, questions, and ideas throughout the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I reflectively responded to

interview cues and responses, and throughout the data analysis process, I kept a record of any ideas and questions that emerged.

Saturation is reached when the continued analysis of the data does not shed any further light on the topic under study (Mason, 2010). With the use of coding procedures, the experiences and understanding of participants was best understood. Emerging themes were identified, and continued research resulted in additional findings not related to the study. By providing an explanation of how often I analyzed the data, rather than how many times, the reader had a better understanding of why I stopped analyzing data when I did.

Transferability

In quantitative research, the onus is on the researcher to design the methodology in ways that increase the generalizability of findings to other populations. Conversely, in qualitative research, the onus of judging the transferability to other contexts falls upon the research consumer and can be enhanced by the extent to which the researcher conducts and describes the data collection and analysis processes (Shenton, 2004). According to Shenton (2004), transferability is related to external validity and refers to how the findings from the study can be applied to a wider population or sample. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness in transferability are the use of journaling following interviews or journaling a timeline of events related to data collection, and thick description in the coding process (Amankwaa, 2016). Thick descriptions are established by providing enough detailed information that the reader obtains a vivid picture of the events of the research (Amankwaa, 2016). Thick description provides the reader with a thorough

understanding of how the research findings were established and how they can be used in further research. The findings from this study might inform online instructor practices and teaching strategies to effectively model EI for students.

Dependability

Dependability and reliability are terms used interchangeably in social science research. The alignment of the purpose, problem, and research questions enhance dependability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When research is dependable, it is consistent and repeatable. In order for research to be repeated accurately, the design and alignment explanation should be detailed, and the data collection strategies specifically outlined to provide a detailed and transparent research process (Shenton, 2004). For this study to achieve dependability, I provided a detailed description of the data collection process and timeline and the process I took to analyze the data accurately.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the objectivity aspect of qualitative research. This aspect of trustworthiness confirms that the findings from the research are the experiences of the participants and not those of the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Throughout the data collection process, I did not influence participants perspectives on the topics being discussed by sharing my own stories, examples, or thoughts. In order to achieve conformability, I maintained a quiet, observed, and facilitated questions during the interviews, and I reviewed the data thoroughly and practiced reflective journaling during my data analysis phase of the research.

Ethical Procedures

In qualitative research, the researcher plays an integral role in the research process. The researcher needs to respect the shared experiences of the participants which includes upholding ethical principles of autonomy and justice (Flick, 2014). Researchers are responsible for upholding their ethical responsibilities during the research process to include following IRB procedures of the University and any other organizations that may be involved, fair and unbiased recruiting, ethical data collection and processing of collecting data, informed consent, and confidentiality and data protection. Reflective journaling and peer debriefing are two tools I used in my research process to ensure the ethical treatment of my research participants (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The use of peer debriefing involved using a peer who reviews and asks questions about the study to ensure the account resonates with people other than the researcher (Creswell, 2014). Peer debriefing added validity to the research findings.

In order to mitigate threats to validity in research, it is important to use ethical procedures for recruitment to include an unbiased, non-selective process. This stipulation means participants should be selected based on bonified research delimitations rather than the researcher's interests (Creswell, 1998). The use of purposeful sampling was used for this research, as explained in the previous section on related procedures. Purposeful sampling means that participants were chosen to participate in the study for specific qualifying criteria related to the phenomenon being studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The power of purposeful sampling is in selecting rich participants to create a data- rich response pool in response to an in-depth study (Patton, 2015).

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), it is the qualitative interviewer's ethical responsibility to examine their role in the research and challenge existing biases, assumptions, and epistemologies. Throughout the data collection process, the use of reflective journaling assisted me in challenging any biases and helped me work through the complexities of my research findings. In addition to self-reflection in the research process, the ethical responsibility of a qualitative researcher is informed consent. Providing informed consent that is transparent and stringent so that participants understand what they agree to is vital to research ethics (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016; Thomas, 2010). In order to adhere to strong ethics, I provided informed consent (Appendix C) and strived to maintain an honest, professional rapport with my participants to ensure they understood precisely what I am researching. To ensure they understood, I asked participants to reiterate the research in their own words. It is unethical to use data for any other purpose than what the researcher informed the participant it would be used for. Therefore, the data obtained for the research was only used for this specific research study and possibly publishing in a peer-reviewed journal after graduation.

Informed consent can assist in maintaining confidentiality in the research process. Confidentiality is an important aspect of the data collection process that allowed participants to be as open and honest as possible. Writing results that discuss demographics or personally identifying information can challenge confidentiality (Flick, 2014). Therefore, the specific safeguards I took in the presentation of data included research standards for the ethical treatment of research participants. As such, I used code

sheets to remove all personally identifying information from transcribed interviews (Flick, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Pseudonyms were used in place of participant names. By sharing these protection procedures with participants, it allowed them to feel more comfortable and honest in answering interview questions (Yob, 2016).

Finally, an important aspect of the ethical treatment of data in qualitative research is data security and stewardship, concepts which include keeping the obtained data secure, especially when it comes to and data that could be used to identify participants (Burkholder et al., 2016). Audio recording of interviews were kept on the Zoom website with password-protected access to the recordings. All electronic documents to include (a) transcripts, (b) reflective journals, (c) memos, (d) field notes, and (e) informed consent documents were stored in password-protected documents in Microsoft Word. I used pseudonyms to replace actual school and organizational names if needed in my data analysis to further strengthen the confidentiality aspects of my data analysis and overall study. After five years, the electronic data will be erased from my computer and hard copy data will be shredded, per Walden University policy and accepted conventions of social science research.

Summary

A strong methodological approach helps to ensure the quality of research data collection and analysis efforts. In Chapter 3, I explained and defended my planned design approach for this basic qualitative study. I reviewed my methods for participant recruitment, instrumentation, collecting data, ensuring ethical practices, and my data analysis plan. This chapter described the purpose of the research for developing an

understanding of online instructors' use of EI in higher education distance learning environments. The objective was to understand online instructors' best practices for using EI in their online environments to inform future practice. Through the methodological design and stated practices presented here, I hoped to fill a gap in the literature about online instructors' use of EI.

Chapter three detailed the research methods used for the intended study. A rationale and design were explained, defining the central concept of the study, the qualitative design choice was supported, and the role of the researcher was explained. A detailed account of (a) participant selection, (b) instrumentation, (c) procedures for recruitment, (d) invitation to participate, and (e) data collection was included. The data analysis plan included the connection of the data to the specified research questions, and ethical procedures were described. Strategies to establish credibility, trustworthiness, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were described in detail to ensure the data analysis meets saturation, triangulation, and reflexivity. Chapter four discussed the results of the research, including the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. Chapter four concluded with a summarization of answers to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore instructor perceptions of their use of EI to guide their practice in undergraduate and graduate distance education courses. Exploring instructor perceptions about their EI self-awareness through qualitative interviews allowed me to clarify the use of EI by instructors in higher education distance learning environments. I sought to address three RQ's: (a) What are online instructors' knowledge and experience with EI, including consuming or supervising EI research? (b) What emotional intelligence skills and strategies are used by online instructors to encourage a productive online learning environment? (c) What are online instructor perceptions about the importance of instructor-student relationships for fostering online student success? In this chapter, I discuss the study setting, demographics, data collection procedures, and analysis. Further, I will present evidence of trustworthiness and the results and findings of the study.

Setting

The setting for semi-structured interviews was Zoom web-conferencing software. I situated myself in my home office to ensure participants' privacy and to reduce distractions. Participants were encouraged to situate themselves in an office or area that was void of distractions during the scheduled interview period. Conferences were arranged using an online shared calendar application, Calendly. When participants scheduled their time through Calendly, it automatically generated the Zoom conference link and sent the invitation to the participant with password protection. Seven interviews were conducted on different dates, three interviews were conducted on the same date

(August 11, 2020) with a 3 to 5 hour window between each interview, and three additional interviews were conducted on the same date (August 20, 2020) with a 4-hour window between each to allow me to absorb the information, complete memos and field notes, and transcribe the data while it was still fresh.

During the interviews there were no personal or organizational relationships that influenced honesty and open communication. The COVID19 pandemic had a slight effect on the responses from some participants. This unique challenge was addressed during the interviews and was deemed not to have skewed the results. The interview protocol (see Appendix E) was used to guide the interviews to gain perspectives of online instructors' self-awareness and use of EI in their courses.

A total of 13 participants were chosen based on the selection criteria that they teach higher education distance learning courses. Participants by gender include four men and nine women (see Figure 5). Participants level of experience teaching online courses was nearly equal with four participants holding 1 to 3 years' experience, three participants with 4 to 6 years' experience, three participants with 6 to 10 years' experience, and three participants with more than 10 years' experience (see Figure 6). Additionally, there was an equal number of participants' teaching level, with six teaching at the graduate level and six teaching at the undergraduate level; one participant taught at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Participants were recruited through the EITRI where 10 volunteer participants were selected; the Flagship University Participant Pool where two participants were selected, and LinkedIn where one participant was selected.

Participants were provided the ESAP Skills and Definitions for the purpose of a shared vocabulary between researcher and participants. Participants recruited from EITRI had first-hand understanding of the ESAP skills and definitions through participation in the EITRI conference and were well-versed in the skills being discussed. Participants from the participant pool and LinkedIn had knowledge of EI through various theories and research and were able to connect the EI skillsets known to the ESAP skills without hesitation in order to create a common vocabulary. It was important for me to use the ESAP skills to discuss EI for the purpose of the study.

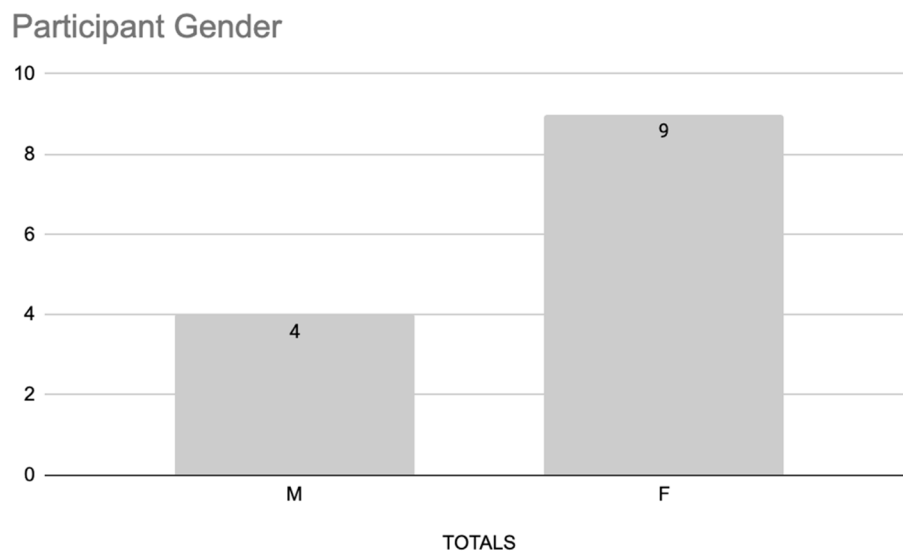


Figure 5. Participant demographics by gender. M = male, F = female.

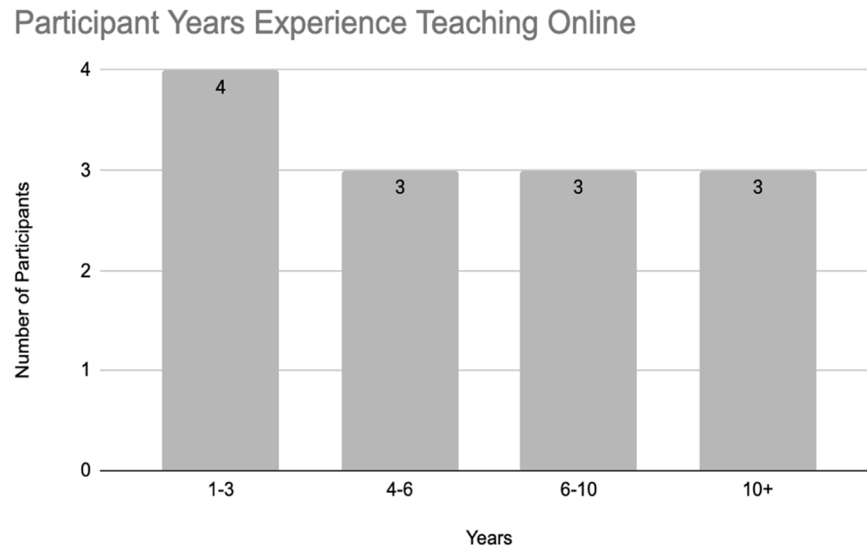


Figure 6. Participant demographics by years' experience.

Data Collection

The recruitment process began immediately following Walden IRB approval (#07-29-20-0762244). Recruitment resulted in a total of 14 participants from a variety of distance education institutions nationally. One participant dropped from the study due to an interstate move and inability to schedule an interview time. The method used for this study was purposive sampling stratified on gender, level, and years of teaching in an effort to recruit equal number of male and female instructors and a variety of teaching levels and experience. During the initial recruitment email, participants were provided with the informed consent (see Appendix D) which included information regarding the study background, procedures, potential risks and benefits, voluntary nature of the study, and confidentiality. Participants were encouraged to respond with any questions they had about the study or request a phone conference to discuss further. Participants were encouraged to take time to review the informed consent. When participants agreed to the

letter of consent, they completed the google form and demographic survey to show agreement. A demographic survey (see Appendix A) was used to gauge participant experience qualifications. After completing the demographic survey, potential participants were contacted via email with a Calendly link to schedule a zoom meeting time that met their schedule.

All interviews were conducted via Zoom web conferencing which allowed for a personalized feel through the use of audio only interviews. Initially, I had planned to use both audio and video so I could include facial expressions and body language in my data analyses; however, the use of video was prohibited by the IRB. Still, the audio conferencing was sufficient to allow me to identify vocal tone changes and other cues associated with participants responses which were added to my field notes and used to enhance findings. All interviews took place between August 7 and August 23, 2020 and took between 35-50 minutes each. With the permission of participants, interviews were recorded. The interview protocol (see Appendix E) was used for initial questions, the nature of semi-structured interviews allows for relevant follow on questions to inquire further into participant responses.

Directly following interview, the audio recordings were transcribed using TEMI software which provides a Microsoft word document. I listened to the audio to compare to the transcripts several times to ensure accuracy. When all data were included and verified, I began the first coding of the data using Microsoft Word tables with the use of participant quotes to identify codes. From the central idea codes, I derived second cycle codes directly related to EI skills. The use of color coding, margin comments and

anchored sentence-level notes assisted in the coding and theme analysis. Upon completion of coding, I shared identified codes with the participants for accuracy, what is known as member check, to establish credibility in my findings. No participant offered any additional notes or adjustments to my codes.

One variation not noted in my data collection plan was the use of Nvivo Software. NVivo 12 software was used to identify word frequencies in order to eliminate the possibility of bias or discrepant data from the coding process (Saldaña, 2016). In addition to the NVivo frequency count, the use of word trees and word clouds created through NVivo software helped to finalize thematic elements and final theme identification.

Data Analysis

A total of 13 interviews were conducted using Zoom web conferencing and interviews were transcribed using TEMI software. Field notes were recorded in a composition book during interviews to hand-write the time mark that a noteworthy comment was made along with a brief description. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), field notes are written documentation of researcher-participant observations, which can lead to personal and objective responses to and interpretations of participants social actions. The observations I noted included non-verbal cues such as tone of voice and inflection, breathing patterns, and thoughtful pauses in answering questions. These notes were useful for recording follow-up questions based on participant cues, thereby avoiding the interruption of the participant's train of thought. Field notes were used during the analytic memo process for reflective purposes. The four analytic steps used in this study recommended by Lambert (2012) were (a) listening to the recorded interview several

times to ensure familiarity with the data, (b) common themes identified, labeled, and noted in a table in a Word document, (c) perspectives identified during the interview process with the use of field notes paying particular attention to participant behavior and cues. Only when shared by participants, cues resulted in follow-up questions to increase the depth and breadth of the interview question; (d) identification of representative quotations and events supporting identified themes with the use of color coding.

I used an inductive approach to data analysis, an approach that is used when there is not a predetermined structure or expectation of findings based on participant responses (Creswell, 2014). During first cycle coding, I identified phrases and descriptions that were consistent during the individual interviews as well as those that came up continuously through multiple interviews. Descriptive coding stays close to the text, allowing me to use words and phrases used in the transcript to determine central ideas (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The descriptive coding assisted in determining central ideas through repetition of words, phrases, and narratives throughout the interview process.

With the use of identified central ideas, second cycle coding took place which involved analysis of central ideas to derive codes. The codes resulted in aggregated themes which I identified as EI skills. A variety of descriptive coding methods were used to unpack succinct, applicable, and emergent themes. During the second cycle coding I identified common EI skills based on participant responses and the codes applied to such. As I analyzed responses from varied participants to the same interview question, codes emerged naturally describing the EI skills associated with each response. I also incorporated peer debriefing to ensure there were no apparent biases in identification of

EI codes and discrepant data. Creswell (2014) suggests the use of peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of accounts between researcher and participant by reviewing and asking questions about the study so that the account will resonate with other people besides the researcher. I included my peer debrief in the same process as the member-checks and had ongoing conversations with her to identify inaccuracies of accounts as well as further questions that may have arisen.

Once coding cycles were complete, I summarized the process and added identified codes to transcripts and shared with participants in what is known as member checks. No follow-up conversations were requested by participants nor were there any additional comments or change requests. Upon completion of member checks, I used NVivo software to identify word frequencies in order to eliminate the possibility of bias or discrepant data. In addition to the NVivo frequency count, the use of word trees and word clouds created through NVivo software helped to finalize thematic elements and final theme identification. First, I created word frequency tables for each RQ, then I created word clouds using the 50 most used words from each response. After reviewing the word clouds, I created word trees to identify how the frequent words were used in context, in completing this step, I was able to see the connection between the EI skill derived from the coding process to the theme identified through word frequency that seemed directly related to the RQ. Four themes emerged from the data with each theme associated with a specific RQ. The identified four themes included (a) managing, identification, and understanding of emotions, (b) understanding of others, (c) instructor positive influence for enhancing student success, and (d) Importance of instructor-student

rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI. Table 3 illustrates the themes associated with the RQ's.

Upon completion of theme identification, I emailed my findings to participants again for a final member check allowing participants to provide any additional input, clarify any questions, and ask if they agree with what emerged. Participant responses indicated they agreed with the emerged themes, findings, and the interpretation of their responses.

Table 3

Themes Identified by RQ

RQ	Theme 1	Theme 2
1	Managing, identification, and understanding of emotions	Understanding of others
2	Instructor positive influence for enhancing student success	
3	Importance of instructor-student rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI	

Results

In this section I present my data analysis and findings as related to each of the research questions. The themes identified surrounded higher education online instructors' perceptions of their knowledge and experience with EI via consuming or supervising EI research, EI skills used to encourage productive learning environments, and importance of instructor-student relationships for fostering student success. The unpacked themes are described in more detail and with context from my interviews below.

RQ1: Instructor EI Knowledge and Experience

The first research question sought to clarify online instructors' knowledge and experience supervising or conducting EI research. This RQ was important for establishing a baseline understanding of participant background in EI. The overarching theme identified for RQ1 was "managing, identification, and understanding of emotions." The two interview questions related to RQ1 asked participants to describe EI in their own words and describe EI research and publishing they have been involved with. Nearly all data gathered from 13 interviews portrayed the understanding of EI as management of emotions, identification of emotions, source of emotions, control of emotions, and understanding of emotions (see figure 7). P1 stated, "Emotional maturity... When a person has the empathetic perception to identify and respond in communication with others..." P4 stated, "Managing emotions with respect to interactions with others;" P5 stated, "Understanding your own emotions and skills and how to use them for your own growth and development and interactions with others." Additionally, P7 stated, "The ability to manage and be aware of what you're thinking and feeling in the moment and to act appropriately and accordingly." Through these responses it is evident that participants understood the theory of EI as relating to one's emotional regulation and self-awareness. Additionally, self-awareness was identified in the coding process as a prominent EI skill for RQ1.

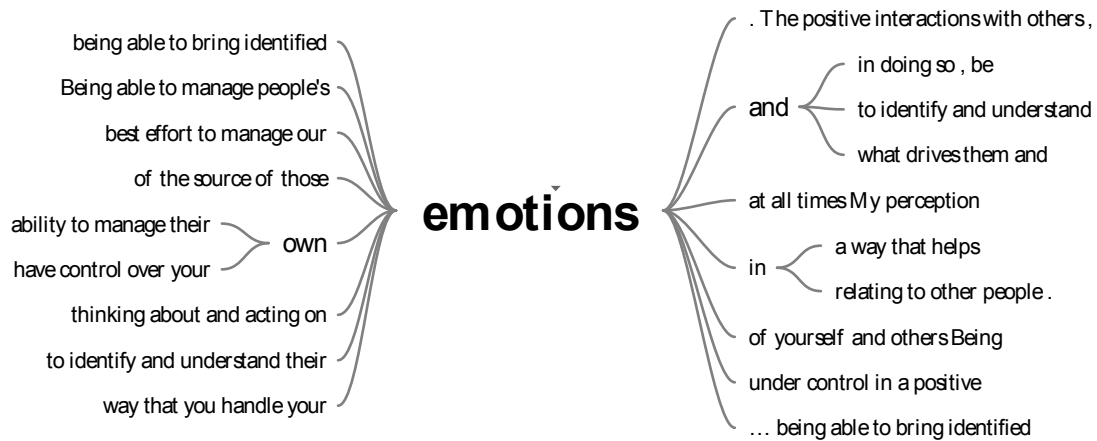


Figure 7. Word tree for the root word, “emotions”. Produced using NVivo 12.

As evidenced in the participant responses described, each participant acknowledged the importance of EI in interacting with others; which unpacked the theme of “Understanding of others.” The theme of “Understanding of others” identified from the word trees use of the second most used word “Other” revealed responses from participants that focused on how EI skills effect communication, perception, reactions, and behaviors of self and others (See figure 8). For example, P12 responded, “Being able to manage people’s emotions in a way that helps us move forward, it’s also being able to be perceptive enough to see how people feel within a situation;” P7 responded in regard to responding to others by stating, “To sense or recognize and identify what others are thinking and what they are feeling and respond accordingly.” As noted in each response, the participants focused on the perception of others’ emotions. Each participant presented a thorough understanding of EI and how it applies professionally and personally.

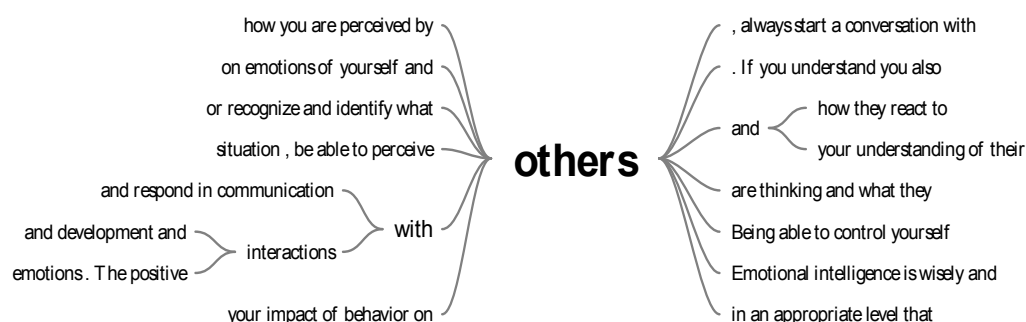


Figure 8. Word tree for the root word, “others”. Produced using NVivo 12.

In addressing the second part of RQ 1, online instructors experience with consuming and/or supervising EI research, each participant shared their personal experience with EI. Each participant engaged with EI research through direct publishing, personal research, and self-directed learning. Specific experience included completion of research or dissertation using EI as the conceptual framework, published research articles, working directly with EI researchers (though not part of the research themselves), and self-exploration which included reading EI books, participation in EI workshops or conferences, and direct instruction of EI through programs and courses. Ten participants were members of EITRI and had a direct relationship to the ESAP implementation and use of ESAP in their practice. The conclusion of RQ1 is that the participants who contributed to the study each had thorough and first-hand experience with consuming EI research and information, Table 4 shows participants experience with EI.

Table 4

Participant Experience with EI Research

P#	Self- Exploration	Dissertation / Direct Research	Published Article	Work W/ Researchers
1	X			
2		X	X	
3	X			
4	X			X
5	X			X
6		X	X	
7	X			
8		X		
9		X	X	
10	X			
11		X	X	
12	X			
13	X	X		X

RQ1 helped me to clarify participants' understanding of the theory of EI, but also provided first-hand knowledge from online instructors on the use of, identification of, and importance of understanding EI in their professional practice. The interview process began with a common understanding and evaluation of instructors' knowledge to validate their participation in the research study. Upon completion of my analysis of RQ1, I completed a second member check to ensure participants agreed with the findings above. Each participant was pleased with the findings and did not provide any additional commentary or suggestion of the emerged themes.

RQ2: EI Skills Used by Online Instructors

The leadership category of the TEI includes the EI skills of comfort, empathy, decision-making, and leadership. This skill category as a whole was emphasized throughout the interview responses presented for RQ2, "What EI skills are used by online instructors to encourage productive learning environment?" The primary emphasis of the response to this question was directed toward the student, as evidenced by the word

frequency of “student(s)” being used 202 times. The words “understand” used 53 times, and “help” 52 times (see Table 5) are directly related to the EI skill of empathy. In referencing the use of the words “understand” and “help” the words tended to be synonymous with each other in context. Instructors referenced “understanding” primarily to their own understanding of student’s needs, but also in relation to helping students to understand their EI skills and how it applies to their learning. In the use of the words “help” in relation to helping students manage their EI skills and understanding of course materials emphasize the use of empathy from the instructor.

Table 5

NVivo12 Word Frequency List RQ2

Word	Count	Similar Words
students	202	student, students, students'
understand	53	understand, understanding, understands
help	52	help, helped, helpful, helping, helps
learning	43	learn, learned, learning
online	43	online
self	38	self
need	36	need, needed, needs
empathy	36	empathy
stress	33	Stress
comfort	32	comfort, comfortable

During the analysis process of the word “understand,” I looked closely at responses from instructors to investigate the importance of the use of this word. From the

responses to IVQ3, *What emotional intelligence skills or competencies do you find helpful, if any, when working with students in distance learning environments*” helped to answer RQ2 and identify themes. For instance, P1 response included:

Drive strength, time management, commitment ethic are all interrelated by trying to help students understand they have due dates and teaching them to be timely. Then you learn to manage your time and have that personal drive and drive strength and commitment ethic to work that through because with online learning its really up to the student.

The response from P1 with the use of “understand” showed the importance of student understanding in relation to online coursework and scheduling, ultimately leading to the importance of their EI self-management skills. Similarly, P2 stated, “Time management helps them with executive functioning skills in terms of organization and understanding how much time they need to put towards coursework. Emphasizing self-direction and stress management, helping them find a work/life balance.” This response again focuses on the importance of students’ self-management skills, but also their intrapersonal skills related to managing aspects of themselves such as stress and self-esteem. P13’s response, “It’s not just being able to understand someone or judge appropriately the situation, you have to be able to establish a relationship with that individual so that they can trust me as an instructor,” supports the finding of empathy as a crucial skill for online instructors to encourage productive learning environments. P13’s response highlights the need for instructor empathy and comfort with students to create rapport leading to their comfort in approaching the instructor with questions or issues that arise.

IVQ6, *What EI centric practices do you currently employ with your students that you would suggest as best practices for all instructors?* Provided similar responses with the use of “understand” in the response relating directly to instructor leadership skills. P4’s response directly states empathy is crucial to building trust and team building, P4 stated:

When you build trust with a team you can really go to the next level with those individuals and have expectations of them to perform at a certain level.

Understanding where students come from, who they are; understand the student and have some empathy and understanding about where they are coming from.

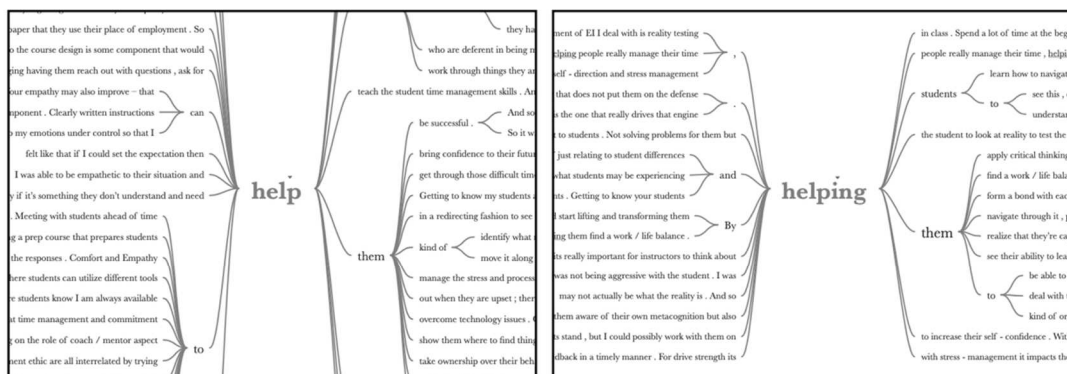
When using EI skills to encourage productive learning, creating a sense of understanding for students, as well as ensuring students understand the expectations of the instructor, it results in success. P13 stated:

I would say assertiveness and leadership, if you are not a good leader and a leader is not someone who just tells you what to do, a leader jumps in there and does it with you and shows you until you understand and make sure you understand so that you can complete it on your own.

P13 expressed the importance of leadership skills in regards to communication and ensuring students success through understanding.

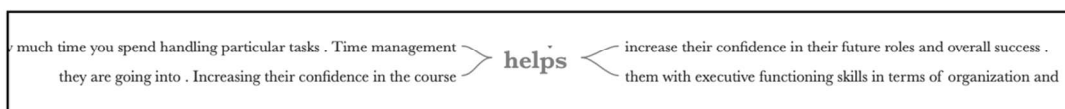
The word “help”, along with its stem words “helping” and “helped” all referred to assisting students in ways to overcome barriers to their success through enhancement and management of their EI skills. The word trees for the three words shown in Figure 9 visualize the use of the words in relation to instructor role in assisting students through

the use of the instructor EI as a model. The word stems, “help anticipate struggles”, “mitigate frustration”, “get through difficult times”, and “overcome technology issues”, convey the instructors’ use of empathy to help students overcome barriers. The stems “helps” and “helping” focus on specific intrapersonal and self-management skills of the student such as “helps increase their (student) confidence”, “...them with executive functioning skills”, “...manage their time”, “...apply critical thinking”, “...find work/life balance”, “...bond with each other”, “...see their ability to learn”, “...increase their self-confidence”, and “...with stress-management;” each point to the EI skills of students enhanced by the support of the instructor.



Panel A. The root “help” with eight major nodes, 13 minor nodes, and three nested nodes.

Panel B. The root “helping” with six major nodes, 12 minor nodes, and two nested nodes.



Panel C. The root “helps” with four minor nodes.

Figure 9. Partial word trees for the roots “help”, “helping”, and “helps”. Word trees are based on participant transcript responses related to EI best practices for online instructors. Refer to Appendix G to review word trees in their entirety.

The responses to IVQ7, *Please share examples of how you incorporate EI when working with your students*, resulted in the emergence of the theme “Instructor positive

influence for enhancing student success.” Participants shared examples of their leadership to include guiding students, creating a decision-making process, providing comfort in the form of sharing and relationship building, and being a leader in terms of modelling the effective use of EI. In response to this interview question, P2 stated, “Not solving problems for them but helping them apply critical thinking – provide an agency of ownership over their decision making process. Being encouraging when they need redirection or additional support or coaching.” P2’s response focused on the facilitation skills of an instructor that helps to create a strong and productive learning environment led by a supportive leader. Likewise, with responses to IVQ5, *What EI skills do you identify with online instruction best practices?* prompted participants to encourage EI skills in students that helped them see through their tasks and increase self-management skills to complete those tasks more efficiently. P5 responded, “For drive strength it’s helping students to see this, encouraging them to stick with it, and get through it together. Make them aware that we can work together to figure this out which ties to their commitment ethic.” Similarly, P13’s response points to the need for empathy and the importance of students self-management skills. P13 responded:

I have to be assertive, but at the same time, help teach the student time management skills. And then as far as time-management skills, I need to make sure that I understand due dates and when to make assignments due and give students plenty of time in order to be able to complete the assignments and also plenty of reminders which is part of time management for myself.

P13's response included the aspect of self-awareness from the instructor perspective to meet the needs of the students in an empathic way. In online learning environments a critical component of student success is the student's own self-management skills (Montelongo, 2019). These participant responses also point to the use of instructor interpersonal self-awareness and personal leadership skills to enhance student productivity and success.

The term "learning" was another prominent word used in participant responses. The words "learn" and "learned" are also included in the stem of this term. The NVivo word tree for the three words, "learning, learn, and learned", resulted in an analysis of instructors use of EI in creating a strong learning environment. Figure 10 shows the adapted NVivo word trees, resulting from the examples of the student learning process, adjusting to the online platform, instructors learning what works, and the importance of the instructor's role in the student learning process. What was most illuminating about the analysis of the three-word variations of "learned" was the context, addressed after Figure 10.

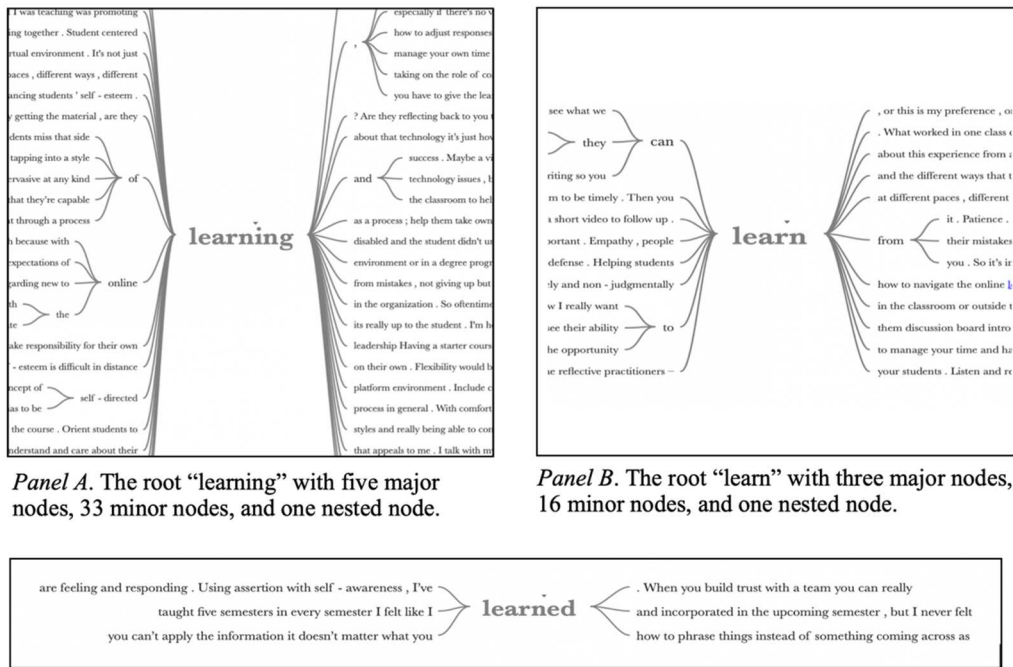


Figure 10. Partial word trees for the roots “learning”, “learn”, and “learned”. Word trees are based on participant transcript responses related to instructors’ use of EI in creating productive learning environments. Refer to Appendix G to review word trees in their entirety.

The context of the three words varied in use as noted in the word trees for “learned” and “learn.” The two words are directly associated to instructor awareness; whereas learning was directly associated to the student. P6’s response supports this observation. P6 stated:

Using my self-awareness but also their (students) awareness, awareness of them and how they are feeling and responding. Using assertion with self-awareness, I’ve learned how to phrase things instead of something coming across as an order. Keeping their self-esteem in mind and their comfort.

P6 discussed the importance of instructor self-awareness of their interpersonal skills on shaping the overall perceptions of students, as well as their confidence in the learning

environment. Likewise, P11 shared a narrative about her struggles with online learning, and cited that struggle as important in her growth as a practitioner. She noted also that the experience helped her learn what works best for her students. P11 stated, “I think I taught five semesters, in every semester I felt like I learned and incorporated something in the upcoming semester... I would include some information about time management and commitment to help them get through those difficult times.” P11’s reflection emphasizes the need for instructors to learn the needs of students and incorporate strategies to model self-management skills through their own instructor self-awareness.

Similarly, the word “learn” was used in terms of instructor-student relationships that lead to productive learning environments facilitated through EI. Learn is used in the context of both what the instructor learned about themselves as EI facilitators, as well as how their awareness of their students helped them to create more productive learning environments through reflective practices and modelling of EI skills. P6 explained, “EI is going to hobble, it will increase and decrease and that’s expected, it’s what you can objectively and non-judgmentally learn from it that matters.” There is a direct understanding in this statement that EI is ever-changing and fluctuating, it is the learning process of managing EI that leads to effective learning. In response to using EI to mitigate limitations for online courses, P9 stated:

When you’re designing a course you’re making assumptions about the students use of technology and tech savvy, that they can use the internet and how to get into blackboard or whatever platform you’re using and the assumption that they

know how to navigate it. You have to balance those assumptions with making sure people have the opportunity to learn from you.

In this response, P9 demonstrated the understanding of the role of the instructor as the primary source of learning in online courses. Course designers work on assumptions that instructors are responsible for helping students navigate technology. Virtual classroom leadership abilities such as using empathy to guide teaching, making decisions about assumptions, and taking the time to create relationships with students to mitigate inaccurate assumptions encourages more productive online learning environments.

In online instruction, the instructor learns various ways to engage students and model EI skills through their example. Modeling affords the opportunity for the observer to learn EI (Nelson & Low, 2011) and leads to more productive learning environments.

P9 shared an example, stating:

Another area for an opportunity for EI is when you're moderating a discussion board and things get a little testy or tense, as students are bantering back and forth and you can come in and say let's see what we can learn about this experience from an emotional standpoint, because emotions are running rampant. Mentoring moments. Accountability, this ties in assertion, decision-making, time management, that I am here to provide a welcoming, supportive environment at the end of the day. Though it's all about how you approach it, it's how you parse your emotions in those tough situations.

Through this example, P9 modeled leadership and interpersonal skills in a way that allowed students to learn; it was through the instructor's reflective practices and ability to

focus students' attention on their own self-management that lead to an effective learning process.

Another critical component of instructor self-awareness and reflection was their own learning processes. Adjusting instructional practices to meet the needs of students demonstrates a level of comfort and empathy that instructors with strong EI are able to use to create enhanced learning environments. For example, P11 shared about personal reflective practices:

I would look for one-minute surveys and ask people to give feedback. I would shift my lecturing or my activities based on the feedback without losing the essence or the integrity of the class with the session to ensure that I was teaching in a way that really connected with them so they can learn.

What stands out in this example is the instructor's willingness to use reflective practice in a formative way to adjust the class activities based on students' learning needs.

Instructors taking the time to learn their students and their students' needs leads to greater engagement and more productive learning (Khademi & Farokhmehr (2016). This point was further exemplified by P7's use of EI to mitigate course limitations. P7 shared:

Learn your students. Listen and read their writing so you can learn them (discussion board intro). Give them the extra boost they may need. Help students who are deferent in being more communicative. Be available one-on-one for students who are shy or do not want to participate in the online class.

P7 also discussed the importance of the leadership skills of empathy and comfort in creating a productive learning environment. It is the relationships created with students

that allows them to feel comfortable to ask questions and take risks in their learning activities.

While the stem “learn” was often used in reference to their own experiences in online education, instructors tended to use the stem “learning” when referring to student experiences. The term “learning” in participant responses demonstrated the critical connection between instructor and student required for distance learning success. The analysis of this word through the use of the word tree shown in Figure 10, along with participant responses, helped to finalize the theme I unpacked for RQ2. In reviewing Figure 10, note the left side of the stem includes statements related to the word learning such as, “I was promoting...;” “...to think about helping them realize that they’re capable of...;” and “promote the concept of self-directed...;” also “...shows the student you understand and care about their...;” and “Help them understand the skills they are....”. These reflections emphasize the instructors’ role in helping students manage their learning. Conversely, the right side of the word tree is focused on student learning that results from instructor modeling EI skills for their students. Note in Figure 10 the accountability of the student in the learning process is the focus of response. The stem from the term learning shows comments such as, “how to adjust to responses and how to understand instructors;” as well as, “as a process; help them take ownership over their behavior;” and, “is really up to the student, I am here to answer...;” and finally, “on their own. Flexibility (of the instructor) would be a big one (EI skill required)”. These responses include holding students accountable for the learning process with the support and encouragement of the instructor.

The second RQ sought to unpack EI skills that online instructors use to encourage productive learning environments. The primary skills discussed by participants were skills from the personal leadership and interpersonal skills dimensions. While there were several responses related to instructor self-management, that discussion focused mostly on assisting students in the development of their own self-management skills. The person-centered and relationship-focused tenets of TEI were also apparent in the instructors' responses, as were Nelson and Low's (2011) highlights on the importance on constructive thinking for EI. Also reflected in the responses were instructor EI skills that engender intelligent self-direction in students, a key success skill for the 21st Century (Nelson, et al., 2017). When I provided my analysis and findings for RQ 2 in a second member check, the participants all agreed with the findings and offered no additional comments for the research.

RQ3: Importance of Instructor-Student Relationships

The process of analyzing RQ 3 for thematic elements was different from the previous RQ's due to the frequently used words. The NVivo frequency count for RQ 3 with the use of transcripts from IVQ9, *How do you think the use of EI by online instructors relates to student success?*, and IVQ10, *Please share your perceptions about the importance of incorporating EI when communicating with your students*; resulted in a frequent word list (see Table 6) that, when first observed, seemed generic in nature. Because of the use of the words "emotional", "help", and "think", there was a necessity to think more deeply about the data to unpack meaning in ways that the NVivo word trees could not provide.

Table 6

NVivo12 Word Frequency List RQ3

Word	Count	Similar Words
students	46	student, students
emotional	25	emotional, emotionally, emotions
help	20	help, helpful, helping, helps
think	18	think, thinking
use	17	use, used, using
important	15	importance, important
instructor	15	instructor, instructors

In analyzing the data for RQ3, I used the direct transcripts from IVQ 9 *How do you think the use of EI by online instructors relates to student success?* and 10 *Please share your perceptions about the importance of incorporating EI when communing with your students.* Using the find feature in Microsoft Word, I color coded the use of each prominent word from the frequency table in a different color to gain an understanding of the word use in context. In doing so, I eliminated the need to use the word “students” because of the general context of the word. Participants used “student” when referring to them as a person of instruction and no deeper context was involved. It should be noted, however, that the primary focus of participant responses was on the students. In reviewing the word and stem for “Emotional,” I eliminated the use of the word being used in the phrase “emotional intelligence” which allowed me to identify 13 uses of either “emotions,” or “emotion.” Additionally, in analyzing the word and stems for “think” I removed 14 instances of responses that began with “I think...” which left me with four instances to analyze. These four instances were revealing about the importance of the thinking processes used by both students and instructors. Finally, the context of the

word on the frequency table “use” was explained in context of instructors’ and students’ “use of” EI or other skills and therefore did not require a deeper analysis.

The analysis of the terms “emotions,” “help,” and “think,” resulted in the theme identification, “Importance of instructor-student rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI”. When referring to emotions, participants focused on the control and awareness of emotions of both the instructors and the students. EI helps to develop this skill through self and social awareness. P4 shared her use of EI and emotional control directly with students, sharing:

I tell the student directly I’m using EI which is why I am not reacting so fast; I’m going to pause first then work constructively to solve the problem, so we have control over our emotions. We have to build the skills to have power to control our emotions and use those skills of controlling our own emotions as an asset to interact with others.

With the use of EI for direct instruction and modelling, P4 provided students with insight about not only what EI is, but how it is applied effectively when communicating with others. This example was particularly significant because it demonstrated the instructor’s implicit use of reflection rather than reaction in their direct application of EI with students (see the Emotional Learning System, Figure 3). P9 provided a similar response focused on empathy and social-awareness:

Really harnesses that connection because you are building rapport with students over the course of a semester. You’re getting to know them, they’re getting to know you on some level. Just really showing your self-authenticity is very key,

using your authentic self as a platform for modeling EI. Take time to be self-aware of the emotions that this conversation (discussion board topic) is triggering in you and be socially aware.

Again, the ideas discussed with the term emotion was not always focused on the EI construct per se, but also included reflections about the social and self-awareness required to harness the skills. The instructors spoke of creating helping relationships through awareness, but also used awareness to drive conversations in an emotionally intelligent way. Reflection, as opposed to reaction, is the prerequisite step in emotional learning (Nelson & Low, 2011). It was apparent from their responses that EI is implemented by instructors through their self-reflective practices, and their belief is that by modeling those practices in a purposeful way helps engender EI development in themselves and in their students.

Through a review of IVQ 10, participant responses focused on the management of emotions when communicating with students. The emphasis of EI skills of leadership and interpersonal skills to maintain emotions in communicating with students helped to derive the theme of “Importance of instructor-student rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI.” P10 discussed EI as an asset, responding with:

Probably the greatest asset is the fact that I can, most of the time, manage my own emotions and manage my own reactions and actions toward people. You use your emotional intelligence to manage yourself; in a way you’re communicating this with the students.

Managing emotions with the use of EI can be modelled for students through the instructor so the student can learn to apply their own communication skills with the use of EI.

Instructors with strong EI communicate naturally using their interpersonal and leadership skills to guide them. P13 supported this assertion with her response:

It takes a lot of interpersonal relationship skills. It takes the ability to be able to control your impulses because if a student keeps asking the same question over and over, and I have just clarified it, I might become frustrated. But if they're asking the same question over and over again, if I think clearly, then I need to understand I am delivering this information to this student in a way that is not comprehensible. I need to remain calm and show a student that being able to control your emotions helps you actually to reach your goal more easily because emotions play a big part in what you're able to accomplish; because emotions can tend to cloud the mind.

Again, as demonstrated here, a critical piece of student success and communication using EI is the direct modelling of emotional skills by instructors. What seems clear is that instructors who have and practice the ability to understand their EI in a way that allows them to manage communication with others engenders the development of inter and intrapersonal skills within their students; and it was clear that the participant instructors in this study believed those EI skills facilitate performance and goal achievement.

The analysis of word frequency helped in identifying patterns of EI skills in response to the interview questions. The word and stems for "help" and "instructor" overlapped often, which assisted in the analysis of the data. This overlap demonstrated

the importance of instructor skills and strategies to assist students in being successful in the online environment. Instructors' use of EI helps to shape and manage the EI of students through example. In response to interview question nine, along with a close look at "help" and "instructor," P1 explained:

I think it's pretty critical, getting to know each other a little bit online is important... That personal touch is going to be critical to students in general. If they see a supportive instructor, one that's had some pretty kind comments and doesn't write a book in the introduction when they get started, and post all these regulations and rules upfront in addition to the syllabus, is helpful.

The rapport created from the instructor has a direct impact on student success, according to P1. The instructor's learned ability to use his EI skills to establish relationships with students allowed them to shape their practice to support communication with students.

The instructor noted that it was the use of reflective practices that shapes the relationships with students and provides them with an example of being empathic. The reflective component of the ELS is apparent in this instructor's response.

P2 responded similarly, with an emphasis on supporting the development of EI in students through instructor modelling. P2 responded to IVQ 9, "The more EI skills we can help support and develop as instructors will just lead to a higher level of success in an online program, this not only leads to individual course success but program success overall." P2 related EI with success for students. Similarly, P3's response discusses instructor use of EI incorporation to the direct success of students by helping them shape their own EI. P3 stated:

It [EI] teaches the student to problem solve, to find their strengths; use strengths to identify what you are good at and use those strengths in groups when working with others. Using my own leadership skills makes it a cakewalk when I tap into my strengths. Teaching students to tap into strengths, give them assignments related to their strengths. It is not about just understanding definitions but the application of it, if you understand it you can use it.

Through the direct instruction of leadership skills and reflective practices, students are encouraged to shape and develop their own EI, and manage their emotions more efficiently. The development of EI in academic settings helps students connect with their own success. EI develops specific skills that assist students in understanding their role as communicators and leaders, which leads to their success academically and professionally.

P7 contributed to these ideas in the following response.

It teaches students how to be self-disciplined, independent as well as sometimes interdependent in their classes. Learn patience. Helps them make good decisions, they can learn to communicate in writing. It gives students more confidence, especially compared to face-to-face. Helps strengthen empathy for others and understand what other people are going through, they listen to and observe their classmates. They learn communication and the importance of communication.

As noted, P7 believed EI provides a gateway to the skills that need to be developed to gain confidence, empathy, and learn effective communication; all of which likely facilitate and enhance online learning.

Analyzing “help” and “instructor” through IVQ 10 allowed me to finalize the theme of “Importance of instructor-student rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI.” Through developing an understanding of participant responses to this question, I was able to connect the relationship between shaping student EI through instructor modelling, but also students’ and instructors’ management of EI to create a balance of communication that leads to success for both parties. P1 responded highlighting the reflective practice of instructors leading to the intentional use of EI to help students. He stated:

For instructors to reflect and use the reflective process. Because I’m wanting to be sure that what I’m doing is appropriate for their learning and not for mine... EI is something that’s there, I don’t think we know it’s there, I don’t think we know how we’re incorporating it on an intentional level... I think most instructors do, but if they’re thinking about what it is and how they may be able to incorporate it and especially if the students understand a little bit about what it is, it may help us kind of shape that for the benefit of not only their learning, but also for the satisfaction on the part of the instructor.

P11 provided a response that articulated the importance of instructors helping students establish EI through connections and relationship building, but also through instructor demonstrating the effective use of EI. P11 responded to interview question 10 with:

If you can truly connect with them (students) and build this really personal rapport in a professional kind of way, you will feel more satisfied because you’ll get more out of that experience, but your student will also be more successful.

Probably also feel more satisfied. So it's not about giving in and lowering your standards. It's about really helping to rise them up. So for me, I feel like emotional intelligence, no matter what situation you're in gives you the ability to inspire others to achieve their greatness.

Based on these examples, it seems that the demonstration, or modeling, of instructor EI naturally sets the tone of success and achievement of students. Through relationship building and leadership development, both instructor and student work together to shape and manage EI in the most effective way.

During the analysis process and identification of themes, the answer to RQ3 naturally evolved. A majority of instructors expressed the importance of EI in creating relationships that foster success. In fact, "important" is on the list of the top ten word frequency. Discussed earlier was the use of IVQ 9 and 10 to answer RQ3. Answers to these two questions often began with the word and word stems for "important." In reviewing responses to IVQ 9 and 10, I also noted the use of the words vital, critical, black and white, and correlation in relation to the term "important." Table 7 provides an overview of participant responses that express the importance of instructor-student relationships when fostering online student success.

Table 7

Participant use of “Important” Related to Answering RQ3

P#	Response that convey “Important” word stems	IVQ
1	I think it’s pretty <i>critical</i> getting to know each other a little bit online is important	9
7	They (students) learn communication and the <i>importance</i> of communication.	9
8	It is <i>vital</i> . How you present yourself or how you come across to them (student). Understanding your own personal awareness and then also the awareness of how you’re coming across to them. Just self-awareness	9
11	I think the <i>correlation is very high because</i> if the level of emotional intelligence of the instructor is higher than they’re going to be able to identify where they might need to intervene and talk to a student who’s struggling because they’ll be able to be perceptive enough to pick up on that.	9
12	It’s <i>important for instructors to use EI</i> in the classroom because it helps students know that there’s something else that they can seek to help themselves with, and what happens is students are more willing to come talk to you during office hours	9
1	I think it’s <i>remains critical</i> for us to remember where we came from and how we can be helpful to others. For instructors to reflect and use the reflective process	10
2	<i>Hugely important</i> to model EI skills; better success with communicating with students in terms of them recognizing you as a recourse, that you are a support, the bridge between their success in the program or course and the work they are doing	10
5	It is <i>extremely important</i> . It has taught me to speak to students with respect and how it may translate to what they bring home	10
6	It is <i>black and white</i> , if you do not use EI you are back to authoritarian; you are putting up barriers, students will have difficulties. If an online instructor does not stretch themselves and reach out of their comfort zones and you don’t use EI online you’re telling students that those set of skills are not <i>important</i>	10
8	It is <i>vital</i> , self-awareness. I have colleagues with terminal degrees who have a lot to share and give, and without the social skills it impedes the actual message in student learning, its distracting. You really need to maintain your emotional intelligence when your teaching online, its vital.	10
9	It’s <i>incredibly important</i> . You cannot be an effective instructor without it, it’s that important. It (EI) has many attributes and characteristics, and you’ve got to engage just about all of them, when you’re dealing with students in an online environment, can do your job without it.	10
11	And I think <i>that’s important</i> because that’s how you connect with them	10
12	The reason I see it as <i>very important</i> , if I think about it in terms of everything that I have been doing that helps me be successful as a teacher, I see progress in students. I think it’s so important because you have an impact and its positive and its positive and it feels good. Positive interactions, impact would probably be the key word, impact.	10
13	It is <i>extremely important</i> . And again, you really have to use all of the emotional intelligence skills, especially in an online course because they can’t see your face. They don’t hear your tone of voice unless you are in some kind of a zoom meeting. And they need to know that you really care. And that takes a lot of leadership skills	10

The third RQ sought to learn about online instructors’ perceptions reflecting the importance of instructor-student relationships for fostering online student success. As presented in table 7, participants shared their opinions on the importance of relationship building, empathy, and comfort in fostering online student success. In instructor participant responses, effective communication was a critical aspect of instructor-student

relationships. Effective communication allows the student to understand what is expected of them while also providing a means of support from the instructor. Self-awareness and reflective practices of the instructor were noted through several responses which reflect on instructor leadership and interpersonal skill management. Participants expressed the importance of perception through reflection as a process for instructors to meet the needs of their students, but also for students' perceptions of the leadership instructors show. The positive interaction that ensues through instructor use of EI results in a connection with students, positive interactions, and mutual respect resulting in online student success.

Upon completion of analysis of RQ 3 I shared the findings with participants to agree or disagree with what emerged as well as provide feedback, additional comments, or any other information to more clearly articulate their responses. P7 responded that she agrees with what has emerged and with my interpretation, she believes the conclusion, "That EI gives the person the ability to inspire others to achieve their greatness which inspires personal and professional success, sums up what online and face-to-face instructors want for their students... to inspire them to do their best." Other participants responded that they agree with the findings or had no comments to add.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility combines reliability and validity to help ensure that the study measures what it was intended to measure (Shenton, 2004). In qualitative research, credibility can be maintained by being familiar with the culture of participants,

the use of varied data collection methods, establishing rapport with participants to allow honest engagement, and choosing participants directly related to the study purpose (Shenton, 2004). Only participants with direct experience with higher education online instruction were chosen to participate to ensure the study measured its intended purpose. My familiarity with the culture of online learning comes from my experience as both an online learner and an online instructor. Having this familiarity provided a means for me to create rapport and connect with my participants by showing an experiential understanding and connection to their responses. The variety of methods were used with the stems of the interview questions more so than the type of collection method, as only semi-structured interviews were used. However, throughout the analysis process there were multiple member checks to ensure trustworthiness of the data, which helped in validating my findings.

Credibility in this study was established through the use of peer debriefing, member checks, reflective journaling, and timeliness in data analysis. Member checks are used in establishing credibility. Prior to analysis, I provided each participant with the findings from my first and second cycle coding, which included the transcript of their interview, to review for accuracy. No discrepancies were identified during this process. During the initial peer-debrief I was informed that my coding cycles helped to identify key findings and central ideas that would help themes to naturally emerge as I began to look closer at the data and coding process. During the peer debrief and member check process I made use of reflective journaling to assist in understanding my thought process to ensure I did not carry any biases. Reflective journaling includes keeping an ongoing

real-time chronicle of reflections, questions, and ideas throughout the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used the reflective process to keep record of any ideas or questions that emerged as I analyzed the data.

Originally, I planned to use ad hoc coding; however, as the ad hoc codes emerged I found it necessary to include the NVivo coding process to ensure credibility. A personal, interpretive meaning was explored through the interview process due to the exploration of participants realities, a common characteristic that would require NVivo coding (Saldaña, 2016). Interview questions such as, “Please share examples of how you incorporate EI when working with your students,” asked participants to explore their personal practices with their online instructional practices; therefore, this type of coding was necessary to establish alignment with the RQ’s.

To continue ensuring credibility I used a reflective practice during analysis by questioning the process. Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested the use of the following questions to reflect upon during analysis: How can my research design seek complexity? Do my methods align with my research questions? Have I designed my study so that the data set is rich, consisting of multiple contributing data sources? How will I interpret data so that my assumptions and biases are withheld? How am I connecting the data? Because of the reflective process and types of interview questions used, I chose to include NVivo coding. NVivo requires engagement in reflexivity, but also the use of participant direct responses to create codes; ensuring that the codes remain true to the participants’ perspectives (Saldaña, 2016).

I included various quotes from participants to ensure multiple contributing sources, which led to the emergent themes. Saturation is reached when the continued analysis of the data does not shed any further light on the topic under study (Mason, 2010). With the use of ad hoc and NVivo coding procedures together, the experiences and understanding of participants was continuously clarified. Emerging themes were identified, and continued research resulted in additional findings not directly related to the study.

The participants in this study were all familiar with the construct of EI, as evidenced by their responses to RQ 1 *What are online instructors' knowledge and experience with EI, including consuming and/or supervising EI research?* As described in the results, each participant clearly understood EI and reflected personal experiences learning about the topic. To ensure my neutrality in the study, I completed member-checks throughout the analysis process, first from the coding cycle, and again when identified themes were explained. Finally, once I felt confident in the answers to the research questions that I had synthesized from my data analysis, I shared those succinct answers one last time for members to check. In this way, members were continuously encourage to add additional thoughts or insights based on my interpretations of their interview responses. Other than what I have included in my data analysis section, no additional comments were shared by the participants. I also used peer debriefing with an experienced qualitative researcher throughout my data collection and analysis processes to test and check any assumptions that may have emerged, as well as obtain feedback about the processes I was using (Creswell, 1998). Through these conversations I

eventually pursued the use of NVivo coding, as well as vetted my synthesized answers for each RQ. The combination of member checks and peer debriefing throughout the analysis process provided an additional measure of credibility for the study, as well as increased my confidence in my findings.

Transferability

Transferability is how my research can be applied to a larger audience, or, if repeated, obtain the same results. Transferability also refers to external validity, to how the findings from the study can be applied to a wider population or sample (Shenton, 2004). Strategies to ensure trustworthiness in transferability are the use of journaling following interviews, journaling a timeline of events related to data collection, and thick description in the coding process (Amankwaa, 2016). Thick descriptions are established by providing enough detailed information that the reader obtains a vivid picture of the events of the research (Amankwaa, 2016). In the results section of this study I provided thick description of findings by providing numerous quotes in response to the research and interview questions. I also described my coding process step-by-step in the data analysis section to paint a complete, coherent picture of the process I completed to determine codes and allow themes to emerge naturally. Thick description provides the reader with a thorough understanding of how the research findings were established and how they can be used in further research.

The applicability and generalization of this study is justified by the variety of participants in gender, level of students in which they teach (graduate/undergraduate), and years of teaching in the online community. It would be assumed that this study could

be transferred to other populations such as higher education in general, and higher education advisors. The findings from this study might inform online instructor practices and teaching strategies to effectively model EI for students.

Dependability

The alignment of the purpose, problem, and research questions enhance dependability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When research is dependable, it is consistent and repeatable. In order for research to be repeated accurately, the design and alignment explanation should be detailed, and the data collection strategies specifically outlined to provide a detailed and transparent research process (Shenton, 2004). For this study to achieve dependability, I provided a detailed description of the data collection process, timeline, and the procedures I followed to analyze the data accurately and unbiasedly. In chapter three, I delineated why I chose the basic qualitative approach to the research while elucidating other suitable methods. Throughout the data process I made choices that helped to enhance the dependability such as frequent member-checks and peer debriefs, as well as the decision to include NVivo coding. Through member checks and peer debriefing, it was established that the research findings supported the participants' lived experiences, which adds to the dependability of this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the objectivity aspect of qualitative research. This aspect of trustworthiness confirms that the findings from the research are the experiences of the participants and not those of the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Throughout the data collection process, I did not influence participants perspectives on

the topics being discussed by sharing my own stories, examples, or thoughts. In order to achieve confirmability, I maintained quiet, observed, and facilitated questions during the interviews, and I reviewed the data thoroughly and practiced reflective journaling during my data analysis phase of the research. I paid close attention to the actual responses from participants and listened to the audio recordings several times throughout the data analysis process. By incorporating NVivo coding, I ensured accurate depiction of the participant's perspectives, as quotes from their transcripts were used to allow themes to emerge naturally. The study findings are exclusively based on participants' responses to interview questions approved by my committee and the IRB, and synthesized with emerging knowledge that I developed about TEI through my own research resulting from my review of literature that was conducted for this study. As participant responses connected to the literature, I made note in the reflective journal to add to the implications and findings. All records to include transcripts, coding processes, audio recordings, reflective journals, and member-check responses will be kept in a password protected hard drive and a locked file cabinet for five years, as mandated by Walden University's procedures and generally accepted practices for conducting doctoral research.

Summary

In this study, I examined the perceptions of online instructors use of EI in their distance learning classrooms. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the research questions were answered through the themes that naturally emerged during the coding and data analysis processes. The themes identified were "Identifying, understanding, and managing emotions", "Understanding of others", "Instructor positive influence for

enhancing student learning”, and “Importance of instructor-student rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI.”

RQ 1 asked “What are online instructors’ knowledge and experience with EI, including consuming and/or supervising EI research?” The 13 participant interviews demonstrated the understanding of emotional intelligence as management of emotions, identification of emotions, source of emotions, control of emotions, and understanding of emotions (see Table 7). The prominent themes that directly answered RQ1 were “Managing, Identification, and understanding of emotions” and “Understanding of others.” Each participant had unique experience with the consumption of EI research through personal research, dissertations using EI as a conceptual framework, published articles on the topic of EI, and through personal exploration of the topic. The conclusion for RQ1 was that each participant had thorough, first-hand experience with consuming EI research and information. Through the varied responses it was evident that participants understood the theory of EI as relating to one’s emotional regulation and self-awareness. These two themes are directly related to the EI skill of empathy and comfort in the first cycle coding process described earlier.

RQ2 asked “What EI skills are used by online instructors to encourage productive learning environments? The study results demonstrate that participants understood the meaning of EI as well as the importance of the use of EI in their instructional practices to encourage productive learning environments leading to student success. The skills from the personal leadership and interpersonal skills dimensions were discussed by participants as ways to encourage productive learning environments. The focus of responses was on

assisting students in the development of their own self-management skills through the use of instructors use of leadership skills. The theme that addressed RQ 2 was “Instructor positive influence for enhancing student success.”

RQ3 asked, “What are online instructors’ perceptions about the importance of instructor-student relationships for fostering online student success? All participants responded with verbiage such as the terms vital, critical, important, black and white, and correlation that showed a critical link between student success and relationship building. Table 7 provides an overview of participant responses that express the importance of instructor-student relationships when fostering online student success. The theme that addressed RQ 3 was “Importance of instructor-student rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI” which again points to the EI skill category of leadership, but most specifically the skills of empathy and comfort.

In this chapter I reported the process of data collection and analysis and presented the data that supported each finding. In the following chapter, I will concisely summarize the key findings, provide an analysis of the interpretation of findings, describe the limitations of the study, and provide recommendations and implications for practice including the potential impact for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore online instructor perceptions of their use of EI to guide practice in undergraduate and graduate distance education courses. To address the gap in literature specifically related to distance higher education instructors' use of EI in their practice, I conducted a basic qualitative study with an exploratory approach. I examined the perceptions of higher education online instructor self-awareness and use of EI with the goal of creating strategies or frameworks that would bring EI training to higher education distance learning classrooms. The phenomenological approach allowed me to gain further understanding of the perceptions of online instructors use of EI in their practice. By providing a baseline understanding of instructor awareness of their use of EI, online instructors in general may be able to mitigate barriers to student success by facilitating and modelling EI for their distance learning students.

I conducted the study with 13 volunteer participants with varied teaching experience ranging from 2 years to over 10 years, equal number of participants who teach graduate and undergraduate levels, and gender ratio of nine women to four men. The study was accomplished by using semi-structured interviews through Zoom web-conferencing. Each participant was well-versed in EI through their own research studies, research participation, authored articles, dissertation research, and self-directed exploration. A common finding amongst participants was their agreement on the importance of EI modelling for students to create effective, productive, and successful online learning environments.

The study results revealed that the inclusion of EI in the distance learning environment is vital for student success. Participants shared their experiences of modelling effective EI leadership skills in an effort to improve students intrapersonal and self-management skills. Increasing students' confidence in the distance learning environment proves to assist in student success and comfort in participating in discussions and other communication-based course expectations. All participants shared examples of how they incorporate their EI when working with students. Each shared their experiences related to the use of empathy and interpersonal assertion with an emphasis on improving students' self-management skills. All participants agreed on the importance of implementing EI in their courses to ensure an effective and productive learning environment; many participants described it as "vital," "crucial," and "critical." To assist online instructors in effectively using their EI to improve practice and increase student success, strategies and frameworks must be created to incorporate into best practices. Chapter 5 will conclude the study with interpretation of key findings and a discussion of limitations, followed by recommendations and a discussion of the implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I discuss the findings of my study in relation to three RQs which addressed online instructor knowledge and experience with EI, EI skills used by online instructors to encourage productive learning environments, and online instructors' perceptions about the importance of instructor-student relationships for fostering online

student success. The interpretation of findings of the study are discussed by RQ with an interpretation of identified themes for each.

RQ1: Online Instructors' EI Knowledge and Experience

This study first examined online higher education instructors' understanding and knowledge of EI including consuming and supervising EI research. This was an important question for the study because instructors' understanding of EI is what guides their use of it in their online courses. All participants shared their experience and knowledge of EI, which included writing dissertations with EI as the conceptual framework, participating in EI research teams, self-study, and publishing articles on EI. Each participant described their understanding of EI with the common theme identified for RQ1 as the importance of "Identifying, understanding and managing of emotions." The emotions described were both the instructors' emotions as well as the emotions of their students. Khademi and Farokhmehr (2016) postulated that the acknowledgement of one's EI can optimize the learning experience, prepare for novel learning experiences, and contribute to the awareness of the needs, goals, and emotions of self and others. By acknowledging and discussing their own EI learning experiences, the instructor participants modeled a personal self-awareness that prepared them for a deeper discussion about how they used EI in their online courses.

After coding and analyzing instructor self-reports, what emerged from my data was that instructors' use of EI, with the self-awareness, provides success in eLearning courses. Self-awareness, a critical EI skill, is also an important factor in online instructors' knowledge and experience of use of EI in their teaching practices. Personally

meaningful development is achieved through self-awareness, which in turn enhances learning outcomes (Majeski et al., 2017). As described in the literature review, this study supports the importance of instructor self-awareness and understanding of EI to improve instructional practices and outcomes. Hamilton (2018) discussed the need for instructors to be cognizant of their own EI, and that instructor self-awareness was a necessary condition for modeling empathy and good interpersonal communication skills with students. Hamilton's caution, combined with the findings from this study, suggest that EI self-awareness is prevalent amongst online instructors who practice EI in their courses.

The combination of self-awareness and empathy led to the second theme for RQ1, "Understanding of others." Caldwell and Hayes's (2016) description of self-awareness as an understanding of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of self and others on everyday situations reiterates the importance of self-awareness in understanding others from an EI perspective. Emotional intelligence facilitates reflective practices in instructors which purposefully informs their words, actions, and behaviors to more positively impact their students. Gill et al. (2015) posited that those teaching EI view self-awareness as central for personal development. With the inclusion of understanding others' emotions, reactions, and behaviors, empathy and understanding are used to develop healthy, productive relationships leading to student success.

RQ2: EI Skills Used by Online Instructors

The study results confirmed the findings of the literature review that instructor modelling of effective EI is integral to creating productive learning environments. Through the personal discovery of EI, instructors promote student engagement and self-

confidence, which makes learning more meaningful (Ebrahimi et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2017). Choi Sang Long et al. (2016) suggested instructors who are aware of their emotions are more effective at their jobs, concluding that teaching is not just about ability but also involves understanding other people's emotions and behaviors. This understanding of students through the leadership skills of empathy and comfort provides a reflective practice for instructors to facilitate learning in ways that best meet each student's individual needs.

When discussing student learning, participants emphasized specific ESAP skills. Table 8 provides examples of participant responses when talking about using EI to facilitate learning with their online students. Note the specific ESAP skills in the middle column that unpack from the participant responses when talking about student learning, as well as the TEI composite scales (i.e., ESAP dimensions), TEI tenets and TEI constructs that unpack in the right-hand column. Each response not only emphasizes the student's responsibility for their own learning, but also the instructor's responsibility to model the behaviors and EI skills that engender meaning, learning, and development.

Participants emphasized an awareness of the importance of their personal leadership skills for reflecting on student self-management, and this awareness and practice emerged as the theme for RQ2, "Instructor positive influence for enhancing student success." The use of empathy and positive influence were used by instructors to assist students with their own self-management skills. As supported by Kauffman (2015) and Nelson et al. (2017), educational achievement through self-direction and self-directed

learning, two skills key to student success, can be taught and learned in any classroom, online or face-to-face, by effectively modeling EI.

Table 8

Participant use of “Learning” w/ TEI Skills, Composite Scales, and Tenets.

P#	Paraphrased participant response	Noted ESAP skill	TEI composite scales/tenets
1	Showing empathy and leadership by including an introduction that shows the student you understand and care about their learning and success.	Empathy Positive Influence	Personal Leadership Person-Centered* Relationship-Focused*
3	A prep course that helps students learn to manage stress and process thoughts better ; helping them learn leadership .	Stress Management Positive Influence	Intrapersonal Knowledge Personal Leadership Constructive Thinking**
9	Time management and drive strength and commitment need to be modeled by instructors. Also, if you’ re going to promote this concept of self-directed learning , you have to give the learners tools for that.	Time Management Drive Strength Commitment Ethic	Self-Management (instructor) Intelligent Self-Direction***
4	Leadership development ; enhancing students’ self-esteem . Learning from mistakes, not giving up but trying again .	Positive Influence Self-Esteem Commitment Ethic	Personal Leadership Intrapersonal Knowledge Emotional Learning System*
9	It’s not just learning about technology, it’s how do we interface and interact with each other . So empathy, time management ; I think time management is just pervasive at any kind of learning environment or in a degree program	Assertion Empathy Time Management	Interpersonal Communication Personal Leadership (instructor modelling) Time Management
12	Student-centered learning which relates to commitment ethic and change orientation [positive change] . They (students) need to take responsibility for their own learning, but at the same time the teacher is there to facilitate that.	Commitment Ethic Positive Change	Self-Management Person-Centered* Problematic Indicators
1	Empathy and teaching self-management and actually having that discussion with the student about their own time management and their own self-management skills. Lead a class by trying to be empathetic and have an assertion type of approach with our students and in learning process in general	Empathy Assertion Time Management Empathic Assertion	Interpersonal Communication Personal Leadership Self-Management Person-Centered*
2	Help them understand the skills they are learning will actually be applied to the career field they are going in to. Increasing their confidence in the course helps increase their confidence in their future roles and overall success	Implied are the combined skills of empathy and assertion, or Empathic Assertion.	Interpersonal Communication Personal Leadership Relationship-Focused* Intelligent Self-Direction***
9	A lot of it is self-empowerment. Especially online it has to be self-directed learning , manage your own time which also goes to time-management. With online there definitely has to be drive strength , directing yourself and motivating yourself to push forward, to achieve your goals , meet deliverables of the course timely , you have to be committed and have a very strong work ethic . Just having that perseverance and belief in yourself that you can navigate through this stress management .	Time Management Drive Strength Commitment Ethic Stress Management	Self-Management (instructor and student) Intrapersonal Knowledge

* TEI is research-derived, skills-based, person-centered, and relationship-focused (Nelson et al., 2017).
** Emotional intelligence is the learned ability to think constructively and act wisely (Nelson et al., 2017).
*** Intelligent self-direction is a 21st century skill that manifests through EI (Nelson et al., 2017).

The relative importance of EI skills can be interpreted from the interview responses related to productive learning environments in at least two different ways. One way would be by examining the total number of times the skill was mentioned throughout the interviews through a simple frequency count (Method 1). Another would be by examining the total number of participants who mentioned the skill (Method 2). If both methods identified the same skill, then this result would provide a form of triangulation of the overall importance of that skill relative to the other skills. As presented in Figure 11, however, this was not the case. With four mentions each, Time Management and Drive Strength would be interpreted as the most important EI skills using Method 1. Upon closer examination, however, note that P9 repeated the need for these skills three different times, making these skills the most important perhaps from P9's perspective. The skill of Empathy was mentioned three times, but two of those were similarly repeated from the same participant, making Empathy perhaps the most important skill from P1's perspective. Using the Method 2 interpretation, the EI skill of Positive Influence was the most commonly unpacked skill because it was mentioned by three different participants (P1, P3, & P4). Based on these findings, I ranked the EI skills by their relative importance for online instructors as follows: (a) Positive Influence, (b) Time Management and Drive Strength, (c) Empathy, (d) Stress Management, Commitment Ethic, Assertion, and Empathic Assertion, and (e) Self-Esteem and Positive Change. The identification of Positive Influence as being highest in relative importance further solidified the theme for RQ2: Instructor positive influence for enhancing student success.

EI Skill	Frequency Mentioned by Participant			
	1	2	3	4
Time Management	P9	P9	P1	P9
Drive Strength	P9	P1	P9	P9
Empathy	P1	P9	P1	
Positive Influence	P1	P3	P4	
Stress Management	P3	P9		
Commitment Ethic	P9	P12		
Assertion	P1	P9		
Empathic Assertion	P1	P2		
Self-Esteem	P4			
Positive Change	P12			

Figure 11. Emotional intelligence skills by order of frequency of mention during interviews.

RQ 3: Importance of Instructor-Student Relationships

An integral aspect of the theoretical framework for this study, TEI, is the enduring principles of the theory; that TEI is research derived, skills-based, person-centered, and relationship-focused (Nelson et al., 2017) These principles helped shape the development of my RQ's, and none more so than RQ 3. This research question was important to the study because it reveals the process of relationship building and reveals the attitudes of EI-centric instructor towards the idea of engendering relationships with students in the online learning environment. The EI reflective skills of social and self-awareness were

noted as prominent in the development of relationships between instructor and student. By combining the EI skills within the dimension of personal leadership with reflective practices, instructors help students shape and learn EI through the instructor's example.

The notion of relationship building between instructor and student leading to success is not a new concept. Research has shown that rapport and relationship building between instructors and students enhances student learning experiences that lead to academic success (Buzdar et al., 2016; Ebrahimi et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2017). Relationships are important to consider for understanding the concept of student satisfaction with online learning, especially in the online learning environments, where attrition rates are 36% higher than face-to-face, attrition has been linked to student dissatisfaction with online instructors lack of relationship building (Boton & Gregory, 2015; Montelongo, 2019). The theme of "Importance of instructor-student rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI" naturally emerged from my data analysis related to RQ 3. Important skills related to this theme include instructor modelling of leadership skills, interpersonal skills, and balanced communication. An underlying theme identified was the importance of instructor modelling and direct instruction of EI in shaping the student perspective, leading to student self-management of EI.

Another theme that emerged continually and specifically in the interviews related to RQ 3 was the notion that practicing EI skills with students involves a reflective thinking process. With its built-in reflection mandate, the ELS can be a prominent tool to help shape EI in instructors and their students. The ELS five-step process encourages constructive thinking by becoming more emotionally reflective to purposefully balance

feelings, thoughts, and actions (Low et al., 2019; Nelson & Low, 2011). The TEI hallmarks and aforementioned tenets can be combined by instructors to inform EI-centric relationships with their online students. From pages 21-24 of their book, Low et al.'s (2019) TEI hallmarks are quoted as follows:

- Hallmark 1: EI is an integrated set of learned skills and abilities to facilitate thinking constructively and behaving wisely.
- Hallmark 2: EI is the most important influencing factor for achievement. As such, affective education is important and should be integrated as a set of learned abilities developed by practicing emotional skills.
- Hallmark 3: The experiential system is the lead system for person-centered learning, positive change, and growth.
- Hallmark 4: Affective, emotional learning is different from traditional cognitive and academic learning, and both are required for healthy development.
- Hallmark 5: Learning to break the habit of emotional reactivity is a requisite life skill, and it is required for intelligent self-direction.
- Hallmark 6: Transformative EI competencies and integrated skills provide a foundation of excellence, resilience, and personal ethics to guide your life and work.
- Hallmark 7: Positive assessment of EI skills provides an essential first step for positive personal change and intelligent self-direction.
- Hallmark 8: EI behaviors and attitudes are intentional and wise outcomes engendered by reflective and constructive thinking.

- Hallmark 9: Intelligent self-management is the behavioral reflection of higher order thinking, positive emotional learning, and healthy daily functioning.
- Hallmark 10: Interdependence is more important than independence.
- Hallmark 11: Excellence is self-defined and self-directed.
- Hallmark 12: The overarching goal of TEI is to work toward and achieve excellence for individuals and organizations.

Together, the 12 hallmarks form the foundation for learning and developing EI for academic achievement (Low et al., 2019). The focus on cognition, emotion, and experience results in a metacognitive process of “emotional reflection and learning, higher order thinking (thinking about how we think and feel), and healthy functioning” (p. 14). Confirming this claim, Tang et al. (2016) reported the positive relationship between experiential and cognitive thinking and the psychological constructs of emotional adjustment, personal well-being, and intrinsic motivation for success among faculty. These researchers found that instructors are jointly responsible for helping students pursue EI development through challenging transitional phases within education and by setting high standards for excellence through a disciplined approach with embedded transformational goals. Together, these findings support the fourth and final theme found in this study, the “Importance of instructor-student rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI.”

In building relationships with students, participants emphasized the use of the EI skills of empathy and comfort in their practice. Instructors modelling empathy provides an environment conducive to trust allowing students to communicate more effectively. In

practicing empathy in the online environment, a skill defined in TEI under the leadership category, instructors need to make use of self and social-awareness (for example, comfort). An online instructors' ability to think critically about the strengths and weaknesses of EI and its role in their own instructional practice is an important part of modelling EI with students and constitutes one level of self-awareness (Ebrahimi et al., 2018; Gill et al., 2015). The importance of strong EI indicators of self-awareness and social-awareness provide an association for the importance of instructional strategies and modelling tasks to take place.

According to Hamilton, (2018), self-awareness logically relates to inter and intrapersonal skills that help manage functional relationships with self and others. One goal of this study was to identify how instructors' use self-awareness in their instructional practice to model EI for students. Participant responses provided narratives and examples of their use of self-awareness in creating relationships and rapport with students in order to provide a trusting, caring, and respectful learning environment where students are comfortable with both participating and communicating with the instructor and their peers. The rapport and relationship building not only provided an atmosphere conducive to success, but also emphasized the importance of instructor-student relationships leading to success.

RQ 3 focused on the importance of instructor-student relationships fostering student success, and also met the recommendation by Majeski et al. (2018) for additional research to gain an understanding of how strategies that enhance learners' awareness of EI in the online learning environment supports student academic success. Participants

sharing of strategies may be considered best practices for instructors who want to include EI in their instruction. Based in EI self-awareness, those best practice strategies included:

- Awareness of their modelling EI principles and skills.
- Emotional awareness and a focus on identifying, understanding, and controlling their own emotions.
- Creating helping relationships through emotional awareness.
- Using emotional awareness to drive conversations in EI-centric ways
- Direct instruction of EI principles and skills when possible.

These best practice examples demonstrate the higher education instructors' implicit use of self-awareness, reflection, and EI-centric responding when manifesting EI through their andragogical practices.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations for this study included small sample size and the possibility of lack of transferability. First, the use of volunteer participant selection resulted in a small sample size, but sufficient for qualitative research. An expected limitation that was resolved was volunteer participants providing diversity. The population provided a variety in years teaching experience, subject level, geographic location, and gender. I mitigated this limitation through purposeful stratified sampling (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, I am certified to conduct EI assessment and training, and I am well-versed in EI with familiarity with my own EI strengths and weakness as an online instructor. Having an awareness of my own biases about the importance of EI in online instruction also

equipped me with the authenticity to record and transcribe participant responses without interjecting my thoughts, beliefs, or values.

Due to the qualitative design, transferability is limited (Saldaña, 2016). To address this limitation, member checks were conducted twice to collect additional information to contribute to the most accurate and detailed description of participant responses. Combining the findings from the questionnaires and interviews provided the opportunity to form at least two forms of data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of my results. Member-checking was also used to ensure the accuracy of participants' responses after transcriptions occurred and peer-debriefing to ensure lack of bias and identification of discrepant data.

The phenomenology approach had the potential of research bias due to researcher interpretation being a factor. To reduce the possibility of bias I conducted member checks and peer debriefing throughout the coding and thematic analysis process (Patton, 2015). NVivo coding was incorporated into the analysis process to ensure an accurate depiction of participant perspectives. NVivo coding is formulated directly from the participants' statements from the transcripts (Saldaña, 2016). The study findings were drawn from participant interviews which resulted in objective and factual data based on the participants' individual, subjective experiences.

Recommendations

Results from this study are compatible with the findings of Fuller et al. (2014), Garrison et al. (2010), and Majeski et al. (2017, 2018) in that emotional presence is a fundamental requirement for embedding EI in online learning, and it is also a

foundational requirement from the perspective of COI. According to these researchers, COIs are positively related to student engagement and learning, and are facilitated through teacher presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. Similarly, the results of my study speak to the importance of online instructor awareness of their use of EI with online students, for establishing rapport and trust to encourage healthy instructor-student relationships, and their use of EI for encouraging student success. The EI skills of empathy and comfort, along with self-awareness and reflective practices were guiding principles for the implementation of EI by the participant instructors. Majeski et al. (2018) aimed to introduce a model of COI that conceptualized emotional presence as EI with pedagogical applications. Through the concept of teaching presence, defined by Garrison et al. (2010) as, “The design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social presence for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (p. 32), the inclusion of emotional presence would necessarily be an additional *requisite* component beyond teaching presence. In establishing a sense of trust and safety for the students, the instructors’ emotional perception and understanding of learners emotional and cognitive needs sets the foundation for success (Majeski et al., 2018). As modeled in the sample of participants in this study, reading about, researching and publishing about, and developing one’s own EI may be the best way for instructors to develop the additional requisite component of emotional presence.

Findings from this study suggest emotional presence is an additional presence that when embedded with teacher presence, makes the COI framework more complete. The results of the current study highlight the instructors’ perceptions of EI in their

instructional practices through modelling, facilitating, and using strategies explicitly to teach EI, and they viewed these behaviors as a fundamental component of enhancing student development and success. Finally, the manifestation of direct instruction of EI principles and skills provides empirical evidence that supports the need for emotional presence in the COI framework, as has been implied in previous research (Fuller et al., 2014; Garrison et al., 2010; Majeski et al., 2017, 2018).

This study also supports Fuller et al.'s (2014) recommendation of "Forging social presence through a variety of connections, creating a cognitive presence through reflection and discourse, and establishing a teacher presence through appropriate instructional design" (p.79). In considering the three presences of COI; teacher presence, social presence, and cognitive presence, each are dependent on each other; however research has shown consistently that teacher presence is crucial to social and cognitive presence (Fuller et al., 2014; Garrison et al., 2010, 2010; Majeski et al., 2017) . While social and cognitive presence is heavily influenced by teacher presence, it is important to identify the relationship of each presence independently rather than focusing on one having a pivotal influence on the others. Garrison et al. (2010) provided evidence that the three presences are interconnected and influence each other in a hypothesized manner, that teaching presence influences the perception of social and cognitive presence; however, social presence also significantly predicted perceptions of cognitive presence. The authors concluded that social presence must be seen as a variable of teaching and cognitive presence. Garrison et al. (2010) research supports the assertion of this study that the COI presences interrelate in a way that supports student success; therefore, the

addition of emotional presence is an important addition to the COI framework. The implications of this study recommend the need for an emotional presence aspect to the COI framework supported by the theory of TEI.

Instructors who embed EI seem to implicitly understand the importance of emotion in learning; they understand the positive contributions of the emotional system. According to Low et al. (2019), “the experiential system is the lead system for person-centered learning, positive change, and growth” (p. 22). Understanding this fundamental aspect of the human condition is a shared reality among instructors who embed EI in their instructional practices. Each in their own way, instructors who embed EI warmly engage the emotional systems of their students to navigate and manage stress, promote positive change, and build self-confidence. In doing so, instructors demonstrate strong personal leadership that engenders better self-management in their students. The importance of instructor-student rapport in managing emotions and shaping EI for both instructor and student is perhaps the most important theme identified in this study because it is central to the TEI framework and weaves its way within and throughout the other identified themes.

In the COI framework, relationship building is a direct skill of teacher presence which enhances social presence (Garrison et al., 2010). An important consideration for instructors when establishing relationships with students is the EI dimensions of personal leadership and interpersonal communication. It stands to reason that students who are invited to have EI-centric relationships by their instructors will be more open to discussing topics, asking questions, and voicing concerns. In short, the EI-centric

relationship engenders an emotional connection that increases cognitive awareness and self-management skills. Adding the emotional presence aspect within the COI framework, instructors create a foundation to guide their practice in direct modelling and, where appropriate, teach EI principles and skills. According to Low et al. (2019), “healthy emotional development is better understood and achieved as a learning system organized around EI skill sets and skills” (p. 22). The five-step ELS can be used to help remind instructors of the importance of reflection and to help guide them in the mandate to create emotional presence when working with students. The ELS can even be shared with students as an important lesson and first steps in developing their own EI by reflectively learning and practicing EI skills themselves. These initial observations about the importance of emotional presence for enhancing the COI framework provides new opportunities for research. For example, it would be interesting to compare the effectiveness of COI frameworks with and without emotional presence, and one convenient way to accomplish this would be to include the ELS and TEI as learning objectives for the COI that purports to embed emotional presence.

Other studies have taken a quantitative approach and demonstrated the positive relationship between EI skills and student success in both face-to-face and online higher education classes (Buzdar et al., 2016; Cotler et al., 2017; Knapke et al., 2016; Machera & Machera, 2017; H. W. V. Tang et al., 2016). This qualitative study provided an exploration of how EI manifests in online instruction through the lens of transformative emotional intelligence. In a future study, it would be important to combine the qualitative and quantitative traditions to confirm and add to what was learned in this

study. For example, based on the results found in this study, it seems that instructors' use of EI facilitates student engagement and performance, at least from the instructors' perspectives, and the instructors even shared their opinions about which skills were important for doing so. It would be helpful to verify, using quantitative research, which EI skills specifically are mediated by instructor use of EI and which of those mediate skills are most predictive of student performance and engagement. Creating such a model would give instructors a more concrete pathway for learning and developing EI in themselves and in their students.

Implications

Instructors who teach from a framework of EI can provide adult learners with opportunities to develop EI meaningfully through online courses. Strategies of engagement that model the principles of TEI are essential for instructors who want to facilitate the meaningful development for students (Nelson et al., 2017). The importance of positive TEI interpretation is one such principle (Nelson et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2017). Higher education instructors who assume responsibility for improving the emotional growth of their adult learners are situated to improve instructional practice that leads to positive social change by improving the online learning experience for both instructors and their students. With the influx of online learning programs from colleges and universities nationwide, it is important for online instructors to use self-awareness in their intentional use of EI in their instructional practices.

Community of Inquiry, Transformative EI, and Emotional Learning System

As discussed in the literature review, the COI framework is considered a basis for online instructional best practice. By incorporating TEI, an educational model of EI, to integrate an emotional presence aspect within the framework, the implications for practice include qualitatively improving online learning environments. The main tenets of TEI are that it is research-derived, skills-based, person-centered, and relationship focused provide learning connections for academic achievement in students and instructors, and instructional growth for both as well. It is the understanding and incorporation of these tenants, whether implicit or explicit, that assists instructors in the self-reflective process to become more aware of their use of EI in their practices. EI implementation in to the best practice of COI can result in instructor modelling of effective use of EI.

The ELS is a learning process that helps thinking become more emotionally reflective and constructive, in turn, allowing you to be more aware of your choice of behavior (Nelson & Low, 2011). The use of the ELS as a tool for instructors to gain an understanding of their own EI provides a process for emotional presence and learning to take place. The steps of the learning system (a) explore, (b) identify, (c) understand, (d)learn, and (f) apply & model; provide a practical way for instructors and students alike to develop intentional behavior habits by consistently practicing and working through the system (Nelson & Low, 2011). The process of understanding the role of EI in decisions and behaviors is activated and the emotional presence aspect of COI then becomes important to the ongoing reflective practice. The results of this study could be used to

inform online higher education researchers and instructors in the development of the emotional presence facets of the COI framework within TEI theory.

Conclusion

As higher education distance learning programs continue to grow, it is imperative for online instructors and course designers to understand the importance of the role of EI. Based on the themes and data formulated from this study, I concluded that instructors' self-awareness of their use of EI in distance learning courses helped them to be more reflective in their instructional practices, which in turn helped students develop emotional skills that seem to improve engagement and learning. Increasing the use of emotional intelligence best practices by online instructors could lead to positive social change by both increasing online instructor efficacy and enhancing student engagement and satisfaction with their online learning experiences. The knowledge attained is significant as it can assist instructors in understanding the importance of their EI self-awareness and the reflective process to inform their instructional practices and improve the overall experience of both distance instruction and learning.

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Appendix A: Google Form Demographics Questionnaire

By completing this demographic form, you are sharing information and expressing interest to be a volunteer participant for my basic qualitative study titled *Online Instructors' Use of Emotional Intelligence in Higher Education Distance Learning*. If selected as a study participant, you will be notified electronically and a separate Informed Consent will be shared that you will be required to acknowledge prior to being interviewed.

1. Name
2. Telephone number
3. Email address
4. Please indicate your sex/gender:
5. Do you teach higher education online courses for an accredited college or university at the graduate and/or undergraduate levels? Yes/No
6. How long have you been teaching online?
7. What level courses do you teach? (Primarily Undergraduate, Primarily Graduate)

Appendix B: LinkedIn Participant Recruitment Post

My name is Aprile Williams and I am currently working on completing my dissertation in pursuit of my Doctor of Education in Higher Education Distance Learning Leadership with Walden University. My dissertation, *Online Instructors Use of Emotional Intelligence in Higher Education Distance Learning Courses*, will explore higher education online instructors' experiences and perceptions of their use of emotional intelligence (EI) in their online courses.

I am seeking volunteer participants for my basic qualitative study. Your initial time requirements for participation would include a 30-45 minute semi-structured individual audio interview with me using ZOOM technology as well as up to 35 minute time commitment to review data obtained.

Please inbox me here on LinkedIn, or email if you are interested contributing to my research.

Appendix C: EITRI Recruitment Letter

For use with the Emotional Intelligence Training and Research Institute

My name is Aprile Williams and I am currently working on completing my dissertation in pursuit of my Doctor of Education in Higher Education Distance Learning Leadership with Walden University. My dissertation, *Online Instructors Use of Emotional Intelligence in Higher Education Distance Learning Courses*, will explore higher education online instructors' experiences and perceptions of their use of emotional intelligence (EI) in their online courses.

I am seeking volunteer participants for my basic qualitative study. Your time requirements for participation would include a 30-45 minute semi-structured individual interview with me using ZOOM technology as well as limited time commitments to review data obtained. If you are, or have been, an online instructor at the undergraduate or graduate level and are interested in participating in my study, please reach out to me via email.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Researcher: _____

Interviewee: _____

Pre-Interview/Introduction:

1. Thank the interviewee for participating in the study.
2. Review the rationale for the study, the purpose of the interview, data that will be collected, and confidentiality and protection of identity. Review the informed consent form and verify date accepted.
3. Inform the participant that I would like to audio record the interview to have an accurate record of our conversation and observations and obtain permission for recording. I will then start recording.
4. Inform the participant that the interview will not exceed 45 minutes.
5. Ask to clarify anything for the participant before proceeding.

Interview Questions

Note: The items in bold are not read to the participants. They are included here for organizational purposes only.

During this interview I will be asking you about emotional intelligence and would like you to answer based on your online teaching practices and experience. In addition to asking you to describe what emotional intelligence is using your own words, I will also be asking about some emotional intelligence skills that you may use. From one validated EI assessment instrument, some emotional intelligence skills include self-esteem, assertion, comfort, empathy, drive strength, decision making, time management, and others. A list of EI skills from the assessment instrument, the Emotional Intelligence Assessment Process, has been provided for your convenience. Please feel free to refer to the list at any point during our interview. Also, feel free to add other skills that you use that may qualify as EI skills from your perspective, even if not already on the list.

RQ1: What are online instructors' knowledge and experience with EI, including consuming and/or supervising EI research?

The first two questions have to do with your knowledge and experience with EI, including any EI research or publishing you may have done.

IVQ1: Please describe emotional intelligence in your own words.

IVQ2: Please share any emotional intelligence research or publishing that you have been involved with.

RQ2: What emotional intelligence skills are used by online instructors to encourage productive learning environments?

The next two questions are where I want to discuss any specific skills you use with your online students.

IVQ3: What emotional intelligence skills or competencies do you find helpful, if any, when working with students in distance learning environments?

IVQ4: Please share examples of how you incorporate emotional intelligence when working with your students.

IVQ5: What EI skills do you identify with online instruction best practices?

IVQ6: What EI considerations would you include if you designed a college course for online delivery?

IVQ7: Please share any examples of how you have used EI to help mitigate limitations of online course designs in the courses you have taught.

IVQ8: What EI-centric practices do you currently employ with your students that you would suggest as best practices for all instructors?

RQ3: What are online instructor perceptions about the importance of instructor-student relationships for fostering online student success?

The last two interview questions are connected to the notion that interdependence is a higher order value than independence, especially when pursuing difficult goals or tasks.

IVQ9: How do you think the use of emotional intelligence by online instructors relates to student success?

IVQ10: Please share your perceptions about the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence when communicating with your students.

Post-Interview

1. Thank the participant for their meaningful involvement and reassure their protection of anonymity.
2. Establish/verify future contact with the participant for member checking after the data have been transcribed and analyzed.

Appendix E: Emotional Intelligence Skills from the ESAP®

The following research-derived skills and definitions are provided from the profile page of the Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP); a positive assessment of emotional intelligence (Nelson & Low, 1998).

ASSERTION: The ability to clearly and honestly communicate personal thoughts and feelings to another person in a comfortable, direct, appropriate, and straightforward manner: Assertive communication is a positive way of talking to people and expressing thoughts and feelings in a way that promotes understanding, caring, and respect. Assertive communication allows a person to respect individual rights and the rights of others and is not hurtful to self or others. Assertion enables a person to communicate effectively even in difficult situations involving strong and intense emotions. Assertion is a key emotional skill essential for developing and maintaining strong, positive, and healthy relationships.

COMFORT: The ability to judge appropriate social, emotional, and physical distance in verbal and non-verbal interactions with others and to impact and influence others in positive ways. Interpersonal Comfort includes the ability to establish rapport and develop trust in relationships by using effective attending skills and being honest, self-assured, and open. Comfort enables a person to be confident, spontaneous, and relaxed with others in a variety of situations. Comfort is a key emotional skill essential for developing and maintaining positive interactions with others in social and/or leadership capacities.

EMPATHY: The ability to accurately understand and constructively respond to the expressed feeling, thoughts, behaviors, and needs of others. Accurate Empathy involves active listening in a patient, compassionate, and non-judgmental manner and communication back to the person to be viewed as caring, genuine, and trustworthy. Empathy is a key emotional skill essential for honest and effective communication in social and/or leadership capacities.

DECISION MAKING: The ability to plan, formulate, initiate, and implement effective problem solving procedures. Decision Making involves using problem solving and conflict resolution strategies in solving personal problems and using a skills approach in making decisions. Decision Making skills include knowing and using a systematic model or process for anticipating and approaching problems and decisions in daily life and work. Decision Making is a key emotional skill essential for formulating and seeing choices in problem situations and for involving others in the solution to problems and conflicts.

LEADERSHIP: The ability to positively impact, persuade and influence others, and in general make a positive difference. Leadership is a behavioral reflection of self-empowerment with developed abilities and skills in interpersonal and goal-directed areas

of life. Leadership is a set of personal and goal directed behaviors and actions that create momentum, consensus, and support in working with others. Leadership is a key emotional skill essential for establishing and providing vision, momentum, and direction for others in ways that are valued and respected.

DRIVE STRENGTH: The ability to effectively direct personal energy and motivation to achieve personal career, and life goals. Drive Strength is reflected in goal achievement and in the ability to complete meaningful goals that result in personal satisfaction and positive feelings. Drive Strength involves the learning of specific strategies and processes of action goal setting that a person can apply and practice on a daily basis in personal, career, and life projects. Drive Strength is a key emotional skill essential for high performance, goal achievement, and success.

TIME MANAGEMENT: The ability to organize tasks into a personally productive time schedule and use time effectively for task completion. Time Management is reflected in the ability to achieve and productively manage the valuable resource of time, rather than responding or reacting to the demands of time. Time Management involves the learning and using of effective skills and brings harmony to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors on a daily basis in the pursuit of personal, career, and life goals. Time Management is a key emotional skill essential to the effective management of self.

COMMITMENT ETHIC: The ability to complete tasks, projects, assignments, and personal responsibilities in a dependable and successful manner, even in difficult circumstances. Commitment Ethic is reflected by an inner-directed, self-motivated, and persistent effort to complete projects regardless of other distractions and difficulties. Commitment Ethic involves a personal standard for meeting the goals, expectations, and requirements of life and career. Commitment Ethic is a key emotional skill essential for success and satisfaction and is the inseparable companion of high achievement and personal excellence.

SELF ESTEEM: The ability, belief, and skill to view self as positive, competent, and successful in achieving personal goals. Self Esteem is reflected in genuine self-confidence, a high regard for self and others, and self-worth. Positive Self Esteem is the foundation of achievement and a general sense of well-being. Self Esteem includes the powerful personal belief system maintained daily by experiencing success in effective dealing with self, others, and the demands of life and work. Self Esteem is a key emotional skill essential for learning about and developing self in all aspects of life.

STRESS MANAGEMENT: The ability and skill to choose and exercise healthy self-control and self-management in response to stressful events. Stress Management is reflected in the ability to control and manage stored and strong emotions in the many situations of daily life and work. Stress Management involves self-regulation of emotional intensity and the use of relaxation and cognitively derived coping strategies in

difficult and high stress situations. Stress Management is a key emotional skill essential to health, performance and satisfaction in life and work.

AGGRESSION: A measure of the degree to which an individual employs a personal communication style or pattern that violates, overpowers, dominates, or discredits another person's rights, thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. Aggression is reflected in communication that is too strong and overpowering and results in bad feelings and negative outcomes. Aggression is a potential problem area of life that negatively affects relationships. Aggression involves the emotion of anger and needs to be understood and converted to the emotional skill of Anger Control and Management. Anger Control and Management is a key emotional skill essential to the healthy and constructive expression of anger in relationship to self and others.

DEFERENCE: A measure of the degree to which an individual employs a communication style or pattern that is indirect, self-inhibiting, self-denying, and ineffectual for the accurate expression of thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. Deference is reflected in communication that is too weak, indirect, or ambiguous and results in unclear and/or mixed messages. Often, Deference involves the emotion of fear and needs to be understood and converted to the emotional skill of Fear Control and Management. Fear Control and Management is a key emotional skill essential to the healthy and constructive expression of fear, worry, and anxiety in relationship to self and others.

CHANGE ORIENTATION: A measure of the degree to which an individual is satisfied and the magnitude of change needed or desired for developing personal and professional effectiveness. Change Orientation includes the degree to which a person is motivated and ready for change. Change Orientation is a reflection of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with current emotional skills and abilities. Often, a high measure of Change Orientation is an indication of dissatisfaction with current personal and emotional skills, an acute interest in making personal changes, and/or a strong conviction of the need to make personal changes. Change Orientation needs to be understood and converted to the emotional skill of Positive Personal Change. Positive Personal Change is a key emotional skill essential to healthy change and development throughout life.

Appendix F: Permission to Use Emotional Skills Assessment Process® (ESAP®)



Emotional Intelligence Learning Systems, Inc.
Emotional Intelligence Is Our Voice In The World

Gary R. Low

PO Box 271877
 Corpus Christ, TX
 78427

March 30, 2020

Dear Ms. Williams,

Myself and my good friend/colleague, the late Dr. Darwin Nelson, have always encouraged and supported quality doctoral research with emotional intelligence and skills vital to personal, academic, career, life, and leadership performance. We are pleased to grant you permission to use our EI-centric learning models, positive assessment instrument; the Emotional Skills Assessment Process® (ESAP®), and skill definitions for your doctoral dissertation in the department of Education-Higher Education and Adult Learning at Walden University. You may include a copy of the ESAP® profile and other information as an appendix if you decide to do so. Copyrights of all ESAP® assessments are retained by Darwin Nelson and Gary Low.

We are pleased that you are using the ESAP® in your dissertation. Your study titled "Online Instructor Use of Emotional Intelligence in Higher Education Distance Learning Courses" is an interesting, relevant, and needed study. Your study will add to the growing research base of emotional intelligence and its value and role in developing healthy and productive students, teachers, educators, and families. Through research, our learning model of emotional intelligence is linked in many ways to effective teaching, learning, and professional development in education.

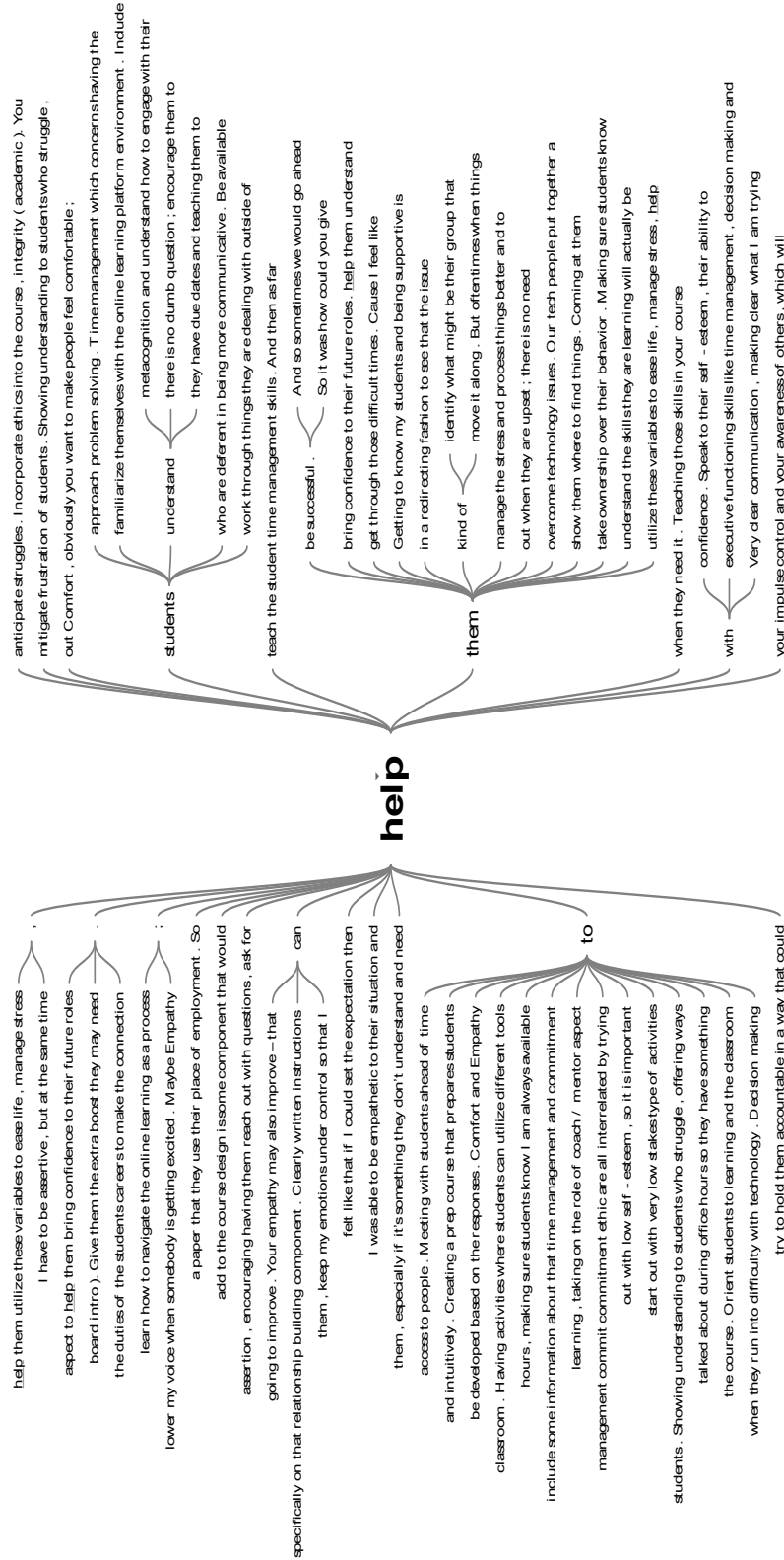
When your dissertation is completed, we would like a bound copy of your thesis and one copy of all papers, reports, and articles that make use of the ESAP®. We try to keep up with all graduate research, doctoral studies, and articles used with our positive and research derived assessments. I wish you the best as you add to the professional literature and increase the heuristic value of our education and transformative assessments and learning models of emotional intelligence.

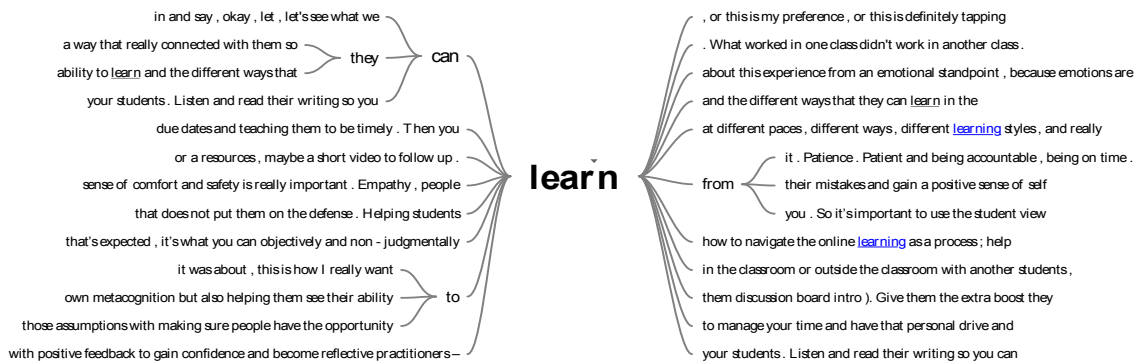
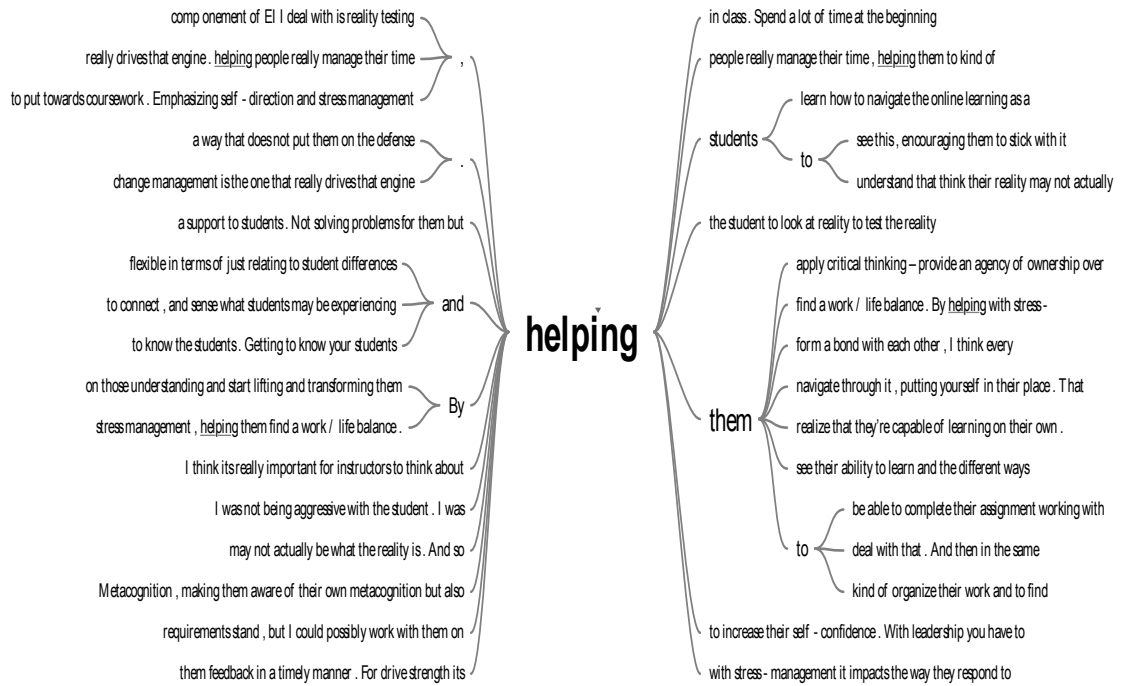
I wish you, your chair Dr. Richard Hammett, and committee at Walden University the very best as you pursue this important research. If you need additional professional literature references or technical assistance regarding the ESAP® assessment, please let me know.

Take care and warmest personal regards.

Gary R. Low, Ph.D.
 Professor Emeritus of Education, Texas A&M University-Kingsville
 Founding Faculty, Emotional Intelligence Training & Research Institute (EITRI)
 Principal, Emotional Intelligence Learning Systems (EILS)

Appendix G: NVivo 12 Word Trees in Their Entirety





are feeling and responding. Using assertion with self-awareness, I've taught five semesters in every semester I felt like I you can't apply the information it doesn't matter what you

learned

When you build trust with a team you can really and incorporated in the upcoming semester, but I never felt how to phrase things instead of something coming across as

an assertion type of approach with our students and in and to get in front of stressors and difficulties by class. Because the class that I was teaching was promoting ensure that we're always kind of tracking together. Student centered function into a very different virtual environment. It's not just important. Empathy, people **learn** at different paces, different ways, different most of it. Leadership development and enhancing students' self-esteem. not only cognitively, are they getting the material, are they human side. I think the students miss that side preference, or this is definitely tapping into a style think time management is just pervasive at any kind of to think about helping them realize that they're capable was able to bring that student through a process and commitment ethic to work that through because with not in classroom. Tying the assignments and expectations of one. (Response given following a narrative regarding new to of activities to help students familiarize themselves with the defense. Helping students **learn** how to navigate the

orientation. They (students) need to take responsibility for their own outside their external motivators. Self-esteem is difficult in distance If you're going to promote this concept of self-empowerment, Especially online it has to be self-directed terms of their success in the course. Orient students to that shows the student you understand and care about their the classroom, but I have come to see its (virtual their future roles. Help them understand the skills they are things 100% better. Another situation with a student would, was

learning

value where I get creative is I still talk to but at the same time the teacher is there to especially if there's no verbal communication. Drive strength, time management how to adjust responses and how to understand that instructors manage your own time which also goes to time-management. taking on the role of coach / mentor aspect to help you have to give the learners the tools for them ? Are they reflecting back to you that they're getting it, about that technology it's just how do we interface and success. Maybe a video introduction, but this too can technology issues, but also the additional patience and understanding the classroom to help them utilize these variables to as a process; help them take ownership over their behavior. disabled and the student didn't understand, or it seemed that environment or in a degree program. I think comfort. try from mistakes, not giving up but trying again. Communication is in the organization. So often times they had to interview people. its really up to the student. I'm here to answer leadership Having a starter course would just make life easier on their own. Flexibility would be the big one. The platform environment. Include community building and relationship building in the process in general. With comfort we're trying to deal with styles and really being able to connect, and sense what that appeals to me. I talk with my hands and to the duties of the students careers to make the which relates to commitment ethic and change orientation. They (students) will actually be applied to the career field they are