

Emotional Intelligence in Saudi Arabian Educational Supervision: between acceptance and resistance

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Abstract

The concept of Emotional Intelligence has received considerable attention globally and most recently in the context of Educational Supervision in Saudi Arabia, where it has been presented as a key element to stimulate effective leadership and educational change. In this article, we discuss the introduction of Emotional Intelligence in Saudi Arabia, focusing on the experiences of six Saudi Educational Supervisors attending a workshop on Emotional Education. Qualitative data was generated from interviews, focus groups, participants observations and reflective diaries. Thematic analysis was used to organise the data and develop central ideas for discussion. Our interpretation of the data suggests that our participants have a limited understanding of the concept of Emotional Intelligence and that their views, which oscillate between acceptance and resistance, are influenced by Saudi culture as well as the model established by Daniel Goleman. In the final part of the paper provides some guidance on how to develop an alternative approach to Emotional Intelligence from a critical perspective.

Keywords

Emotional Intelligence, Educational Supervision, Saudi Education, Leadership

Introduction: Emotional Intelligence in Saudi Educational Supervisor's training

In the hope of enhancing the practice of educational supervision and improving the relationship between school agents and supervisors, new training programmes were developed and introduced in the context of Educational Supervision in Saudi Arabia. The outline of these training programmes included a set of objectives that aimed to improve social, communication and leadership skills, together with the ability to promote change (Nather, 2014). With this aim in mind, the concept of Emotional Intelligence has been introduced to Educational Supervisors' training in the belief that

there is a relationship between Emotional Intelligence and the development of better leadership practices. Emotional Intelligence is generally understood a set of personal skills or competencies that allow people to understand, manage and use emotions for different purposes. It is commonly defined as intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities originally presented in 4 clusters: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness and (4) relationship management (Boyatzis, 2007). There are many studies that support the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership (e.g. Doe, Ndinguri and Phipps, 2015; Nafukho et al., 2016; Beatty, 2000; Goleman, 1999) but also critical voices that approach the concept of Emotional Intelligence with distrust (e.g. Menendez Alvarez-Hevia, 2018a; Burman, 2009; Conte, 2005).

Educational supervision¹ was first introduced to Saudi Arabia in the 1920s as part of educational reform geared towards improving school outcomes with the aim of enhancing the quality of education and in 1957 the Ministry of Education implemented educational supervision to facilitate effective management of schools (Abdul-Kareem, 2001). Since then, the educational supervision system has gone through significant changes facilitated by government agendas and policies. More recently, the Saudi Ministry of Education (2014) has defined the educational supervisor as an expert in education who helps teachers develop their competences and skills in teaching, solve educational problems and provide advice on learning matters. As part of their activities, it is also their responsibility to assess teaching practices and provide performance reports to the Ministry of Education covering primary, secondary and high school education, in the public and private sector

In the last fifteen years, some concerns have been raised as to whether the educational supervision system has been effective in executing its mandate. Alabdulkareem (2014) argue that the educational supervision system has not been effective, since it has been marred by poor and autocratic leadership practices. Consequently, tensions and distrust appeared between supervisors and teachers while poor staff development continued to permeate the body of supervisors. Moreover, insufficient cooperation among educational supervision and the amount of bureaucratic work were identified as significant obstacles for the quality of educational supervision in Saudi Arabia (Abdulla, 2008; Alenizi, 2012). In that regard, Alkrdem (2011) explains that supervisory practices may not be valued in some school contexts due to inconsistency, biases, and some supervisors' lack of effective communication skills. The rupture between schools and educational supervision is inconsistent with the Ministry's description of educational supervision, which aims to achieve an

¹ Ofsted is the UK equivalent to the educational supervision in Saudi Arabia.

inclusive and democratic form of leadership that implies the development of positive professional and personal relationships (Abdula, 2008). In response to this issue, the Ministry of Education started a series of reforms that included the introduction of new policies and changes in the training of Educational Supervisors.

Critical approaches to the concept of Emotional Intelligence

The dissemination of the concept of Emotional Intelligence is associated with the success of the publication in 1996 of Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. A book written in a journalistic style that introduces the concept of Emotional Intelligence as a set of skills and abilities that are partly determined by our genetic-evolutionary baggage but also malleable through learning. Emotional Intelligence has been received with enthusiasm in the fields of education and leadership, as is evidenced by the large body of literature available (e.g. Stough, Saklofske and Parker, 2009; Hughes, Patterson and Terrell, 2005; Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2003; Schultze and Roberts, 2005; Bar-On and Parker, 2000). A review of the Arabic literature on the topic, showed that most of the translated work on Emotional Intelligence covers Goleman's model, to the extent that his name dominates all the publications (Alkahmshy, 2011). These sources are widely accessible in bookshops and public libraries (e.g. Adnan, 2001; Al-swedan, 2005; Al-Rashed, 2007).

Nevertheless, in this paper we take a critical standpoint to approach the discourse of Emotional Intelligence represented by Goleman's ideas with distrust, understanding that marketable easy solution to complex problems can be problematic. Emotional Intelligence is also criticised for putting too much emphasis on developing strategies for self-regulation and promoting relationships with the main aim of making people more productive for organisational or corporative purposes (Boler, 1999). Part of its success comes from its ability to increase productivity and manage human capital but for Hartley (2003) this is problematic because deliberately ignores power structures that normalise inequalities, having a negative impact at subjective level. In this regard, and before the popularisation of Emotional Intelligence, research conducted by the feminist sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2003) had already recognised the risk of manipulating emotions for work purposes in professions that required some form of emotional involvement. She called this form of manipulating emotions for work purposes *emotional labour*. Professionals working in education are also performing emotional labour that requires them to manage and use their emotions in their daily practice, so exposing themselves to be damaged too (Menendez Alvarez-Hevia, 2018b, Zembylas, 2005a and Colley, 2006).

The concept of Emotional Intelligence has also been criticised for its alignment with positive-psychology and the self-help industry that promotes unrealistic expectations such as the magical achievement of happiness and the rapid eradication of problems (Bibby, 2010). Self-help and Emotional Intelligence training were introduced simultaneously in Arab countries through marketing channels that promoted training packages under glamorous titles, holding out illusory promises of wellbeing, happiness, success, and/or positive change (Al-Rashid, 2016; Kenney, 2015). In the Saudi context, those packages have become increasingly popular, in the assumption that they will lead to an improvement of educational leadership practices (Al Kahtani 2013, Alghamdi, 2014; Alkurdi, 2015).

The challenge of transferring Emotional Intelligence into the Saudi socio-cultural context

From a socio-cultural perspective, the translation and transferring of ideas about Emotional Intelligence from a Western to an Arab context is also problematic. To fully engage with the complexities, uncertainties and potential inequalities of transferring ideas about emotions from one cultural context to a different one, we need to take an approach that considers the socio-cultural setting, especially in the context of Saudi educational leadership. From the perspective of cultural identity, it is important to consider the influence of the complex context in which educational supervisors are practicing their daily responsibilities. The educational system in Saudi Arabia has a strong presence of the values, norms, and lifestyles characteristic of the Arab culture (Idrees, 2002; Abdulla, 2008; Alenizi, 2012). As such, any discussion about introducing initiatives, educational reforms, or new leadership/teaching styles inspired by imported ideas, requires be contextualised and approached cautiously.

Transferring organisational or leadership practices from very distant cultures is delicate and challenging (Morosini et al., 1998). The notion of Emotional Intelligence has its roots in the Western context, and we must understand that the Saudi socio-cultural and political context is very different. In particular, the cultural distance between the United States or United Kingdom and countries in the Middle East is significant in terms of the role of religion in shaping people's minds and practices (Al-Rashid, 2016). Although this is clearly not the only area of cultural distance, the importance of religion in Islamic countries tends to take precedence over other aspects of daily life, in contrast to the more secular Western societies. The concept of Emotional Intelligence has presence in the Saudi corporate sector, although its universalistic view clashed with some of the Saudi cultural values (Al-Sahafi and Mohd, 2015). The dissonance between Western and Saudi cultural values is grounded

in religion but also in language, given that Islam and the Arabic language underpin Saudi society.

Kayyal and Russell (2012) explain that emotional words and language play a significant role in the Arabic context when portraying and recognising emotions. The language used to talk about emotions also reflects cultural characteristics (e.g. gender division, hierarchies etc.), something that Harré and Parrot (1986) emphasised in his socioconstructionist analysis of emotions. However, it is significant that in our initial analysis of the literature we found that the majority of Saudi researchers, who have adopted the concept of Emotional Intelligence in their studies, have done so without critically questioning some of the cultural, religious and linguistic challenges. This finding allows us to identify a critical gap in the literature that this research aims to contribute to fulfil.

Methodology

This research aimed to critically examine the introduction of ideas associated with Emotional Intelligence in the professional context of Saudi Arabian Educational Supervision. We looked at the experiences of a group of educational supervisors taking a critical-interpretive approach. This perspective allowed us to interpret the phenomena of study more subjectively, focusing on actions and textual representations (Creswell, 2014). One of the researchers was an active-internal participant in the production of interpretations. In this case, she was also an educational supervisor in Saudi Arabia, which adds an insider-outsider standpoint. However, as suggested by other Arab researchers, we understood that researching your own socio-cultural context made it difficult to take the critical approach necessary to provide a meaningful representation (Al-Kahtani, Ryan and Jefferson., 2006; Al-Dakheel, 2008; Al-Fahad, 2009). For that reason, the external position of the second researcher is used to compensate providing an alternative insight into the research. We were also aware of the limitations of our small sample, but it was not our intention to generalise but to get an original, grounded and thoughtful insight to contribute with new ideas to further debates.

We combined different methods to collect qualitative data over a period of eight months in 2017 between March and October. The data collection was structured into three phases: a *pre-reflective phase* which included semi-structured interviews; a *participatory workshop phase* which included participant observation and focus group discussion aims to provide an structured space where participants reflect on their previous knowledge on Emotional Intelligence and are exposed to alternative views;

and a *post-reflective phase* that included qualitative questionnaires. The three phases are used to generate different forms of data that enrich the discussion of the experience of the participants. During the three phases, we also used a reflective diary to which both the main researcher and the research assistant contributed. Following Abu Hassan et al. (2017) a pilot study was carried out with the aim of refining the research tools, improving the feasibility of the study and preparing the researcher.

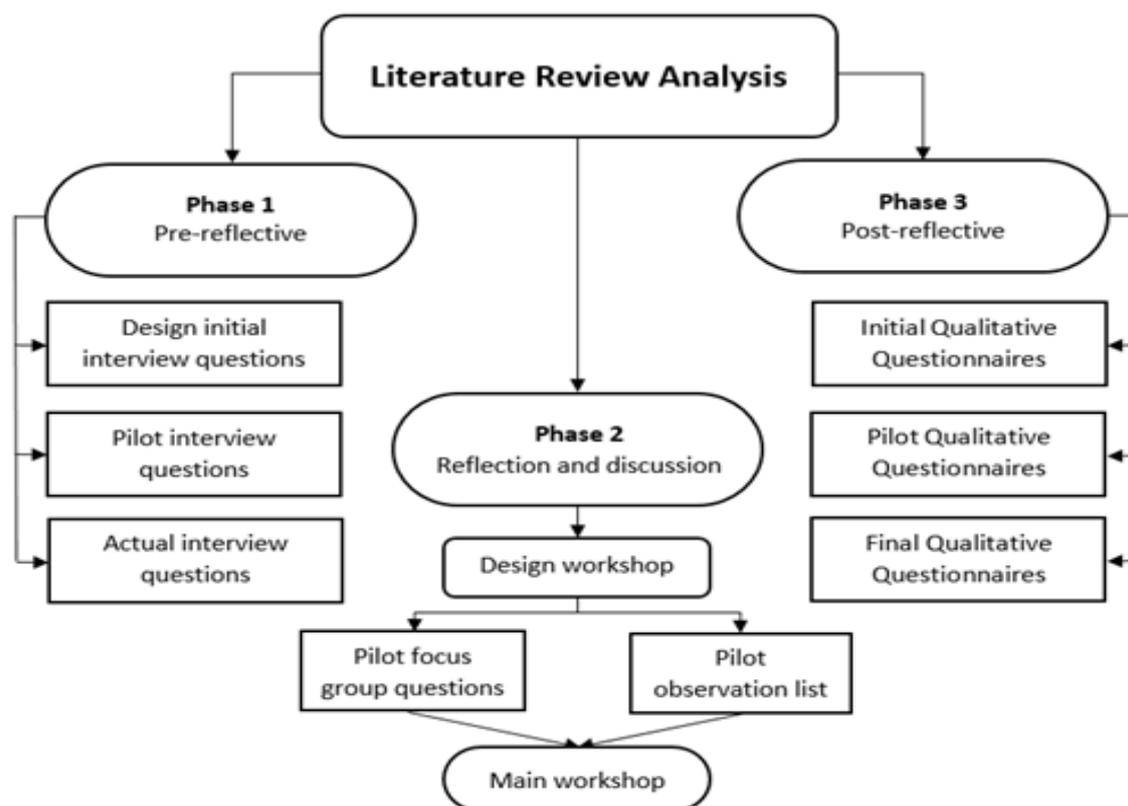


Figure 1: Research phases

The participants are six educational supervisors (3 men and 3 women) at different career stages and the size of the sample was conditioned by the approval of the Department of Education that only allowed this number. They were selected from a list of 45 potential candidates (professional contacts of the principal researcher) with the intention of creating a balanced convenient sample that includes different genders and a range of experiences, career stages, knowledge of the topic and interests.

Participants committed to all phases of the research. Data collection was carried out in Saudi Arabia by the main researcher with the support of a research assistant (Yusuf). Institutional ethical approval had already been gained, ensuring that the research was conducted in line with the latest BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018). The main challenge came from dealing with the rules on gender segregation that do

not permit female researchers to interview male participants. To overcome this barrier, we appointed a male research assistant who conducted the interviews with male participants and provided support with other research activities such as transcriptions and workshop observations.

We used thematic analysis to analyse the data that emerged from the three phases of data collection. We followed the model developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) that involves a process of transcription (and translation into English), coding, searching for themes/sub-themes, reviewing themes/sub-themes, defining and naming themes/sub-themes and a final interpretation of the themes/sub-themes in relation to the research aim.

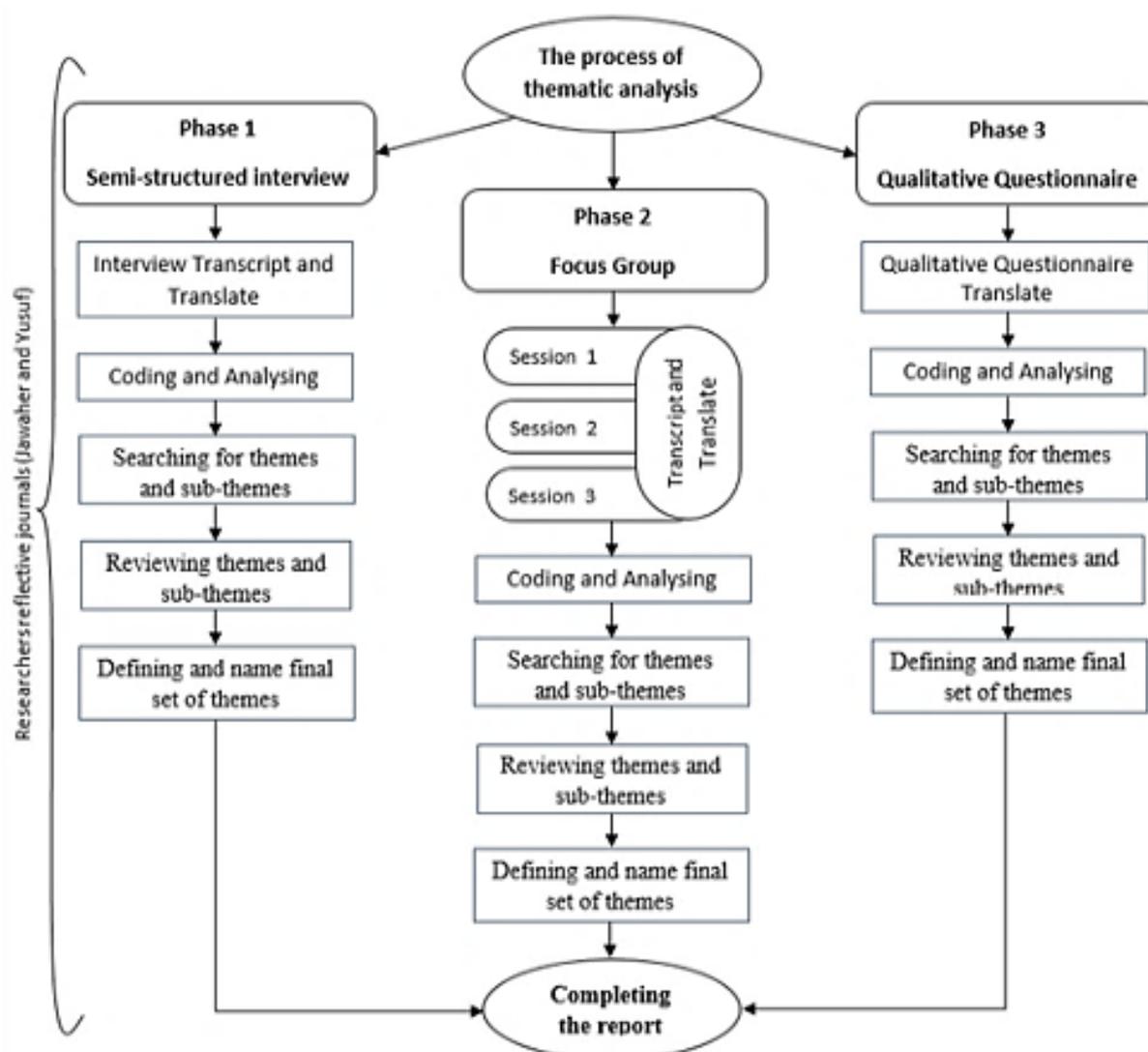


Figure 2: The process of thematic analysis

Findings

Three different sets of themes and their related sub-themes emerged from the data analysis. The first set of themes and sub-themes illustrates the Saudi Educational Supervisors' initial understandings and perceptions of Emotional Intelligence as a transformative concept introduced through formal and informal channels. Their understandings of Emotional Intelligence is represented in terms of acceptance and resistance. The second themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data suggest that participants negotiated and re-negotiated the conceptualization of Emotional Intelligence in the workplace. The third theme suggests that educational supervisors question the meanings attributed to Emotional Intelligence and whether it can be approached differently. This idea served to identify challenges that influenced the participants' understanding of Emotional Intelligence in the Saudi educational workplace.

We grouped the three themes into two main points that summarised the findings of this study: Saudi Educational Supervisors' perception of the concept of Emotional Intelligence, and challenges and possibilities of Emotional Intelligence for Saudi Educational Supervision.

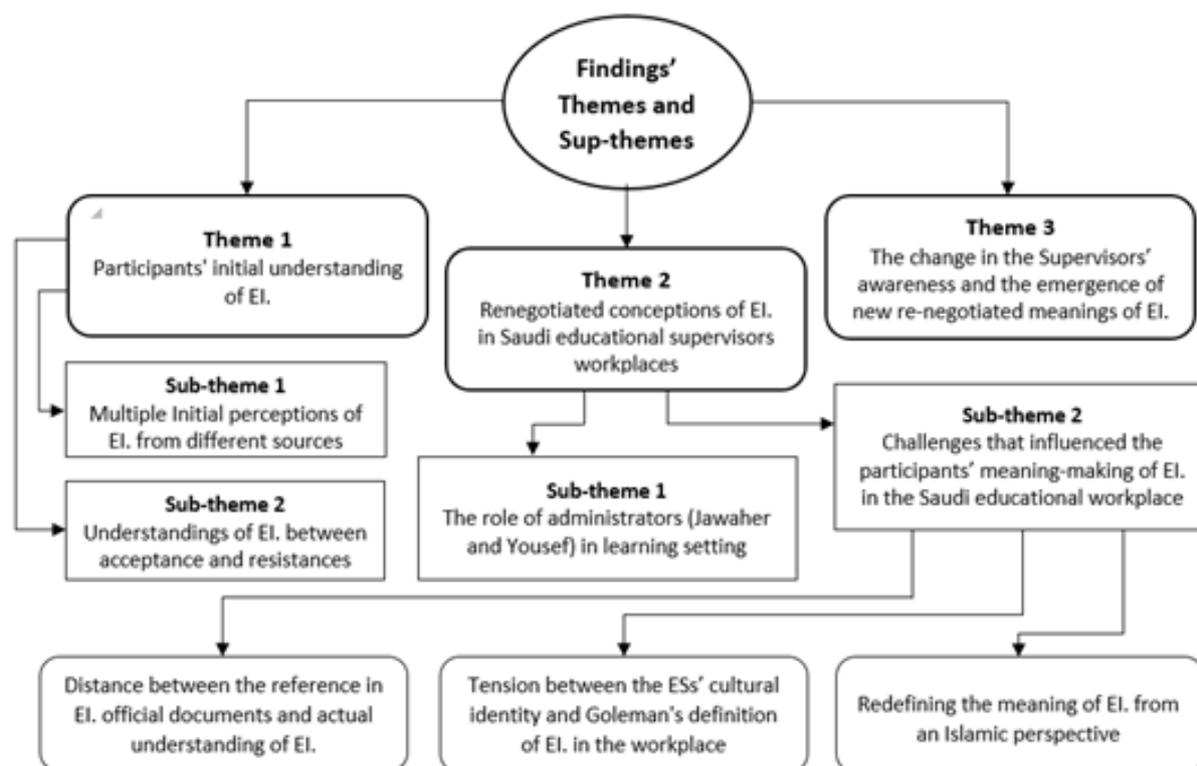


Figure 3: Themes and sub-themes

Saudi Educational Supervisors Perception of the concept of Emotional Intelligence

The findings suggested that Educational Supervisors develop different understandings of Emotional Intelligence. Initial ideas about Emotional Education were introduced to the Saudi context by means of different formal and informal channels: formal training organised by the Department of Education, self-learning and private commercial courses. Some of our participants suggested that managers of supervisors provided training courses to introduce key ideas about Emotional Intelligence, believing that it would be useful to improve their practices and leadership skills. The words of one of the participants served to illustrate this idea:

“They [managers] think that we need training to learn how to assess head teachers, teachers, and our colleague’s emotions to be able to lead them effectively” (Nora, interview).

However, there were also critical voices that looked with distrust at the interest in Emotional Intelligence:

“At the end of the day, it is nothing more than just another business that is evolving into a multimillion-dollar training industry”. (Mohmad, Focus Group).

Different expressions of rejection came from the participants who felt threatened and forced to accept Emotional Intelligence as a transformative element of educational supervision. They argued that the training was not occasional or random but “part of a plan”. They suggested that the decision-makers who made the plan should had thought more carefully about every aspect before putting it into practice. Some participants’ responses implied some anger; they approached Emotional Intelligence as a “foreign concept”. They feared that the way emotional issues and relational dynamics were presented threatened their values and identity and in particular their religious belief. The most resistant participants claimed that the concept does not belong to the Saudi context as it does not emerge from or harmonise with Saudi cultural norms and values.

From a dissimilar perspective, the introduction of ideas about Emotional Intelligence in Saudi educational supervision was seen as a positive contribution. For example, one of the participants defined Emotional Intelligence as a:

“Powerful skills to enhance the practice of leadership” (Sara, interview).

Other participants based their position on their trust in the government's judgement:

"If Emotional Intelligence was not a useful idea, the Saudi government would not spend money and time to train us". (Abdullah, interview).

During the course of one workshop, both points of views were manifested. In a debate about the suitability of Goleman's conceptualisation of Emotional Intelligence in Saudi's educational context, Manal criticised the way that Goleman's ideas relate to spiritual matters. For this educational supervisor, Islamic culture and values clashed with some of the ideas proposed by Goleman. On the other hand, Khalid argued that Emotional Intelligence as presented by Goleman was a useful tool for managers and necessary for improving competence and competitiveness in the workplace. For Khalid, the performance imperatives of the workplace justified some of the criticisms that pointed to an invasion of private space. Whilst for Khalid it was possible to separate spaces (private/spiritual and workspace), for Manal the separation was problematic. What we understand is that both of them made sense of the concept of Emotional Intelligence by referring to their own personal schemes.

Challenges and possibilities of Emotional Intelligence for the Saudi Educational Supervision

Our participants challenged the way that the concept of Emotional Intelligence was presented to them and how it was introduced in their particular context. They noted inconsistencies between the theoretical significance of Emotional Intelligence, the expected outcomes, and its implementation in the workplace. In the words of Mohmad, this disillusion was palpable when he realised that the idea of Emotional Intelligence publicly accessible is not showing its complexity

"When I noticed an advertisement about Emotional Intelligence for the first time, I was in the dentist. I thought that this is it. I will change myself and others as the advert claimed! But, I was shocked because the reality of the training is a thing and adverts are something else" (Mohmad, Focus Group).

Participants also showed their disappointment with the way that ideas about Emotional Intelligence were presented to them in the workplace following a top-down logic. Something that for some of them was accompanied by an ill-defined understanding of the concept:

"I think the problem is that even they [Education Department] did not have enough ideas what Emotional Intelligence would mean" (Nora, Focus Group).

Moreover, participants explained during this discussion that despite hearing a lot about Emotional Intelligence through different professional channels (e.g. discussions with colleagues and professional trainings), it was not appearing in official documentation, creating some confusion and distrust.

The insights provided by the participants suggest that there was also a need to get a balance between the personal and the workplace, something that for some of the participants meant a reconciliation between religious values and the concept of Emotional Intelligence. What is more, the successful introduction of the ideas of Emotional Intelligence in the Saudi context depend on the possibility of finding a balance between them. They explained that in Islam, emotional issues are approached, understood and interpreted differently. As Sara mentioned, emotionality for Muslims is connected to their hearts and thus to Allah:

“I think in Islam we have been asked to refine our hearts. So, it starts from the heart, intention. Now how you would redact your heart is by connecting all your emotions and values to Allah who asked us not to judge others but ourselves first”. (Sara, Qualitative Questionnaire)

For our participants, the Quran is a source of knowledge and they needed to learn to transfer that knowledge to strengthen their faith.

At the same time, participants came up with a limited and constrained understanding of Emotional Intelligence due to the influence of different layers of cultural and religious restrictions. Manal emphasised that “emotion” as a term would mean different things to different people in different cultures. Thus, she suggested that even more restrictions in the workplace should be applied to the use of words that contain and communicate cultural meanings of emotion and feeling. She stated that:

“When someone says the word *Taqwa* (emotion), the first thing that comes to my mind is sincerity and doing things with full consciousness and cognizance of Allah, of truth, of the rational reality “piety, and fear of Allah”. We need to use such words in the workplace. [Laughing]...maybe Goleman thought about using the word emotion because it means to him different thing” (Manal, Focus Group).

In the above considerations, educational supervisors explored possibilities to renegotiate the meaning of Emotional Intelligence in the light of their cultural needs and workplace practices but at the same time, they showed a limited and constrained understanding of the concept. Whilst we saw some disposition to open up the

discussion to more ways of understanding Emotional Intelligence, their views were still limited to the Saudi educational supervision context and constrained by a partial understanding of the concept.

Discussion

Ideas about Emotional Intelligence have become increasingly popular in the Arabic and Saudi contexts (Alkurdi, 2015). More specifically, our participants described how these ideas have been disseminated among educational supervisors through different training courses presented under glamorous titles, bringing promises of wellbeing, happiness, success, and/or positive change. Some of them share with Al-Rashid (2016) the concern that behind this interest exists other motivations. Our findings suggested that our participants developed arguments both against and for the implementation of Emotional Intelligence in their workplace. Although in different ways, they shared questions that require further investigations. They are concerned about the lack of transparency (and criticality) of the Department of Education when deciding to introduce Emotional Intelligence as a core element of official training during the subsequent educational reforms that took place in the last fifteen years. However, we believe that this is a more complex matter that is not only related to the way that decisions are taken about the official training of educational supervisors but to the top-down management model that directs the Education Department and the politic dynamics in Saudi Arabia (Almudarra, 2017).

In the current study, most of the participants did not agree that Emotional Intelligence could be the solution to their current leadership challenges. Rather, they declared that the educational management had made the decision to provide Emotional Intelligence training courses based on the assumption that educational supervisors and leaders were generally oblivious to the emotions of other stakeholders involved in their daily practice. This, in turn, led to negative impressions and identified some of the challenges participants faced when attempting to link Emotional Intelligence to leadership, such as feeling that their cultural identities may be threatened by a foreign concept. Educational supervisors struggled to find a clear reference in their culture. The findings of this research suggested that there was frustration among a few participants that Emotional Intelligence challenged their identity. This is understandable from a constructivist perspective because human emotionality is embedded in a cultural world that resists universalisation (Harré and Parrot, 1996). Educational supervisors from Saudi Arabia may need to look at Emotional Intelligence in a slightly different way. In the current globalised world, it is not strange to see non-

Western countries seduced by Western ideas that are implemented without understanding implicit tensions (Kapoor, 2008; Tomlinson, 1991).

Something that we noticed during our discussion with the participants is that, despite their attempts to develop a critical insight into the topic (e.g. arguing that the concept is not compatible with their cultural or religious values); our participants had an understanding of Emotional Intelligence mainly developed from the model proposed by Goleman. They mainly ignored alternative perspectives or other critical voices. Thus, people who are interested in learning about Emotional Intelligence can easily access literature although the variety of ideas will be very limited. This may help to explain why our participants repeatedly mention Goleman's name as a prominent reference. Building on this argument, we understand that their capacity to find alternative references to articulate critical arguments was determined by their access to wider ideas.

Although each of the participants had his or her own initial take on Emotional Intelligence, all of them seemed to fall somewhere along a spectrum between two rather extreme positions: from fully resistant to fully accepting, with just a few participants indicating levels of ambivalence. This division reflected the clash of two discourses that are situated in a wider political debate. For Dekmejian (2013) in the situation of the greatest openness promoted by Crown Prince Abdallah in Saudi Arabia, we have seen the emergence of a liberal discourse that encounters the more conservative-religious views that have traditionally dominated the social and political life of the Saudi citizens. Our participants are translating this division to their position when discussing issues about their approach to Emotional Intelligence. On the one hand, views that are more liberal see in Emotional Intelligence a concept that prioritises the possibility of enhancing their work practices. On the other hand, views that tend to be more conservative are concerned about the relationship between their personal and religious values and a foreign concept such as Emotional Intelligence

Despite the limitations within the Arab context to access alternative sources of information about Emotional Intelligence that are not associated to the general ideas portrayed by Goleman, our participants touched on some of the criticisms covered in the western literature. Their experience and reflection showed some awareness of the negative aspects associated with the implementation of Emotional Intelligence in the workplace. For example, Khalid communicated his concern about the use of Emotional Intelligence ideas to manipulate people at work. He actively attempted to produce a workplace-specific meaning of emotionality but he struggled to understand the power dynamics associated with this new approach. He was able to perceive that Emotional

Intelligence provides tools to manipulate other people's emotions and concerned that it may lead to some form of abuse. What Khalid was trying to explain are ideas that concepts such as *emotional labour* (Hochschild, 2003) or *emotional rules* (Zembylas, 2005b) were covering in detail, but unknown to him. What we argue here is that access to more critical ideas outside Goleman's conceptualisation would benefit Khalid and other Saudi educational supervisors providing them a framework to articulate their ideas in a more critical, personal and sophisticated way.

Conclusion

The concept of Emotional Intelligence has evolved in different ways since Daniel Goleman made it available to the public. It has been updated, reframed, and transformed in many ways (Jordan et al., 2006; Kiefer, 2005; McKenzie, 2011), opening the concept to further exploration and criticism. One of the main claims of this paper is that in the context of Saudi educational supervision understanding of the ideas associated with Emotional Intelligence is limited to an uncritical view of Goleman's theory. Ideas about Emotional Intelligence were introduced in the training of educational supervisors without a clear explanation. However, our experience with a group of Educational supervisors shows that they conceptualise the idea of Emotional Intelligence in diverse forms that include positions of acceptance or resistance evidencing some form of agency. Their arguments refer to ideas of power, effectiveness and cultural identity as central elements used for articulating their approach to Emotional Intelligence.

Grounded in the lessons learned from our research, to finalise this paper we developed the following figure that provides some guidance on how to develop a more critical and contextualised conceptualisation of Emotional Intelligence for Saudi Educational Supervisors.

Stage	Actors	Purpose	Requirements	Activities
Pre-reflective and preparatory	Facilitator; administrator Training provider's representative Trainees	To understand what the trainees know and do not know about EI To consider participants' voices	Facilitator/administrator need; adequate experience and knowledge of wider perspective of EI and; Understanding the training skills	<i>Exploring;</i> Interviewing Reporting Analysing
Negotiation and discussion	Facilitator-administrator; Training provider's representative; Trainees Active learners (Learner-leader)	To share, learn and negotiate different meanings of EI in relation to workplace context; To raise awareness of complications of cultural aspects.	Provide open discussion space for sharing; Constructive conversation Build platform for trust; Promote questions to seek more answers Learner-leader to be trained; Offer different perspectives of EI; Presenting adequate materials of EI Offer cultural theories (e.g. cultural imperialism, Post-colonialism, Globalisation) to raise awareness of cultural education Benefit from using theories (e.g. problem-based learning, adult learning; affective theory)	<i>Examining;</i> Reporting Analysing Participant observation Reflective journals
Reflection and Feedback	Facilitator/ad administrator Training provider's representative or Trainees	To expand and generate multiple new thoughts about EI	Ability to access trainees Provide possible suggestions	<i>Reviewing;</i> Written feedback

Reapplication of these stages not only helps to generate more insights into EI, but also reduces the cost of professional and financial issues

Figure 4: Training guidance for an enhanced understanding of Emotional Intelligence

To consider issues about power, this model suggests the participation of different actors (administrators, educational supervisors and representatives from Department of Professional Development) not only to discuss their understanding of Emotional Intelligence but also the rationality of its introduction. Reflections on the relationship between culture and emotions are included as an important element to develop a more situated conceptualisation.

Finally, this paper not only provides an insight into the experience of a group of educational supervisors in Saudi Arabia, but also provides some practical guidance on Emotional Intelligence from a more critical perspective. We do not think that the ideas provided in this paper can be directly transferred to other contexts but they can be used as a reference when designing training in Emotional Intelligence.

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