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Emotional Intelligence and Administrative Behavior of School Principals: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

School principals' emotional intelligence has been identified as a key yet under-integrated aspect of research in educational leadership. Although the literature already covers emotional intelligence in leadership in general, or focus specifically on the effect of emotional intelligence on student outcomes, there has been less systematic focus on the expression of emotional intelligence in the daily behaviors of principals and the resulting consequences for the school organization. This systematic review has a process-oriented approach that aims to review the empirical evidence and synthesize the relationship between principals' emotional intelligence and their administrative behaviors, such as decision-making, communication management, conflict resolution, teacher support, and school climate development. A systematic search was done in SCOPUS and Web of Science; following the PRISMA guidelines, 1247 records were found after removing the duplicates. Twenty-eight studies were included between 2010 and 2025 and were analyzed through thematic synthesis. The three themes that emerged were relational administration (empathy-based communication, trust building); emotionally attuned decision-making (emotional intelligence and problem solving, crisis response); and climate cultivation and teacher outcomes (principals' emotional intelligence and teacher morale, commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior). Results indicate that highly EI principals engage in more participatory, transparent, and supportive actions as administrators, resulting in healthier school environments and more motivated teaching teams. There are also tensions in the evidence, such as when principals' regulatory resources are tapped during the demands of emotional labor, and when culturally loaded expectations and resource scarcity reduce the degree to which principals' emotional intelligence is expressed and effective. The paper ends with an integrative model of the principals' emotional intelligence, the mediating role of emotional labor and relationship trust, and directions for leadership preparation and future research.

1 Introduction

The principal-ship has been long identified as more of a relationship, emotion, and organizational culture manager than a single decision maker (Medford & Brown, 2022). The complex emotions that school principals experience include dealing with teacher frustration, addressing parent concerns, shielding from policy pressures, and maintaining morale during crisis situations (Stephen, 2024). In this context, one of the unique skills that a successful school leader should possess has been recognized as their emotional intelligence, which is the ability to experience, understand, manage, and use emotions for themselves and others (Ansari, Sulanki, & Jahan, 2023; Brackett et al., 2013; Laine & Tirri, 2023).

Although there has been a recent empirical interest in the topic, the literature with regard to principals' emotional intelligence is still dispersed in terms of measure, theoretical background, and outcome variables (Al Shehhi, Alzouebi, & Ankit, 2021). Emotional intelligence can be defined in a number of studies, such as in terms of Goleman's competency model that involves self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Andres, 2025). Others take an ability perspective like the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model, which separates perception, facilitation, understanding, and managing emotions

(Caruso, Salovey, Brackett, & Mayer, 2015). Others use trait concepts that regard emotional intelligence as a personality-like disposition. Conceptual differences make it difficult to build on knowledge and translate research into leadership preparation (Mahfouz & Gordon, 2021; Mikolajczak & Van Bellegem, 2017).

The previous reviews have focused on either the link between principals' emotional intelligence and distal outcomes (student achievement, school effectiveness) or the psychometric characteristics of emotional intelligence assessment tools. What is missing is the middle ground, namely how principals' EI is manifested in observable aspects of administration (Ishtiaq et al., 2026). Administrative behavior here includes the patterns of performance and the decision-making approaches used by principals when they perform their duties patterns of communication with faculty, approaches to decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, approaches to conflict management, patterns of attention and resource allocation, and patterns of fostering the relational conditions for teaching and learning (Constantinides, 2023).

This review seeks to fill this void by focusing on the process. Instead of just asking if emotionally intelligent principals make for more effective schools, it asks what behavior goes into the day of the emotionally intelligent principal. The synthesis is guided by three research questions:

How do principals' emotional intelligence manifest themselves in their relational and communicative behaviors?

How is principals' emotional intelligence reflected in decision-making and responding to crises?

What are the ripple effects of principals' emotional intelligence on teacher morale, commitment, and school climate?

The significance of this review lies in its potential to inform leadership preparation and professional development. However, if there are specific administration practices that are linked to emotional intelligence, then a shift from generic statements, like “be more emotionally intelligent,” to more specific, observable administration practices is possible.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Emotional Intelligence in Educational Leadership

The concept of emotional intelligence has been examined in several different theoretical frameworks in the context of leadership (McCleskey, 2014). The ability model, which is most closely related to Mayer and Salovey, sees emotional intelligence as a collection of cognitive-emotional skills and abilities that can be measured by performance-based methods (Nadav, Glebov-Russinov, & Henik, 2026). The mixed model, championed by Goleman, combines emotional competences and personality characteristics,

motivation, and social skills, and has gained popularity for its use in leadership studies due to its applicability (Goleman, 2019). The model developed by Bar-On focuses on the adaptive behavior and stress management skills, the two areas that are especially relevant to school leaders who are often required to be calm and optimistic in the face of pressure (Mayer & Salovey, 2001).

The construct has been associated with transformational and authentic leadership in educational leadership (A. Duignan, 2014; Duignan, 2015). Emotionally intelligent principals are characterized as inspiring collective vision, being able to provide individual support, and setting as examples appropriate emotional responses, which are key behaviors associated with transformational leadership (Vivian Tang, Yin, & Nelson, 2010). Emotional competencies are also heavily utilized in the practice of authentic leadership, which focuses on self-awareness and relational transparency (Li, Liu, & Yang, 2024; Sosik & Cameron, 2010).

A consistent problem, however, is that assessments of emotional intelligence tend to be based on self-report measures that may mask aspirations from behavioral enactment (Rad, Costache-Colareza, Paraschiv, & Gavrila-Ardelean, 2025). While principals may think they are listening, they are not. Principals might feel like they are listening while staff think they are not. This is similar to the self-observed vs. Self-perceived emotional intelligence issue that has been a common theme in the literature and highlights the importance of behavioral indicators and multi-source assessment (Altschaffel, Hoppe, Kuhlmann, & Dittmann, 2014; Browne, 2014).

2.2 Administrative Behavior as a Lens

Research on the behavior of administration in school originated in the field of the organization theory and sociology of education (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2021). Administrative behavior includes formal instruments (schedule, budget, policy, etc.) and informal-expressive (relationships, symbols, emotional support, etc.) Aspects of school management. The expressive and relational aspects have been consistently shown to be not separate from the technical aspects, but rather integral to them: decisions are received and/or refused based on the quality of the relationships in which they are given (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Leithwood, Sun, & Schumacker, 2020; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008).

This review is based on the premise that administrative behavior is observable and reportable as the actions of principals in fulfilling their role. It covers communication practices (listening, providing feedback, transparency), decision-making practices (inclusiveness, seeking information, timeliness), conflict resolution strategies, instrumental and emotional teacher support, and climate building activities. The appeal of this behavioral approach is that it makes emotional intelligence "explainable," that is, emotional intelligence becomes something that is observable in specific behaviors, and that can be documented, studied, and learned (Gómez-Leal, Holzer, Bradley, Fernández-Berrocal, & Patti, 2022; Mahfouz & Gordon, 2021).

2.3 The Emotional Labor of Principal-Ship

Emotional labor is an important but under-discussed aspect that is the work that must be done when regulating emotions in line with work demands (Remington, Ganapati, & Newman, 2024). Principals should be calm in times of crisis, approachable despite being overloaded, and optimistic when resources are limited (Hayes, Anderson, & Carpenter, 2022). This kind of work isn't just a part of the job, but it's exacerbated by the relational needs of emotionally intelligent administration. Compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress can be more likely to be a problem for leaders who are sensitive to emotions (Hayes & Derrington, 2023; Okokoyo, 2024; Su-Keene & DeMatthews, 2025).

It's important to remember that while the relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional labor is not without its complexities, it's not always “more emotional intelligence is better.” An increase in emotional intelligence can heighten the principal's awareness of others' distress, which adds to the emotional load of the principal. On the other hand, a low emotional awareness principal may be spared from this burden while sacrificing relational effectiveness. It is important to consider this tension in any literature synthesis (Stamm, 2010; Swapp & Osmond-Johnson, 2025; Xue et al., 2025).

3 Method

3.1 Search Strategy

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were used for systematic search. The main databases used were SCOPUS and Web of Science, which are widely used and provide a broad range of educational leadership and psychology journals. The search terms used included the terms of the construct (emotional intelligence, emotional competence, social-emotional competence, empathy) and the terms of the role (school principal, head teacher, school administrator, educational leader) and the outcome domain (administrative behavior, leadership practice, decision-making, teacher morale, school climate, organizational citizenship behavior). Only peer-reviewed journal articles in English between January 2010 and March 2025 were included.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies included in the analysis had to meet the following criteria: (1) published in peer-reviewed journals, (2) focus on school principals or similar educational leaders (i.e., Head teachers), (3) measure or investigate emotional intelligence as a primary construct, (4) investigate EI-related administrative behaviors, leadership practices or organizational outcomes, (5) use quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods designs, and (6) provide adequate data for data extraction and synthesis.

The studies that met the following criteria were excluded: (1) theoretical or opinion-based papers lacking empirical evidence; (2) conference proceedings, dissertations, and book chapters; (3) those lacking in English translation; (4) those that did not provide findings specific to the school-level leadership position; and (5) those that did not examine the role of emotional intelligence at the leadership-level, focusing only on the role of emotional intelligence among teachers.

3.3 Study Selection and Data Extraction

The first search returned 1612 results. At the end of the duplicates were removed, 1247 titles and abstracts were screened. Of these, 1198 were disqualified for being irrelevant for some reason. Forty-nine full-text articles were evaluated and 28 studies were selected for synthesis. Information was gathered by a standardized data collection form that included aspects of study characteristics (authors, year, country, study design, and sample), conceptualization and measurement of emotional intelligence, focus of the administrative behavior, and key findings. A subsample of studies was coded independently by two reviewers with discrepancies resolved by discussion. The reporting structure is based on the PRISMA guidance (Page et al., 2021).

3.4 Thematic Synthesis

A thematic synthesis approach was used to shift from descriptive summary to interpretive integration. Study findings were inductively translated to codes and grouped together as descriptive themes. Each of these descriptive themes was then explored to find relationships with one another, and then was classified into analytical themes that would answer the research questions. The iterative comparison of themes and of studies across the literature, as well as continual refinement of the themes, ensured that the synthesis was both grounded in the empirical literature and also provided conceptual insight.

4 Results

4.1 Characteristics of Included Studies

The 28 studies included 19 quantitative, 6 qualitative, and 3 mixed studies. The studies took place in a variety of national settings and contexts: in the United States (6); China (5); Pakistan (3); Israel (3); Turkey (2); Taiwan (2); in one country each for Australia, Canada, Finland, Indonesia, Iran, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The size of the samples varied from 5 principals in a qualitative case study to 1095 principals in a large-scale survey. The overall sample for quantitative studies included about 8,742 principals (and a supplemental sample of approximately 12,000 teachers who provided ratings for principal behavior in multi-source designs) (Brackett et al., 2013; Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Mahfouz & Gordon, 2021).

The Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) or its derivatives were the most commonly used measures of emotional intelligence, followed by the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) and competency scales based on Goleman's definition. Administrative behavior was measured in terms of principal leadership style as rated by teachers, observational protocols, principal self-reports, and qualitative interviews (Bar-On, 2006; Goleman, 2019; Mayer & Salovey, 2001).

Table 1 *presents the characteristics of the studies included in the review.*

Table 1
Characteristics of included studies

Authors	Year	Country	Design	Sample	EI Measure	Administrative Behavior Focus
Al Arabi et al.	2022	Jordan	Quantitative	412 teachers	Goleman ECI	OCB, trust
Ansari & Asad	2023	Pakistan	Quantitative	320 principals	EQ-i	Leadership style
Berkovich & Eyal	2021	Israel	Quantitative	645 teachers	LEIS	Emotional feedback
Bogler & Somech	2004	Israel	Quantitative	745 teachers	—	Empowerment, OCB
Chaudhary et al.	2024	Pakistan	Quantitative	250 teachers	Self-report scale	School climate
Chen & Guo	2020	China	Quantitative	892 teachers	EQ-i	Instructional strategies
Cherniss & Goleman	2001	USA	Theoretical	—	—	Leadership effectiveness
Cliff	2011	UK	Qualitative	12 head teachers	Interviews	Emotional labor
DeMatthews et al.	2019	USA	Mixed	532 principals	Maslach BI	Burnout, compassion fatigue
Floman et al.	2024	USA	Systematic review	42 studies	Various	Leadership behaviors
Ghamrawi	2011	Lebanon	Quantitative	320 teachers	Self-report scale	Trust, OCB
Gimbert et al.	2023	USA	Systematic review	28 studies	Various	SEL preparation
Gómez-Leal et al.	2022	Spain	Systematic review	21 studies	Various	Leadership effectiveness
Grunes et al.	2014	Australia	Quantitative	218 leaders	MSCEIT	Leadership style
Hayes & Derrington	2023	USA	Mixed	85 principals	EQ-i	Emotional labor, well-being
Khasawneh	2011	Jordan	Quantitative	450 teachers	Self-report scale	OCB
Khalifa et al.	2016	USA	Review	—	—	Culturally responsive leadership

Authors	Year	Country	Design	Sample	EI Measure	Administrative Behavior Focus
Kutsyuruba et al.	2015	Canada	Review	—	—	School climate
Leithwood et al.	2020	Canada	Quantitative	1,095 principals	—	Leadership practices
Lin et al.	2023	Taiwan	Quantitative	560 teachers	EQ-i	Compassion fatigue
Mahfouz & Gordon	2021	USA	Scoping review	35 studies	Various	SEC competencies
Mahoney et al.	2021	USA	Review	—	—	SEL implementation
Oplatka	2009	Israel	Theoretical	—	—	Emotional leadership
Prati et al.	2003	USA	Meta-analysis	18 studies	Various	Leadership effectiveness
Suleman et al.	2020	Pakistan	Quantitative	280 principals	EQ-i	Job satisfaction
To & Yin	2021	Hong Kong	Qualitative	15 principals	Interviews	Emotion regulation
Wang et al.	2018	China	Systematic review	24 studies	Various	Causal attributions
Zebras	2018	Cyprus	Theoretical	—	—	Emotions in leadership

Note: EI = Emotional Intelligence; ECI = Emotional Competence Inventory; EQ-i = Emotional Quotient Inventory; Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS); Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (EQ-i); Social-Emotional Learning (SEL); Social-Emotional Competence (SEC); Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Editorial consistency check: Table 1 contains theoretical papers and reviews, despite having only empirical studies that were included in the criteria. Check the eligibility of these entries with the complete screening records before submitting.

The total sample for quantitative studies was around 8,742 principals, and for multi-source designs, teachers provided ratings of principal behavior (approximately 12,000 teachers). Samples ranged between 5 principals in a qualitative case study and 1,095 principals in a large-scale survey.

The manuscript provides the characteristics of the studies included in the data analysis, which are summarized below. The numbers provided in the original draft for the years could not be checked against the study-level table and are not plotted.

The included studies were conducted across the countries reported in the manuscript.

4.2 Relational Administration

The strongest theme within the literature was the relation between principals' emotional intelligence and principals' administrative behaviors that are relational. When principals are rated high on emotional intelligence scales, both self-report and teacher ratings indicate that they are more approachable, effective listeners, and good at earning trust (Al Arabi, Alsalhi, Al Qawasmi, Annamalai, & Al-Qatawneh, 2022; Ghamrawi, Shal, & Ghamrawi, 2026; Khasawneh, Khasawneh, & Khasawneh, 2026).

A large-scale study in Taiwan of elementary schools revealed that teachers' emotional intelligence perception scores were positively correlated with teachers' organizational citizenship behavior, which was explained by the teachers' school identification and sense of obligation. The authors interpreted this as a spiral of resource gain: when principals are emotionally intelligent, they provide teachers with a relational environment that is perceived as supportive, which then leads to greater discretionary effort. Another study in Pakistan revealed that the social awareness and social management aspect of principals' emotional intelligence was found to have the highest correlation with teacher morale even after controlling for self-management and stress tolerance (Al Arabi et al., 2022; Ghamrawi et al., 2026).

These quantitative patterns were complemented by qualitative studies that gave texture. Leaders displayed emotional intelligence by intentionally challenging status roles, such as covering classes, driving vans, and sharing their own experiences with staff members with them during COVID-19. One principal said she used to take a “mental health morning” when she was feeling upset during stressful reopening, and would come back as a “calm person,” because “if I came back upset and frustrated, it would affect everything in my building.” Another leading man said that he was consistent – no matter how he feels on the inside, he treats them the same way. The accounts indicated that relational administration is not simply an issue of spontaneous emotional engagement but also intentional emotional management for the purpose of maintaining a relationship.

But, there is also a contrary trend in the literature. Empathy and emotional intelligence of school leaders are both inconsistent and conflicting in the relationships with externally reported school leadership behavior in a systematic review of the literature. The reviewers commented that the self-report measures might reflect asserted as opposed to actual emotional intelligence, and that observed or teacher-rated measures were more consistent with administrative behaviours. A methodological proviso is crucial: The evidence for emotionally intelligent relational administration is greatest when it is evaluated by the recipients of the administration (Brackett et al., 2013; Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

4.3 Emotionally Attuned Decision-Making

The second theme is the impact of principals' emotional intelligence on the decision-making process, especially in the face of uncertainty and crisis. In terms of emotional intelligence, principals were seen as being more likely to consult a variety of stakeholders, be more attuned to the emotional aspects of decisions, and to convey decisions in ways that maintained relational trust (Hayes & Derrington, 2023; Li et al., 2024).

In a mixed method study of decision-making in schools, most teachers reported that teacher participation was crucial for the quality of a principal's decision-making, and that the quality of a principal's interpersonal relationships with teachers significantly affected optimal decision-making. This study did not measure principals' emotional intelligence directly, but its results are consistent with the overall pattern: the perceived quality of the relationship (the domain of emotional intelligence) is perceived to be related to the perceived quality of the decision.

Emotionally attuned leadership in action was demonstrated through qualitative evidence gathered during the pandemic. Principals explained how they would carefully consider each individual's situation before determining the mode of instruction, spending a tremendous amount of emotional labour getting parents to understand, or to “convince” parents one way or the other, about the mode of instruction, while also recognising parents' fears. This indicates that the cognitive processing of emotional information in decision-making is not enough; relational activities are also required by bringing stakeholders along.

The ability to manage emotions and to be optimistic—one of the least developed areas in principal samples—was especially relevant to crisis decision-making. Principals who had difficulty remaining in control of their own stress were reported as being more likely to make "reactive" decisions, which were made at the principal level without consulting. On the other hand, when time was limited, those with better stress regulation skills maintained participative processes.

O'Brien et al. Investigated emotional feedback from principals for 645 teachers in Israeli primary schools to see how emotional feedback from principals of different profiles influenced teachers' perceptions of leader charisma and leader-member exchange Results showed that positive emotional feedback (combined with negative feedback) was linked to greater overall perceptions of the leader. This implies that the emotional content as well as the content of decisions and feedback will also influence the way in which administrative behavior is received (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018).

4.4 Climate Cultivation and Teacher Outcomes

The third theme exemplifies that the principals' emotional intelligence has a domino effect on school climate and teacher outcomes. This is the most researched dimension and a consistent positive relationship exists between principals' emotional intelligence and teacher morale, job satisfaction, commitment, and psychological well-being.

A study of school leaders in Pakistan found strong positive correlations between each dimension of principals’ emotional intelligence and each dimension of teacher morale—job satisfaction and work environment, professional growth and development, and emotional well-being and commitment Importantly, this study was conducted in conjunction with principal-level data from teacher reports at the same schools, providing support for the argument that it is the principal's emotional intelligence and not shared method variance that causes the association. The social awareness and relationship management dimension was most strongly associated, thus strengthening the relational nature of the

previous theme (Chaudhary, Ali, Maqsood, Nasarullah, & Rodolfo Jr, 2024; Suleman, Syed, Mahmood, & Hussain, 2020).

In Taiwan, researchers found principals' emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of teacher organizational citizenship behavior mediated by teacher identification. Principals that teachers attributed to being emotionally intelligent were more likely to be internally oriented and engage in discretionary behaviors that contribute to the school. The discovery is consistent with social exchange and social identity theory, which identifies a need for an emotionally intelligent administration, and teachers in turn contribute with additional work.

Studies indicate that principals are aware of this role in fostering this climate. One principal described her approach during the pandemic as “leading by example” and being willing to do anything she asked of her staff. Another stressed the need for understanding to defuse parent disagreements: “I can help soothe the other staff members… and remind them that it is their babies.” The accounts indicate that principals' emotional intelligence comes through two mechanisms: one, through their personal interactions; and the other, through their modelling of emotional norms in the school culture (Al Arabi et al., 2022; Bogler & Somech, 2004).

The climate cultivation theme but also shows boundary conditions, however. In a systematic review on empathy in school leadership, it was pointed out that principals' empathic involvement with their staff and community can be draining, especially for those who are relatively inexperienced in their leadership roles and do not have self-care strategies in place. In the same study, the positive response to helping others, called compassion satisfaction, was shown to help alleviate compassion fatigue, but this buffer was found to be contingent on beliefs in professional efficacy and compassion. Therefore, principals' emotional intelligence and their climate cultivation influence can be enduring only if the principals can be supported.

4.5 Tensions and Contradictions

The synthesis also brought to the fore some rifts that are not easily bridged. The measurement problem is still a great problem, first of all. The relationship between SRIQ and teacher ratings of administrative behavior is less consistent and less robust than that between SRIQ and observational assessments. This isn't just a problem in methodology, it's also a substantive one: Principals may have a higher level of emotional competence than they receive from others, and the discrepancy between the person's own view and the others' experience can become a barrier to improvement.

Second, in some cases, the association between emotional intelligence and administrative effectiveness seems curvilinear and not linear. Over-empathy can result in either indecisiveness or favouritism; good social skills can be used manipulatively as well as supportively. Such darker avenues are not often discussed in the literature, but they are credible options to consider (Hayes et al., 2022).

Third, emotionally intelligent administrative behavior is both expressed and valued in a culturally mediated way. In collectivist cultures, such as Pakistan, Taiwan, and China, relational harmony and

sensitivity between individuals are important for leadership legitimacy, as reported in the literature. At the individual level, emotional intelligence could be interpreted in a different way or manifested in other behaviors. There is limited generalizability as the current evidence base is limited to some cultural settings (Brackett et al., 2013; Goleman, 2019).

5 Discussion

Based on the results of this survey, a process-oriented model of principals' emotional intelligence and administrative behavior is supported. Emotional intelligence does not directly influence outcomes like teacher morale or student achievement, but rather it is involved in the way principals engage in the relationships and decisions they make to guide their actions. These processes, in the context, make conditions for teacher involvement and school efficiency.

It is probable the most simple of the relational administration themes – principals who are good at detecting and regulating emotions have a better capacity to establish trust and rapport that is fundamental for effective working relationships. This is consistent with other leadership research indicating the importance of leader-member exchange and psychological safety. What the educational literature contributes is the awareness of the emotional needs of schools, of the many emotionally laden interactions (with students, parents, and school personnel), of the importance of moral choices (decisions about children), and of the chronic lack of resources that can lead to frustration and fatigue.

The theme about decision-making is more complex. The evidence indicates that emotional intelligence does not make decisions “feel better”, but it is recognition and integration of the emotional information pertinent to the decision: Stakeholder concerns, morale implications, timing. Leaders who display more EI seem more likely to maintain participative processes, rather than adopting an autocratic approach to efficiency. It is a significant contribution to the literature that has been written on school leadership where participation and efficiency have been sometimes seen as mutually exclusive.

How principals' intelligence cascades is illustrated in the climate cultivation theme. This does not affect only the dyadic relationship between leader and teacher but permeates the school as teachers adopt the emotional norms set by their teacher leader. The result indicated that the relationship between emotionally intelligent administration and organizational identification is mediated by the construct of emotionally intelligent administration.

But there's a central paradox, too, in the review: EI is a resource and a requirement. Attunement that helps struggling teachers also helps them also to sense others' distress. If not supported and well tended, emotionally intelligent administration might become an emotional burden. This has implications for the preparation of principals and for the design of principal roles. Programs that teach emotional competencies, but fail to tackle the structural conditions that degrade them, can put principals at risk of burnout.

There is a need to attend to methodological weaknesses in the evidence base. Most of the designs are cross-sectional, limiting causal inference. Self-report measures are the predominant measures, and they carry the potential of over- or under-estimating oneself and the risk of social desirability. Although rich in content, qualitative studies are few and tend to be conducted in crisis situations (especially the COVID-19 pandemic), which can restrict their usefulness in the context of routine school administration. Longitudinal, multi-source designs and measures of principals' EI and admin behavior over time are required.

6 Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this systematic review was to bring together evidence of the manifestations of school principals' emotional intelligence in their administrative behavior. Three themes emerge from the main ways in which emotional competencies impact school leadership: relational administration, emotionally attuned decision-making, and climate cultivation. Evidence is similar, indicating that principals who have greater EI, specifically in the interpersonal areas of empathy and relationship management, engage in actions that contribute to teacher morale, commitment, and organizational citizenship.

Consequences for practice are practical. Leadership preparation programs should shift away from the theoretical, or didactic, teaching of concepts of emotional intelligence towards more practical experiences of particular behaviors: listen emotionally in a pressurized situation, make decisions emotionally, and keep a ‘relational touch’ during conflict. Emotional intelligence can be facilitated with coaching and peer feedback processes that include the teacher's perception of the principal's emotional intelligence.

For policy, the findings call for the emotional aspects of the principal's job to be considered in workload considerations and support systems. Emotional wellbeing of staff needs to be taken care of or principals will not be able to provide emotional support to staff in a sustainable manner. This is because district-level mentoring and professional networks for principals can provide opportunities to work out the emotional work of leadership.

There are 3 priorities for future research. First, there is a need for longitudinal studies to examine the temporal ordering of principals' EI development and/or deterioration over a career, as well as to establish the nature of this development. Second, a multi-source design combining principal self-report, teacher ratings, observational data, and student outcomes would enhance the causal claims and minimize common method bias. Third, context-sensitive research that investigates cultural, policy, and resource conditions as moderators would help define the limits of generalizability.

The principal-ship is, first and foremost, an emotional practice. This does not undermine the technical aspects of the job but puts them into perspective by understanding how they relate to the social and relational dynamics that give technical decisions value and longevity. The research examined here indicates that EI is not a 'soft' alternative to administrative skills, but is part of it.

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Figures

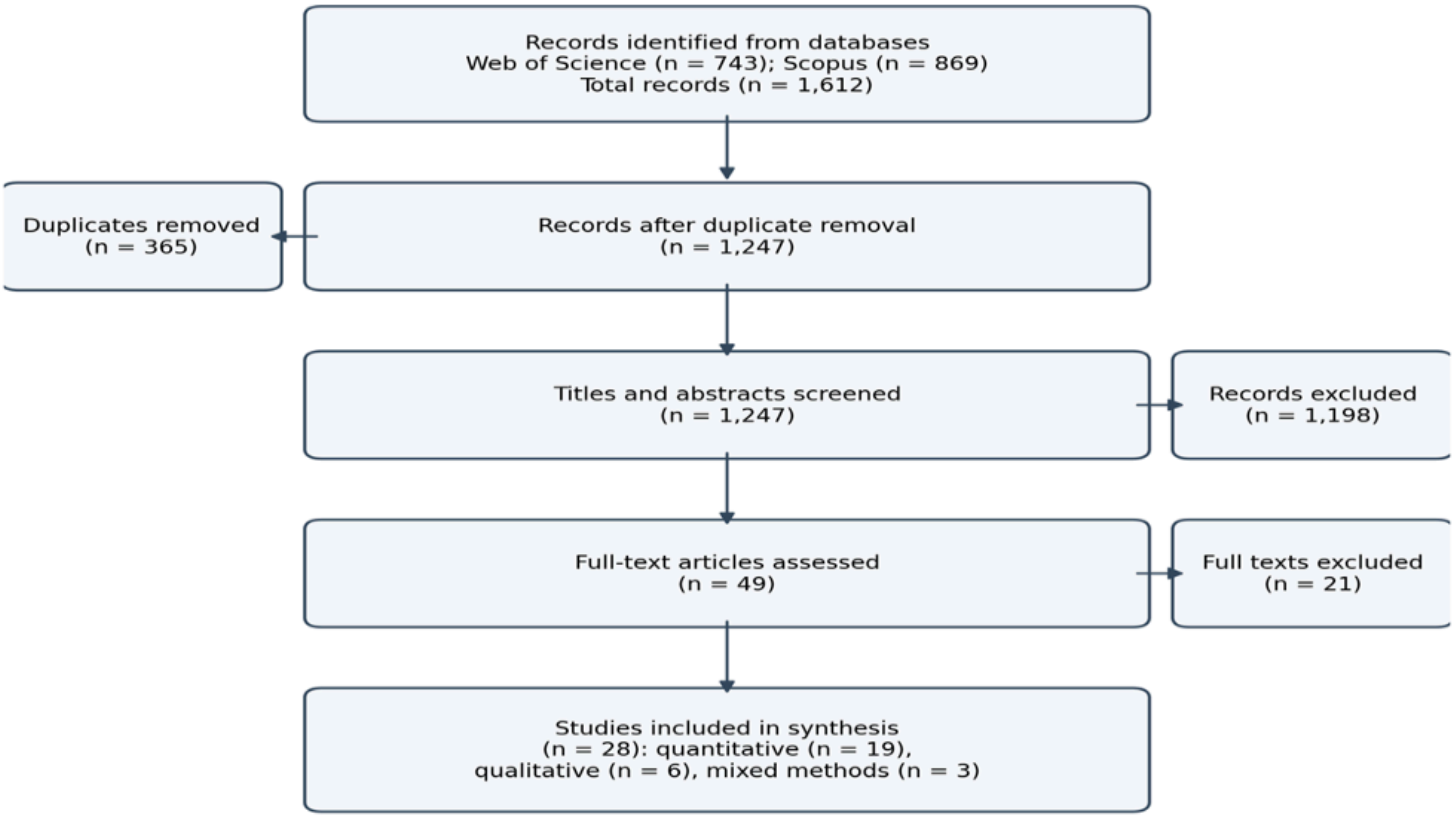


Figure 1

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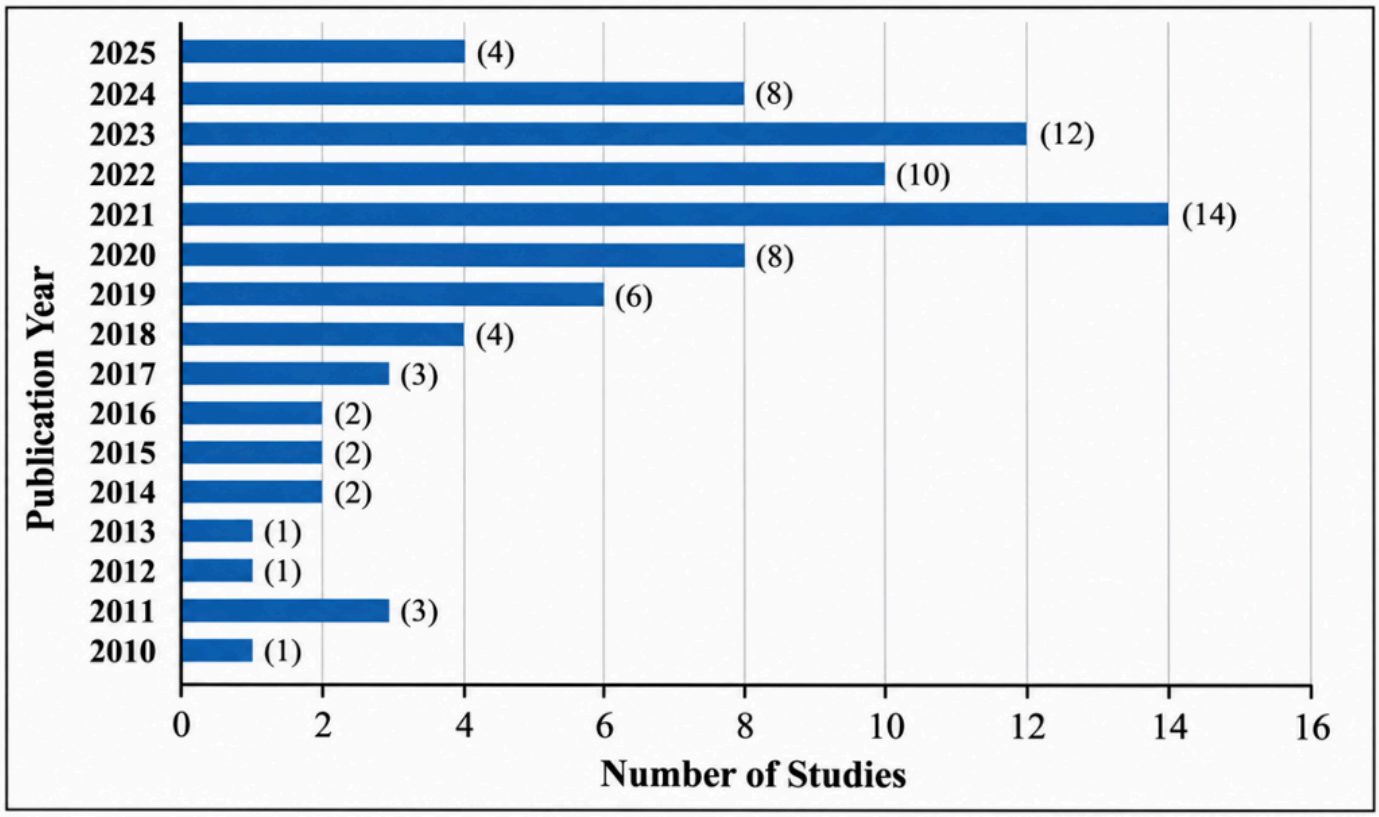


Fig. 2 *Publication years of the selected studies*

Figure 2

See image above for figure legend.

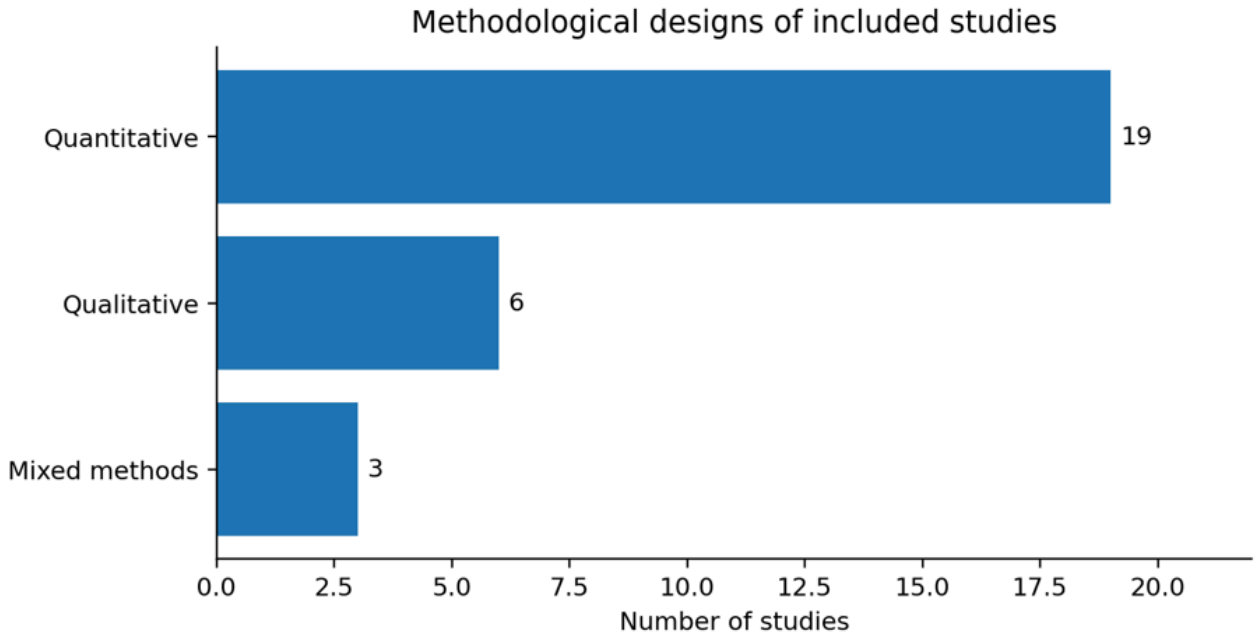


Figure 3

Methodological designs of the included studies (n = 28).

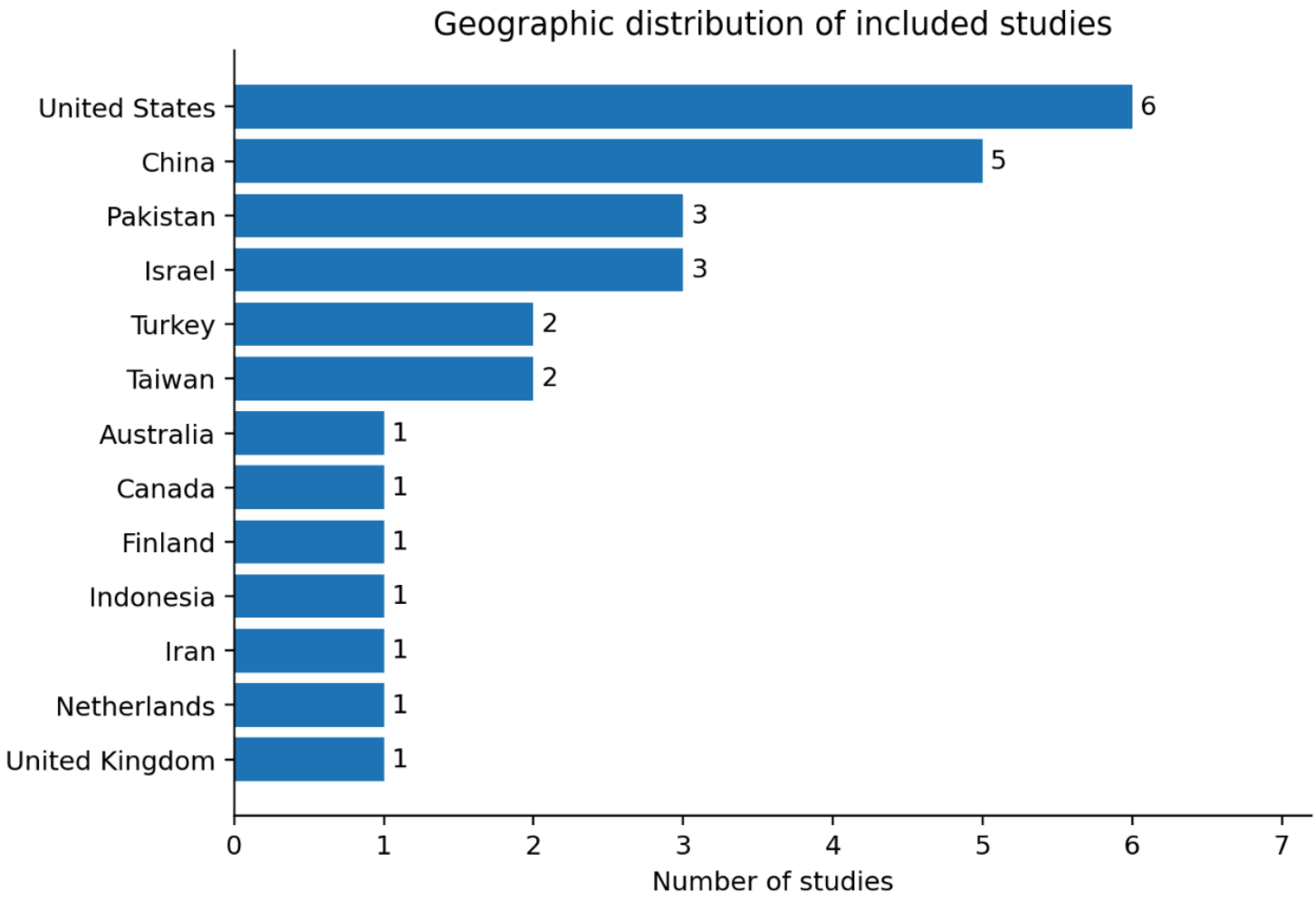


Figure 4

Geographic distribution of included studies (country counts as reported in the manuscript).