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## **THE IMPACT OF READING ON IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

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### **Abstract**

*Reading is fundamental in developing the individual's mind and creativity. Playing a vital role in conveying attitudes, ideas, and information, it is thought that the person's overall performance is remarkably improved because of this habit. However, previous research has not adequately addressed the impact reading has on a school leader's character. The objective of this paper is to bring to light this rarely tackled issue with special attention to the effect it has on a leader's performance. Literature has shown that reading expands the leader's knowledge, which in turn helps the administration's progress. This paper suggests that providing a well-equipped library and encouraging educators to use it can play a key role in developing employees' reading habits and can therefore benefit the institution. School principals can also conduct after school reading clubs to help principals from other schools throughout the country to share ideas and inspirations gained from reading.*

### **Keywords**

Reading, School, Leadership, Leader

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## **1. Introduction**

Over the course of one's academic life, reading is considered an important skill to acquire information and knowledge. Reading books, newspapers or articles from the Internet are very useful sources to gain information and keep up to date with the latest trends in the world. Despite this fact, however, many neglect reading for mass media and other leisure activities (Kavi, Teackie & Bugyei, 2015). In fact, recent studies have shown that reading is an endangered activity, particularly among youth (Gilbert & Fister, 2011). Poor reading habits are thought to lead to hardships not only academically but also in future career life.

Equally important, constant progress and improvement require constant learning and self-development. For this reason, developing good reading habits benefits leaders because it fosters personal intellectual growth. School leaders, specifically school principals, with considerable background knowledge can add enormously to better learning outcomes in their organizations. New knowledge of the best teaching practices and the latest approaches to education contributes to greater success and reputation. Sharing gained knowledge gained from reading with staff and teachers will produce even better results. Therefore, engaging staff and teachers in common educational aims will lead to greater achievement not only by students but also the school as a whole community. Reading plays a crucial role in developing leadership skills and accordingly improves school leadership.

Despite how important reading is to school and the people who lead them, to the best of our knowledge no one has studied the significance reading has on improving school leadership. This paper aims to analyze the effects of reading on developing effective management skills and other aspects that benefit school leadership.

## **2. Reading and its benefits**

### **2.1 Reading and Individuals**

Reading is considered an important skill for acquiring language and information, greatly helping students' achievement if practiced well. Evidence showed that "students who read widely and frequently are higher achievers than students who read rarely and narrowly" (Guthrie, 2008; Atwell, 2007). The more a student reads, the more likely he/she is to excel academically than those who seldom read. Whether done extensively or intensively, reading is beneficial to gaining knowledge, which aids students throughout their academic life and future careers.

Moreover, reading benefits not only the younger population but also adults. A study by Stanovich, West, and Harrison (1995), examined a much older population to investigate

the extent to which age related growth in knowledge could be accounted for by differences in the amount reading. The results showed that reading a great deal could help to compensate for the normally deleterious effects of aging.

Furthermore, reading also increases verbal intelligence. Stanovich and Cunningham (1992) posit, "Reading volume, although clearly a consequence of developed reading ability, is itself a significant contributor to the development of other aspects of verbal intelligence." Avid readers are better communicators, regardless of their background, displaying very good speaking skills.

## **2.2 Reading and Instructional Leadership**

Many behaviors are associated with strong school leaders, including instructional leadership. Instructional leaders place priority on curriculum and instruction issues by learning best practices and preferred teaching methods (Smith & Andrews, 1989). In addition, they involve teachers in the decision-making process by encouraging them to exchange ideas and supporting them in staff development activities. A study by Miller, Goddard, and Goddard (2010) emphasized, "Good leadership falls within and beyond the scope of the principal. Therefore, school leaders should involve teachers in collaborating to bring out school improvement."

Furthermore, an attempt to create a positive and effective school environment requires principals to share information with their staff and most importantly with their teachers. Engaging staff members and teachers to join the vision and objectives of the school leader will not only improve learning outcomes but will also strengthen the relationship between leader and subordinates. School leaders can make use of weekly staff meetings to share ideas from what they have read in books, articles, and journals. Rather than using meetings merely for issuing orders, school leaders can use this opportunity for brainstorming, creating more creativity and a positive school environment.

When collaboration is absent and teachers work in isolation, little professional growth occurs (Pounder, 1999). Moreover, issuing orders such as forcing staff and teachers to read can create a tense atmosphere. Therefore, the school leader's influence on the administration and teachers has the potential to improve the quality of the whole educational process, and encouragement from him/her will motivate staff members and teachers to be more knowledgeable.

School leaders can play a key role in providing the support and structures necessary for effective collaboration (Miller et al., 2010). Because the library is an essential part of the school, providing a well-equipped library as well as good library services will encourage staff

members to read regularly. School principals can conduct after-school reading clubs and invite other school principals from different schools throughout the country to share inspirations and ideas gained from reading books that may benefit them in their school practices.

### **2.3 Leaders are Readers**

Whether done extensively, intensively, or professionally, many types of reading perform the same function in expanding knowledge. Studies have shown that reading is a key factor in developing essential leadership skills. McElhatton (2013) posits “senior military figures have long stressed the vital part professional reading plays in the development of leadership and command skills.” This demonstrates that reading greatly affects leaders regardless of their discipline by gaining knowledge that benefits their field.

Moreover, Hyatt (2015) asserts that reading improves a leader’s ability to socialize and empathize with staffs, which is considered a vital leadership skill for creating unity, understanding motivation and setting organizational goals. When leaders understand their subordinates’ motivation, they will then try to seek ways to help them become more productive and have a higher sense of job satisfaction.

Leadership improvement from reading is not limited to a particular field, but also extends beyond the leader’s field. By seeking ideas and inspirations from various disciplines and connecting them with their fields, leaders can find innovative and creative ways for their organizations to grow professionally. Coleman (2012) stated that “many business people claim that reading across fields is good for creativity, and leaders who can have some insights in other fields and apply them to their organizations are more likely to innovate and prosper.” This indicates that combining strategies from other fields with the field of the leader leads to more creativity and innovation.

## **3. Discussion**

From the previously mentioned research and articles, we believe that there is an evident relationship between reading and school leadership improvement. As stated earlier in this paper, prior research has proved that reading not only provides individuals with knowledge but also aids in cognition. Cognitive outcomes such as critical thinking and better comprehension abilities were noticed in students who read extensively or those who had a daily habit of reading. Consequently, those students were on a higher level academically compared with their peers (Guthrie, 2008; Atwell, 2007).

Results also showed that avid readers possess increased vocabulary; in other words, those who frequently read are verbally intelligent (Stanovich & Cunningham, 1992). Although other factors such as radio learning programs or television shows can assist in improving speaking skills, we argue that reading is vital to lexical growth, thus making avid readers better communicators.

Moreover, developing reading habits amongst adults strengthens the mind against deleterious effects of aging such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

In sum, these results provide some evidence that reading is indeed a prime factor in developing essential leadership characteristics such as exceptional verbal skills, critical thinking and other cognitive outcomes, which can help in problem solving and creative thinking within leaders. We believe that such characteristics are crucial in an effective administration or organization.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Although not many previous literature have directly investigated the relationship that reading has on improving school leadership, it is still evident that reading is an effective habit in developing characteristics of successful school principals such as good communication, creativity, socializing, empathy, etc. (Stanovich & Cunningham, 1992; Coleman, 2012; Hyatt, 2015). This is not to suggest that reading alone forms basis of improving leadership performance; leaders can learn from experience and various other ways to develop professionally. Nonetheless our work has led us to conclude that reading plays a crucial role in not only providing knowledge (Guthrie, 2008; Atwell, 2007), but also in shaping up the desired characteristics of school leaders, thus leading to school leadership improvement. Although limited, we believe our work could be a starting point for further research.

#### **5. Limitations**

As the current paper is opinion based, this article lacks in several aspects. First, empirical research should be conducted to validate such evidences found in this article. Second, a very limited amount of research has been conducted on the relationship between reading and school leadership improvement; therefore, most of the literature cited in this article was to find a connection between them. Third, the present article is an opinion paper and so it cannot generalize the findings in this article.

#### **6. Scope for Future Research**

This article could be a base for future empirical research, and hence it is suggested that future researches test the validity of this paper on school principals, vice principals, or even head of departments as each of these contain leadership aspects that could be improved with reading.

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