



Creating Language-Rich Environments: The Influence of Transformational Leadership in Early Childhood Education

DOI [10.5281/zenodo.14013748](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14013748)

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Abstract

Transformational leadership in early childhood education is instrumental in fostering a supportive and enriching environment that enhances literacy development among young learners. This paper explores the pivotal role of transformational leaders in creating language-rich settings that nurture curiosity, autonomy, and a genuine love for learning. Citing the work of Barnett (2014), transformational leaders inspire and motivate educators, promoting innovative teaching strategies that cater to diverse learning needs. By focusing on individualized support and collaboration, these leaders empower educators to implement effective literacy interventions, thereby enhancing children's engagement with literacy materials. Furthermore, the impact of transformational leadership extends beyond the classroom, as leaders actively engage families and communities in literacy initiatives, reinforcing the importance of literacy in children's lives. Research indicates that children in settings led by transformational leaders demonstrate significant improvements in academic performance, cognitive abilities, and socio-emotional development (Kilag et al., 2023). Additionally, the emphasis on ongoing professional development ensures educators remain equipped with the latest research and effective practices in literacy instruction. This comprehensive approach lays a strong foundation for long-term academic success, as evidenced by studies linking early literacy skills to later achievements (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001). This paper underscores the critical importance of transformational leadership in shaping positive educational trajectories for children, advocating for its integration into early childhood education frameworks to promote a lifelong love for literacy and learning.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Early Childhood Education, Literacy Development, Educational Leadership

Introduction

Recognizing the significance of early childhood literacy, educators and policymakers are increasingly focusing on interventions that promote literacy development (Brown, 2014). During the early years, children's language and literacy skills develop rapidly, forming the foundation for future academic achievement. Research emphasizes that fostering these skills early in life can significantly influence children's cognitive development, social skills, and long-term educational outcomes. In this context, leadership practices in early childhood education have emerged as a key determinant in shaping the learning environment, curriculum implementation, and teaching strategies that contribute to children's literacy development.

Effective leadership in early childhood education goes beyond administrative roles; it involves inspiring teachers to adopt innovative approaches that promote meaningful learning experiences. Leaders play a crucial role in establishing a shared vision, promoting collaboration among teachers, and creating a culture that values continuous professional development. Leaders who prioritize literacy development encourage educators to implement research-based strategies such as phonemic awareness activities, interactive read-alouds, and play-based literacy interventions. These practices foster children's engagement with language in natural, meaningful contexts, laying the groundwork for essential reading and writing skills.



A critical responsibility of educational leaders is to ensure that the curriculum aligns with evidence-based practices and reflects the needs of diverse learners. Early childhood classrooms often include students with varying language abilities, cultural backgrounds, and developmental needs. Therefore, inclusive leadership practices are essential to promote equitable literacy instruction for all learners. Leaders must advocate for differentiated instruction, which allows teachers to tailor activities and assessments to meet the individual needs of children. They should also support the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), ensuring that literacy materials are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Furthermore, leaders in early childhood education must engage families and communities as partners in children's literacy journeys. Research shows that family involvement plays a significant role in children's language development and reading habits. Leaders can foster family engagement by organizing workshops, reading programs, and collaborative activities that encourage parents to actively participate in their child's literacy development. Building strong connections between schools and families creates a supportive environment where children feel motivated to explore literacy both at school and home.

Professional development is another critical area where leadership has a direct impact on literacy outcomes. Effective leaders prioritize training opportunities that equip teachers with the latest strategies for early literacy instruction. Workshops, coaching sessions, and collaborative learning communities help teachers stay updated on new methodologies, enhancing their ability to support children's literacy skills. When teachers feel supported and empowered, they are more likely to implement innovative teaching practices that engage children and promote literacy growth.

Leadership practices play an essential role in promoting early childhood literacy by shaping instructional practices, fostering collaboration, and advocating for inclusive and equitable education. Leaders who prioritize literacy development inspire teachers to create meaningful learning experiences, engage families as active partners, and provide professional development opportunities that enhance instructional quality. Through effective leadership, early childhood programs can create a strong foundation for children's literacy development, setting them on a path toward lifelong learning and academic success.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Literacy: Foundation for Academic Success

Early childhood literacy is widely acknowledged as a crucial component of a child's cognitive development and future academic achievements. Literacy skills established during the early years become the foundation for future communication, critical thinking, and overall academic performance (Bus et al., 2014; Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Interventions designed to enhance literacy during early childhood hold immense potential in shaping long-term educational trajectories. As children transition from early childhood into formal schooling, the presence of a strong literacy foundation is essential for success across subjects (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001).

Leadership in Early Childhood Education

Effective leadership is central to shaping educational environments and influencing instructional practices in early childhood settings. Strong leadership fosters a positive, stimulating learning atmosphere and establishes clear goals to support both educators and learners (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In early childhood education, leadership extends beyond administrative duties, playing a critical role in instructional leadership that directly impacts teaching methods and literacy instruction (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Several studies have explored the connection between leadership styles and literacy outcomes in early childhood settings. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support, has been positively linked with improved literacy instruction (Barnett, 2013). By promoting continuous learning and innovation, transformational leaders create environments conducive to literacy development (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Transactional Leadership and Literacy Development

Transactional leadership, which emphasizes the exchange of resources and rewards, has also been investigated in early childhood literacy contexts. While transactional leadership provides clear expectations and structure, its impact on fostering a love for literacy and intrinsic motivation among learners may be limited (Spillane, 2012). Exploring



the balance between transformational and transactional leadership styles can offer insights into optimizing literacy instruction and outcomes for early learners.

Long-Term Educational Impact of Early Literacy Interventions

The enduring effects of early childhood literacy interventions, particularly those guided by strong leadership, have been highlighted in several longitudinal studies. For instance, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 2005) demonstrated that early interventions combined with effective leadership led to sustained academic success. Research further shows that children who receive quality early literacy instruction exhibit improved cognitive abilities, reading proficiency, and socio-emotional skills as they progress through their educational journey (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). These findings underscore the critical role of early literacy interventions and the impact of leadership in shaping long-term educational outcomes.

Methodology

This study employed an integrative literature review methodology to synthesize existing research on leadership practices and early childhood literacy. A systematic search of databases, including PubMed, ERIC, and PsycINFO, was conducted using terms related to early childhood education, leadership, and literacy outcomes. Studies published between 2000 and 2023, including empirical research, theoretical frameworks, and comprehensive reviews, were included in the analysis.

A two-tier screening process was utilized: titles and abstracts were first reviewed for relevance, followed by full-text reviews based on inclusion criteria. Studies were then analyzed for themes related to leadership styles, literacy outcomes, and long-term educational impact. Key themes and patterns identified in the literature were synthesized to inform the conceptual framework for this research.

Findings and Discussion

Transformational Leadership in Early Childhood Education

Transformational leaders in early childhood settings play a pivotal role in shaping environments that nurture curiosity, autonomy, and a genuine love for learning among young learners. According to Barnett (2014), such leaders significantly contribute to fostering positive educational outcomes by establishing an atmosphere conducive to exploration and creativity. These leaders embody qualities that inspire and motivate educators and students alike, creating a vibrant learning community where literacy can flourish.

Central to the effectiveness of transformational leadership in early childhood education is the presence of leadership traits such as inspirational motivation and individualized support. Bass and Avolio (1994) highlight that transformational leaders excel in fostering an environment where individuals feel valued and supported in their learning journeys. This form of leadership is characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate educators to embrace innovative teaching strategies, which are essential for enhancing literacy outcomes in young children.

One of the key attributes of transformational leaders is their focus on creating a supportive and encouraging environment for both educators and students. By providing individualized support, transformational leaders ensure that the unique needs of each child are met.

This personalized approach is crucial in early childhood settings, where children come with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles. When educators feel empowered to address the individual needs of their students, they are better equipped to implement effective literacy interventions. As a result, children are more likely to engage with literacy materials and develop a strong foundation for future learning.

Moreover, transformational leaders foster a culture of collaboration among educators, encouraging them to share best practices and innovative teaching strategies. This collaborative environment not only enhances the professional development of educators but also enriches the learning experiences of young children. By promoting a shared vision of excellence in literacy education, transformational leaders cultivate a sense of collective responsibility among educators to prioritize literacy development in their classrooms.



The impact of transformational leadership on literacy outcomes extends beyond the classroom. Leaders who actively engage with parents and the community create partnerships that reinforce the importance of literacy in children's lives.

When families are involved in their children's literacy journey, it strengthens the foundation for learning and fosters a home environment that values reading and writing. Transformational leaders often organize workshops, literacy events, and outreach programs that empower parents with the tools and knowledge needed to support their children's literacy development at home.

Additionally, the emphasis on professional development is a hallmark of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders invest in ongoing training and resources for educators, ensuring they remain up-to-date with the latest research and effective teaching practices in literacy education.

This commitment to professional growth empowers educators to implement innovative strategies that engage children in meaningful literacy experiences. The combination of inspired educators and a well-resourced learning environment creates a powerful synergy that positively impacts children's literacy skills.

Research supports the notion that transformational leadership significantly enhances literacy outcomes in early childhood education settings. Studies have shown that classrooms led by transformational leaders often exhibit higher levels of student engagement, motivation, and literacy achievement. The positive relationship between leadership practices and student outcomes underscores the critical role of effective leadership in shaping educational trajectories during early childhood.

Furthermore, as children transition from early childhood into formal schooling, the importance of a strong literacy foundation cannot be overstated. Neuman and Dickinson (2001) emphasize that literacy skills developed in early childhood serve as a critical precursor for success across various subjects in later years. When children possess strong literacy skills, they are more likely to thrive academically, as reading proficiency correlates with overall academic achievement. Transformational leaders, by fostering a culture of literacy, lay the groundwork for long-term educational success.

Transformational leadership in early childhood education is instrumental in creating environments that promote literacy development. By embodying leadership traits such as inspirational motivation and individualized support, these leaders significantly enhance literacy outcomes for young learners.

Their focus on collaboration, community engagement, and professional development further amplifies the impact of their leadership on children's literacy skills. As educators and policymakers continue to recognize the significance of early childhood literacy, embracing transformational leadership practices will be vital in shaping positive educational trajectories for children. Through the efforts of transformational leaders, we can create nurturing and engaging learning environments where young learners can thrive, fostering a lifelong love for literacy and learning.

Leadership on Literacy Development in Early Childhood Education

Children who receive high-quality literacy instruction under the leadership of transformational educators demonstrate significant improvements in academic performance, cognitive abilities, and socio-emotional development throughout their schooling (Kilag et al., 2023). Transformational leadership in educational contexts, especially in early childhood settings, creates an environment conducive to optimal learning experiences, significantly enhancing literacy development.

Transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to inspire and motivate educators, fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. Bass and Avolio (1994) highlight that transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of individualized support and inspiration, which can lead to significant enhancements in teaching practices and student outcomes. In early childhood education, this leadership style is essential as it encourages educators to adopt innovative strategies tailored to the unique needs of young learners.

One of the primary benefits of transformational leadership is its focus on high-quality literacy instruction. Research shows that children who are taught by transformational leaders engage more deeply with literacy activities, leading to improved reading and writing skills (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001).



By providing educators with the tools and resources necessary to implement effective literacy interventions, transformational leaders ensure that students receive comprehensive support in developing foundational literacy skills. For instance, Abendan et al. (2023) explore various innovative strategies that enhance elementary pupils' reading skills, emphasizing the role of leadership in fostering a supportive environment for such initiatives.

Additionally, transformational leaders prioritize the professional development of educators, ensuring they are equipped with the latest research and techniques in literacy instruction. This commitment to ongoing training empowers teachers to implement effective pedagogical approaches that cater to the diverse needs of their students.

For example, Kilag et al. (2023) describe how a multisensory approach can effectively bridge the literacy gap, demonstrating the importance of leadership in guiding educators towards evidence-based practices. Cognitive development is another critical area positively influenced by transformational leadership.

According to Lonigan and Shanahan (2010), the early years are crucial for developing literacy skills that form the basis for later academic success. Transformational leaders understand this importance and work to create a rich learning environment where children can explore language and literacy in meaningful ways. As a result, children not only improve their literacy skills but also enhance their cognitive abilities, as they engage in activities that promote critical thinking and problem-solving.

Moreover, the socio-emotional development of children is closely linked to the literacy instruction they receive. Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) found that parental involvement in literacy activities significantly contributes to children's reading skills.

Transformational leaders often engage parents and communities in the literacy development process, recognizing that a collaborative approach enhances the support children receive both at school and at home. By organizing workshops and literacy events that involve families, transformational leaders help cultivate a culture that values reading and learning, further supporting children's socio-emotional growth.

The leadership of transformational educators is vital in shaping the literacy outcomes of young learners. The positive impact of transformational leadership is evident in the enhanced academic performance, cognitive abilities, and socio-emotional development of children who benefit from high-quality literacy instruction. By fostering an environment of support, collaboration, and innovation, transformational leaders empower educators to implement effective literacy practices, ensuring that children are equipped with the skills necessary for long-term academic success. As educational systems continue to evolve, embracing transformational leadership will be essential in addressing the literacy needs of future generations and promoting a lifelong love for learning.

Balancing Transactional and Transformational Leadership in Education

Transactional leadership provides essential structure and guidance within educational settings, ensuring that the daily operations of schools run smoothly. This leadership style emphasizes clear roles, responsibilities, and reward systems that help maintain order and accountability among educators and students alike. However, while transactional leadership lays the foundation for effective management, integrating transformational leadership practices can yield even more effective outcomes tailored to the diverse needs of learners (Spillane, 2006).

Transformational leadership, in contrast, focuses on inspiring and motivating educators and students to exceed expectations and embrace a culture of innovation. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders foster an environment where individuals feel empowered to take risks and engage in collaborative learning experiences. This approach is particularly beneficial in the context of early childhood education, where fostering creativity and critical thinking is essential for cognitive and socio-emotional development. Research indicates that children who are engaged in high-quality literacy instruction under transformational leadership tend to show significant improvements in their academic performance and overall development (Kilag et al., 2023).

A combination of transactional and transformational leadership can enhance teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes. For instance, while transactional leadership establishes the necessary framework for educational practices, transformational leadership promotes a deeper engagement with the learning process. This dual approach allows educators to maintain the organizational structure essential for effective instruction while also encouraging innovative teaching methods that meet the varied needs of their students (Robinson et al., 2008).



Furthermore, research highlights the critical role of leadership in shaping the literacy development of young learners. Effective literacy instruction is foundational for academic success, and leaders who adopt both transactional and transformational strategies can create a comprehensive support system for educators. For example, the Rave-O strategy approach discussed by Abendan et al. (2023) emphasizes structured instructional techniques that enhance reading skills while also encouraging teachers to adopt creative and engaging practices. This balance allows educators to provide effective instruction within a supportive environment.

In addition to promoting academic achievement, effective leadership also impacts the socio-emotional development of students. Studies have shown that transformational leaders who engage parents and communities in literacy initiatives can create a supportive learning ecosystem. Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) found that parental involvement significantly contributes to children's reading skills. By leveraging both leadership styles, educators can foster partnerships with families that encourage literacy development at home, thereby enhancing children's overall learning experiences.

Moreover, the integration of technology in education has become increasingly important in the digital age. Leaders who embrace innovative practices, as discussed by Abendan et al. (2023), can harness technology to create dynamic learning environments. Transactional leadership provides the framework for implementing these technologies, while transformational leadership inspires educators to explore new possibilities and integrate them into their teaching practices. This synergy can lead to improved literacy outcomes and prepare students for success in a rapidly changing world.

While transactional leadership provides the necessary structure and guidance within educational settings, the most effective outcomes arise from a thoughtful combination of both transactional and transformational leadership approaches. This integration allows educators to create a rich learning environment that supports academic achievement, cognitive development, and socio-emotional growth among students. By balancing the strengths of both leadership styles, educational leaders can effectively address the diverse needs of learners and promote a culture of excellence in literacy instruction. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, embracing this dual leadership approach will be crucial for fostering successful learning experiences for all students.

Supporting Early Childhood Literacy

Language-rich environments are essential for nurturing early childhood literacy. Such environments expose young learners to a diverse range of language experiences that stimulate cognitive development, foster communication skills, and lay the groundwork for reading proficiency.

These settings can include homes, schools, and community spaces filled with engaging language activities, including storytelling, discussions, and interactive reading. Research indicates that children who are immersed in rich language experiences from an early age demonstrate improved language and literacy skills as they progress through their educational journeys (Dickinson & Porche, 2011).

In particular, the importance of language-rich environments is supported by the findings of Brown (2014), who emphasizes that foundational skills in language and literacy develop

best when children are surrounded by varied and meaningful linguistic interactions. These interactions promote vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and critical thinking skills essential for reading development. For instance, incorporating daily conversations about diverse topics, reading aloud, and engaging in pretend play can significantly enhance children's linguistic capabilities, preparing them for future academic success (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2010).

Moreover, ongoing professional development for educators is crucial in creating and sustaining these language-rich environments. Professional development equips teachers with the latest strategies and knowledge to support literacy instruction effectively.

As noted by Kilag et al. (2023), integrating innovative instructional approaches, such as the Rave-O strategy, can significantly enhance reading skills among elementary pupils. Educators trained in these methods can create engaging, interactive, and responsive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of their students.

Transformational leadership plays a pivotal role in facilitating this ongoing professional development. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders inspire and motivate educators to adopt innovative teaching practices that benefit student learning. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, these leaders ensure that



teachers are supported in their professional growth, which ultimately translates into improved literacy outcomes for students (Robinson et al., 2008). Effective leaders also encourage collaboration among educators, allowing them to share best practices and resources that enhance the overall teaching and learning experience. Furthermore, the integration of technology in language-rich environments is becoming increasingly important in the digital age. Abendan et al. (2023) highlight the need for educators to embrace technological advancements that can enhance literacy instruction.

By utilizing digital resources and interactive tools, teachers can create more dynamic and engaging learning experiences for their students. Professional development programs focused on technology integration can empower educators to leverage these resources effectively, ensuring that children have access to a variety of literacy experiences. Additionally, parental involvement is critical in supporting early childhood literacy. Research shows that children whose parents actively engage in their literacy development tend to perform better academically (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002).

Educators can enhance language-rich environments by providing parents with strategies and resources to support their children's literacy at home. Professional development initiatives that involve parents can create a collaborative approach to literacy development, ensuring that children receive consistent support both at school and in their home environments.

Fostering language-rich environments and providing ongoing professional development for educators are vital components of supporting early childhood literacy. By creating immersive linguistic experiences, promoting effective teaching strategies, and involving parents in the process, we can equip young learners with the skills they need for academic success. As research continues to underscore the significance of these factors, educational leaders must prioritize them to cultivate an educational landscape that nurtures literacy development and prepares children for lifelong learning.

Conclusion

This research paper explored emerging approaches and innovative teaching strategies in early childhood education, focusing on the role of leadership in literacy development. Transformational leadership was found to play a significant role in fostering literacy skills and creating environments conducive to learning. The long-term benefits of early literacy interventions, when coupled with effective leadership, were consistently highlighted in the literature, emphasizing the need for strategic leadership practices in early childhood education settings.

The findings suggest that a combination of transformational and transactional leadership approaches, tailored to the specific needs of learners, is crucial for optimizing early literacy outcomes. The importance of language-rich environments and professional development for educators was also emphasized as key components of successful literacy interventions. These insights provide valuable guidance for educational leaders, policymakers, and educators aiming to enhance early childhood literacy through effective leadership and innovative teaching strategies.

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