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## Full Length Research Article

# Effects of the Characteristics and Practices of a School Principal on School Climate and Improvement

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### ABSTRACT

School leadership is decisive in determining school success. It should be a priority in educational research because it plays a key role in improving school outcomes through increasing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment. Effective school leadership is important to improve the quality of teachers' performance and dedication. Teachers in most Arab cultures are greatly affected by their leaders and their characteristics especially those related to their human interaction. Thus, principals who possess a great deal of emotional intelligence enhance teachers' dedication to their work and raise the levels of their OCB. Teaching is a very demanding profession that needs a lot of efforts to achieve school excellence. This study is meant to assess a school principal's best practices and emotional intelligence that affect the school organizational citizenship behavior bringing about school improvement. The results of this study revealed that school leaders encounter many difficult challenges, and, in order to overcome these challenges, they must use their emotional intelligence to adapt the best practices in leadership and consider teachers emotions. In fact, any principal, regardless of experiences and studies, should constantly critique themselves and assess his / her relationships with teachers.

## Introduction

Since leadership practices are pertinent to school improvement. Various standards and indicators were designed to assess school performance. Lyons & Barnett (2011) found that the Standards and Indicators for School Improvement (SISI), and related variance points were a valuable tool for school leaders involved in school improvement, yet there are *inconsistencies* in variance point results and *contextual differences*, between elementary and middle/high school personnel. In addition, assessing a school principal's style cannot always be a valid predictor for school improvement. Hallinger (2003) provided a comprehensive description for instructional leadership as a strong predictor for school improvement since it concentrates on achieving objectives and mainly targets the academic achievement of students. However, it is the actual practices that can anticipate bettering school performance and determine a school's overall efficiency. Some school leaders may possess the potentialities and capabilities to be effective instructional leaders. They may even show various deeds and practices from time to time. However, it is not guaranteed that such practices are *continuously* performed or *contextually* effective. In fact, leadership styles and its specific characteristics play an important role in determining teachers' *Global Journal of Current Research*

efforts in schools. However, applying leadership theories without paying attention to the cultural context can do more harm than good. Since education is a human practice, culture is highly substantial in predicting leadership's efficacy especially when it comes to the educational contexts in the East. Thus, it would be insufficient to collect information about leadership styles or even tracing their best practices, which may not be continuous, to associate them with school improvement. David & Jackson (2000) argue that there are various limitations to the models of different leadership styles to bring about school improvement. They emphasized that it is the *values* leaders can root in their schools, shared leadership contexts and capacity creation and transformation that can really make the difference.

Somech & Ron (2007) argued that schools' success is directly related to on teachers' compliance to exert more efforts even after working hours, showing their (OCB). Best practices are those that can create the positive permanent values such as educational dedication and commitment to maximize teachers' capacities to relentlessly better their students' academic achievement and bring about overall continuous school improvement. In fact, there are differences between Western and

Eastern cultural perspectives with regard to the affective and emotional domain. Little is mentioned about the effects of considering teachers' emotions especially in Eastern cultures which are guided more by emotions rather than intellect. Elsaid (2012) emphasized that "research which focuses on values, practices, and effective leadership attributes that are widely shared in Middle Eastern societies is needed in order to have a better understanding of how Middle Easterners view leader style and behavior theories". (p.3). Thus, within the context of Eastern societies, the best practices capable of maximizing (OCB) cannot be effectively performed without specific leadership characteristics such as leadership's *emotional intelligence*. In this case study, *emotional intelligence* of a school principal is expected to be an essential factor of leadership *best practices* that can maximize the levels of *OCB* and consequently *school improvement*.

### Purpose of the study

This study is meant to assess a school principal's best practices and emotional intelligence that affect the school organizational citizenship behavior bringing about school improvement. Thus, following the integrative approach, both the individual best practices and characteristics of a school principal and the perception of teachers with regard to OCB are assessed. In short, the study is meant to examine the best practices and the emotional intelligence possessed by the school leader and its impacts on teacher's OCB and their commitment to school.

### Study Context

The human element is an important factor in any educational institution, especially the school. Due to the evident improvement of Al-Jahli School for Girls (Al-Ain), as reported by Irtiqa'a Inspection Team within *just* two years. It would be essential to examine the reasons for such improvement in a very short time. The change that occurred to the school is just a change in its leadership. A former teacher at Al-Jahili School, Mrs Aysha Saeed Alshamsi returned to her old school just two years ago as a school principal. In fact, the success of this school is very much related to the principal's characteristics and practices by motivating and leading the school staff.

### Research Questions

In fact, this study is meant to assess the impacts of school principals' emotional Intelligence on their teachers' organizational citizenship behavior. To find out whether there are effects or not the following three questions are raised;

Question 1. What are the principals' best practices associated with (SISI) and emotional intelligence?

Question 2. What are the levels of emotional intelligence possessed by the principal?

Question 3. What are the average levels of the teachers' organizational citizenship behavior?

Question 4. Is there any correlation between principal's emotional intelligence and practices on one hand and level of emotional intelligence and teachers' levels of OCB on the other?

### Leadership Practices, School Climate and Cultural Context

Emmanouil (2014) argued that instructional leaders are mostly influential through having effective communication with teachers and through their emphasis on creating a professional

learning community to enhance the professional development of teachers. No doubt that effective communication necessitates positive climate that maximizes teachers' dedication and willingness to actively participate in professional development to enhance their students' academic achievement and bringing about school improvement. Kale & Gunes (2015) emphasized the impact of positive school climate created by school principals. They found that "there is a positive and significant relationship between instructional leadership and organizational climate". They reached the conclusion that instructional leadership is closely associated with positive school climate. Elsaid (2012) stated that "tremendous benefits can be gained when leaders truly understand the differences in cultures across nations and incorporate this understanding in their leadership styles" p. 2.

### Emotional Intelligence

Allyn, Bacon & Oguz (2010) emphasized that the certain types of leadership of school management significantly affect enhancing teachers' OCB. Emotional intelligence is an important component for any character and was formally denoted in the 20th century and according to some authors, it has its origins in the social intelligence suggested by Thorndike (1920), who describes the construct of social intelligence as the capacity to grasp and interact with people in a wise manner. Gardner (1983) also discussed the term "multiple intelligences". It is presumed that in the theory proposed by Gardner, two intelligences are found that are linked to the social intelligence proposed by Thorndike. Aslan & Erkus (2008) described the construct of emotional intelligence as a part of social intelligence which involves the capacity to control feelings and emotions. In addition, emotional intelligence is the exercise of choosing the proper social behavior among other behavior, (Salovey and Mayer, 1990).

Also, Chopra and Kanji (2010) argued that it is important to define emotional intelligence before you have to define the two terms of what is composed that are intelligence and emotions. The two writers also mention that the social intelligence as a whole is a paradox because the two terms are opposite, and that intelligence is objective and subjective emotions. To define each of the two terms, several authors are identified; for the first, Chopra and Kanji (2010) identify those who define intelligence as understanding, because according to these authors, intelligence comes from the Latin "*intellige*". Another of the identified authors is Gottfredson (1997), who defines intelligence as a mental ability that involves in it several abilities that help to understand the environment.

Regarding the second term, emotions, Chora and Kanji (2010) describe it as a mental state and associated with the psychological aspects, whereas for Goleman (1995) in the emotions there is a tendency to act, that is to say, it is something that encourages us to move. Mayer, Caruso & Salovey (2000) describe emotions as connected responses to changes within the environment that necessitate the ability to remember certain subjective experiences, recalling relevant knowledge, controlling bodily states to pave the way for specific reactions, and assessing changes in situations. It is necessary to mention other authors that relate emotional intelligence with professional and personal performance. Anand & Udaya (2010), who mention that emotional intelligence "*empowers*" to managers with the

capacity to intuit the need of others and adopt strategies to satisfy those needs." Additionally, Wong, Wong & Law (2007) mention that "emotional intelligence has been proposed as an important and potential construct for the management of human resources, and also mention that in recent years the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance has been more evident in studies in China".

In addition, some authors, among them Aslan and Erkus (2008) and Goleman (1995) mention that emotional intelligence is of similar importance or even greater importance than the IQ to achieve success. From the perspective of job performance, Wong and Law (2002) found a close relation between emotional intelligence and work performance in their studies. On the other hand, Law, Wong, Huang & Li (2007), mention that staff who social intelligence, will be more successful their daily contacts and communication with others at work and with their colleagues in the office. Emotional intelligence is "the ability of individuals to deal with emotions and includes the following four areas" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

1. Assessment and expressing one's own emotions. This is the capacity to grasp emotions and be able to express them in a normal way. The fact of possessing this ability, makes people feel and raise their emotions before others.
2. Assessment and recognizing others' emotion. This is the capacity to define and understand the others' feelings and emotions. Additionally, it is the ability to value the emotions of others.
3. Regulation of one's emotions. It is the ability to regulate your own emotions; this enables people to recover more quickly from difficult emotional moments.
4. Handling emotions to enhance performance. This is the capacity to use emotions to become self-motivated. People who possess this ability maintain positive emotions and are able to use their emotions to increase their work performance.

According to Anand and Udaya (2010) argued that "the emotional intelligence of executives has a relationship with their leadership practices because emotional intelligence empowers leaders with the ability to intuit the needs of their followers and, in addition, gives them tools to meet these needs. This relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership has been studied by several authors. Sosik and Megerian (1999) predicts that leaders who possess high emotional intelligence are more successful. They added that emotional intelligence became more popular as a crucial necessity for successful leadership.

### **Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

Organizational Citizenship Behavior has various definitions. The phenomenon was first defined by Organ and his colleagues in the eighties (1988). The subsequent studies were based on the social and economic exchange approach and related to the relationships between an employee in the organization and members of the organization and the organization as a whole.

Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine & Bacharach (2000) studied about 81 type cases to examine OCB and found a great overlap between them. They proposed certain behaviors to compose

OCB such as; Help - helping colleagues on various topics, Sportsmanship, courtesy, Sportsmanship - maintain a positive attitude even in situations where the opinion is not accepted or in a situation of lack, comfort. It is also possible to characterize the behavior of people who do not object to their opinion in a personal way, Loyalty, Organizational Support, support and protection of the organization. Organizational Compliance - Acceptance of the organization's requirements and procedures. The worker acts according to the organization's rules even without supervision. Self-identification as part of a large pay. The emphasis here is on the employee's willingness to conduct activities. Related to the organization and their existence expresses the identification with the organization. Self-development, constant work to improve knowledge, skills and abilities. Behaviors related to the effort of Which works to improve the organization as a whole.

Williams & Anderson (1991) distinguished between organizational citizenship and commitment in that organizational citizenship is not a relationship. Fixed between employee and data organization, but characteristic of the individual employee and can be copied from organization to organization. Organizational citizenship is a principled position of the individual towards the organization. In different organizational environments and it will be everywhere a desirable quality and a worthy asset. Organizational citizenship is a kind of positive product of exchange and aid system they themselves achieve goals, (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2004). Numerous studies have also described the importance of the director on OCB, Stevens & Ash (2001). The director was presented as a component that significantly influences civic behavior. There are organizational forms in which management is not strictly hierarchical but circular and decentralized. Although most of the previous studies focused on business, they can be employed in education. It is possible to reach the right and significant decisions for the school by joint forces. In fact, OCB is essential to the teaching career and the school climate. An organizational climate is defined as perceptions shared by employees about norms and values in the organization, Dipaola & Tschannen-Moran (2001). It reflects the prevailing attitude among the employees in relation to what is expected of them and what is customary in the organization.

In addition, there have been associations between organizational climate and student behavior and their absence, (Hancock, 1995). In addition, relationships have been found between organizational climate and educational outcomes, especially in the context of student achievement eg, Between pedagogic leadership, organizational climate, and student achievement (Bogler & Somech, 2004). Smith, Organ & Near (1983) found that teachers' emotional commitment was directly related to the achievements of students and was also mediated by the relation between educational leadership and student achievement.

Bogler & Somech (2004) have also shown that a supportive style of educational leadership affects positively teachers' commitment, and teachers are more committed when the principal provides clear feedback, encouragement, and recognition. Finally, Mintzberg (1973) argued leadership is one of the roles that managers need to be able to play. Since not all managers can

play this role, it can be said that a leader is a manager and not necessarily a manager can be a leader. Thus, a leader has more than one person (group) to lead which brings leadership activity

nearer to the human element and consequently the necessity of effective use of emotional intelligence. This is evident in this case through the school improvement plan, see figure 1.

<b>MoE and School Vision Statements</b>
<p>الوزارة: تعليم ابتكاري لمجتمع معرفي ريادي عالمي</p> <p>المدرسة: غرس ثقافة التميز في سبيل إعداد طالبة متمكنة من المعرفة والمهارات، ضمن بيئة تعليمية ملهمة مليئة بالتحديات.</p>
<p>MoE: Innovative education for a knowledge, pioneering, and global society.</p> <p>School: Every student cultivates excellence, knowledge and literacies at her maximum potential in an engaging, inspiring and challenging learning environment.</p>
<b>MOE and School Mission Statements</b>
<p>بناء جيل واع متمسك بدينه، معزز بهويته الوطنية وثقافته الإسلامية والعربية، مسلح بالمعلم والمعرفة لمواجهة تحديات القرن الحادي والعشرين.</p> <p>تلهم مدرسة الجاهلي كل طالبة لتكون مواطنة متمسكة بتعاليم الدين الإسلامي، محافظة على الهوية والثقافة الإماراتية، طموحة وممنولة، فاعلة على المستوى المحلي والعالمي، محبة للتعليم مدى الحياة، ومعدة لتحديات سوق العمل.</p>
<p>MoE: Develop an innovative Education System for a knowledge and global competitive society, that includes all age groups to meet future labor market demand, by ensuring quality of the ministry of education outputs, and provision of best services for internal and external customers.</p> <p>School: Al Jahili School empowers every student to become an engaged citizen within the global community and a life-long learner who is responsible, productive, ready for the work force and inspired by the Islamic values and Emirati culture.</p>
<b>School Context</b>
<p>تضم مدرسة الجاهلي الصفوف من الرابع للعاشر عشر وتتبع في منطقة الجاهلي ، مدينة العين. تضم المدرسة بجانب اللسان العام والمتقدم اللسان التخصصي الذي يعد خطوة جديدة نحو تطبيق نماذج المدرسة الإماراتية. كانت المدرسة تستقبل دفعة الصف العاشر سنويا الا انه تم استبدال هذه السنة، بنفي الصف العاشر والطلع ما زاد عدد الطالبات للصف تقريبا. تنتج المدرسة نتج التعلم المحرك حول الطالب وتجمع العلاقات المتوازنة بين الطلاب والمعلمين فيما وأولياء الأمور.</p>
<p>Allahli school has classes from grade 9-12 and located in Al Jahli area in Al Ain. Beside the advanced and general streams, we have the professional stream that is considered as one stream of the different streams of the Emirati school. Previously, this school receives grade 10 every year, however, this year we received grade 9 and 10 which increased the total number of students to almost half. The school encourages the student centered learning and has a strong relationship with both staff members and students as well as parents.</p>

Fig. 1. School Improvement Plan

**Methodology**

Somech & Ron (2007) emphasize the necessity of adopting an integrative model to assess school improvement. Such an integrative model can be followed through examining both individual characteristics and organizational characteristics. Since the main objective of this study is to (1) assess the impacts of school principals’ best practices and emotional Intelligence on their (2) teachers’ organizational citizenship behavior, two instruments are used; an interview and two questionnaires. Based on Kentucky standards and indicators for school improvement (SISI), a semi-structured interview is conducted to collect information about the leadership best practices and a survey to assess the school principal’s emotional intelligence. In addition, a survey questionnaire is also used to assess overall organizational characteristics and teachers OCB.

The study adopted two scales to assess emotional intelligence and organizational citizenship behavior. Simple statistical analysis through using percentages is used to find out effects of

principals’ emotional Intelligence on their teachers’ organizational citizenship behavior.

**Instruments**

An interview and a survey were used to answer the first two questions. First, an interview based on the principals’ best practices based on the school improvement plan and Irtiqa’a report, see figure 2. The second instrument is Goleman (1995) EI Questionnaire which was used to measure levels of emotional intelligence of principal. The questionnaire consists of fifty questions and has a format of a typical five-level Likert item. It assesses five constructs for emotional intelligence; self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating one, empathy and social skills. Third, Neves, Paixão, Alarcão & Gomes (2014) OCB Questionnaire was used to measure differences between the levels of teachers’ organizational citizenship behavior five years ago and now. The questionnaire consists of sixteen questions and has a format of five-level Likert item also Items 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11,

12, 14 & 16 assess loyalty to the school specifically and the rest of the items assess the general levels of OCB.



Fig 2: Irtiqqa Report

Certain items of the second questionnaire were altered to serve the study objectives. The questionnaire also was modified to make use of the data for future investigations. For example, a question for being from Arab culture or not was added in an indirect way to study whether Arabs are more affected by certain leadership practices; (Subject, EMT or Not EMT). An additional modified version of the same questionnaire to assess teachers' OCB two years ago is used. Items were just changed in the past.

**Participants**

The school principal, Dr Aysha Alshamsi, participated in this study willingly. An interview and a survey were administered to find her best practices and assess her emotional intelligence. In addition, 53 teachers responded to the second questionnaire to assess the average level of organizational citizenship and loyalty of the teachers under current leadership. However, forty-seven teachers responded to the third questionnaire which assesses their OCB and loyalty 2 years ago. Only 28 participants from the forty-seven who responded to the second questionnaire worked with Dr Aysha Alshamsi as a principal and the former principal. The rest of teachers recently joined the school either this year or the year before and they did not work with the former principal.

**Procedures**

After conducting the interview with the school principal, the principal was administered the first questionnaire and teachers were administered the second questionnaire. The responses of the principal were analyzed numerically to assess her emotional intelligence. The responses of the 53 teachers who responded to

the second questionnaire were analyzed to calculate the average of their OCB with the current principal. After that, the third questionnaire was distributed to the teachers. Forty-seven teachers submitted their responses. However, only 28 responses of the teachers who worked for more than 2 years at the school were taken into consideration. Their responses were also analyzed to calculate the average of their OCB with the previous principal. Finally, simple analysis is made to find out any correlation between the principal's emotional Intelligence and teachers' organizational citizenship behavior.

**Findings**

Concerning the first question, the best practices of the school principal can be found in detail through the school improvement plan. In addition, during the interview she showed strong emphasis on the necessity of establishing a good relationship with all teachers especially because most of them were her colleagues. In fact, this explains the high level of emotional intelligence she possessed and can be found in answering the second question below. As for the second question, the level of EI of the principal was calculated. She has four areas of strength associated with the five constructs of EI; self-awareness, motivating oneself, empathy and social skills see Table 1. However, she has scored less in managing emotions. Her best scores are in empathy and social skills. Finally, she scored an overall good level in EI.

**Table 1.** School Principal’s Emotional Intelligence

Self awareness		Managing emotions		Motivating oneself		Empathy		Social Skill	
1	3	2	3	3	4	4	4	5	4
6	2	7	2	8	3	9	4	10	3
11	5	12	3	13	5	14	5	15	5
16	4	17	4	18	4	19	5	20	4
21	4	22	2	23	4	24	4	25	4
26	4	27	4	28	4	29	4	30	5
31	4	32	3	33	3	34	5	35	4
36	5	37	4	38	3	39	5	40	4
41	2	42	3	43	4	44	4	45	5
46	4	47	3	48	3	49	4	50	4
Total=(SA)	37	Total=(ME)	31	Total=(MO)	37	Total=(E)	44	Total=(SS)	42

Concerning the third research question about perceptions of teachers about their organizational citizenship behavior, Table 2 shows summarized comparison between teachers’ OCB now and their OCB two years ago. The items that ask about loyalty to

school are items 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16. Table (3) summarizes differences of teachers’ responses now and two years ago, before Dr. Aysha moved to school.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Teachers’ OCB Due to Leadership Change

No	Two years ago	Percentage	
		Present	Past
1	I was willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help my school be successful.	67%	20%
4	Teaching was the ideal vocation for a life work.	33%	20%
5	It was encouraging to see the high level of idealism which is maintained by people in the field of teaching.	58%	10%
8	I was extremely glad that I chose my school to work forever others I may have joined.	58%	20%
10	I was proud to tell others that I am part of my school.	17%	20%
11	If I had all the money I needed without working, I would have probably still continued in teaching.	42%	10%
12	I definitely wanted a career for myself in teaching.	33%	10%
14	I really cared about the future of my school.	33%	10%
16	I thought most people would stay in the teaching profession even if their incomes were reduced.	17%	20%

As for the final question, it can be seen from percentages of Table 2 that higher levels of teachers’ organizational commitment because of the current principal is associated in Irtiqa’ Report having Grade B, whereas lower levels of teachers’ OCB because of the former principal has a lower grade according to Irtiqa’ Report.

**Conclusion**

School leadership is decisive in determining school success. It should be a priority in educational research because it plays a key role in improving school outcomes through increasing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment. Effective school leadership is important to improve the quality of teachers’ performance and dedication. Teachers in most Arab cultures are greatly affected by their leaders and their characteristics especially those related to their human interaction. Thus, principals who possess a great deal of emotional intelligence enhance teachers’ dedication to their work and raise the levels of their OCB. Teaching is a very demanding profession that needs a lot of efforts to achieve school excellence. Principals who have high levels of emotional intelligence are usually maintaining and supporting positive

organizational climate and culture. They always examine their own beliefs and values and identify what they need to nurture a sound school climate. Such types of leaders usually build strong relationship with teachers and they build an ethics of caring. They use the following techniques to build strong relationship; they listen to teacher ideas and suggestions, solicit their advice and input, spend time supporting and helping them and have trust in their capacity to improve. In addition, they also, create a culture of constructive or supportive discipline with a school wide policy. In addition, they invite them to share problems or concerns provide positive reinforcements, apologize for mistakes they make, and treat them with respect. Of course, all these initiatives by the leaders at schools improve the quality of school leadership. Moreover, values and ethics of leadership have crucial role in facilitating school management as in today’s educational setting leadership and ethics go hand in hand as many principals encounter ethical problems daily. For this reason, school principals need to have specific ethics-related skills such as vision, character, values, empowerment, and persistence. Effective ethical leaders can manage schools perfectly through respecting the dignity of all persons, believe in the power of education to prepare generations for life, believe that dedication

makes difference in the academic and social lives of students. These values and ethics adapted by school leaders will, without doubt, facilitate school management and make all the participants, including students, teachers, parents, and others want schooling willingly. To sum up, the school leaders encounter many difficult challenges, and, in order to overcome these challenges, they must use their emotional intelligence to adapt the best practices in leadership and consider teachers emotions. In fact, any principal, regardless of experiences and studies, should constantly critique themselves and assess his / her relationships with teachers. Their style of leadership should be consistent to avoid problems and conflicts in school. Moreover, they should treat each of the teachers according to their abilities, tendencies and skills.

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