

Cite this Article: Gul, N., Atta, M. A., Khan, S. R. (2026). Authentic Leadership of Secondary School Heads: The Role of Transparency in Relationships. *Journal of Regional Studies Review*, 5(1), 83-93. <https://doi.org/10.62843/jrsr/2026.5a173>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

JOURNAL OF REGIONAL STUDIES REVIEW (JRSR)

Authentic Leadership of Secondary School Heads: The Role of Transparency in Relationships

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Abstract: This is a quantitative research on the importance of transparency-in-relations in the leadership of secondary school with reference to stakeholders in the District of Dera Ismail Khan. The study has solved the issue of the lack of empirical evidence on the specific effect of transparency on relations by quantifying perceived levels by parents of principals, teachers, and administrative personnel. A descriptive design was used; a seven-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect data among 538 sampled stakeholders. There was an analysis; descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and correlation. The major results were the perceived degree of transparency-in-relations between the stakeholders who were tested whether their perceptions significantly differed with the sample groups of stakeholders and the connection between the transparency perceptions and general school satisfaction. The research paper presents quantitative data to assist school leaders to design evidence-based transparency measures of building trust and enhancing school climate.

Keywords: Transparency, School Leadership, Stakeholders, Quantitative Study, Secondary Schools, Satisfaction

Introduction

The ideal leader in the schools is very self-aware, ethical and trusting to establish relationships. True leaders are themselves; they lead in a truthful and open way, and are respected and admired by their coworkers at work, school, and society. They know their strengths and weaknesses and most importantly, not hesitant to receive feedback and they will go out of their way to advance their leadership expertise. This sort of introspection enables them to socialize with other people more and establish true relationships with them, based on trust and mutual respect. True leaders create a culture and open culture of honesty where all people feel free to offer their suggestions and issues (Kelly, 2023).

A good moral compass is a part of the building block of an actual leader. Real leaders will make difficult choices that they believe in. They are also guided by the sense of what is right and just, and they take themselves responsible for whatever they do. This moral behavior brings in the element of credibility and trust in the school fraternity. An ethical leader making integrity decisions is more likely to be trusted and followed by both students, teachers, and parents as well. This moral foundation offers some level of stability and improvement of a favorable school climate (Chimakati, 2024).

In order to become an effective leader, one should be capable of forming proper and trusting relationships. Real leaders take some time and effort to understand their peers, students, and parents. They

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also become sensitive to their concerns, and their opinion is considered, and they get space to speak freely. They understand that leadership is not about power that is exercised but about empowerment. Real leaders create a community and a common purpose at the school by building strong relationships. The specified collaborative setting facilitates innovation and allows everyone to contribute towards the success of the school (Chen & Sriphon, 2022).

The real leaders are also said to be humble and willing to make confessions. They never state that they know everything, but they know that they just cannot do everything, and they require other people to offer their input. They use failures as learning curves, and they have others risk and learn from their experience. Such humility results in a culture of learning and growth in the school. Being willing to be vulnerable and authentic by leaders will be a secure way for others to follow suit. This weakness will build trust and improve the relations among the school population (Bharanitharan, Lowe, Bahmannia, Chen, & Cui, 2021).

The real leadership in the school system is to possess a favorable and good learning environment wherein everyone feels prestigious and confident. In fact, authentic leaders can make others achieve their fullest potential and also foster a culture of collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement. They start up learning institutions in which the learners perform effectively, the teachers are motivated, and the society at large is actively involved in the education process. They are not worried about self-interest and fame but about the contribution to the needs of the school community and life-enhancing changes that occurred in the life of the students (Murphy & Louis, 2018).

Transparency in Relations

Openness in management: This is a form of management that involves sharing of information, making decisions as well as motives with the stake holders. It includes the dissemination of the truth, clarity, and establishment of a trusting and understanding environment. It is also evident that transparent leaders do not hide information and work behind closed doors, but they think knowledge and insight should be shared among people. This transparency results in a sense of ownership and affirms the relationship and makes them more solid, which the firm or the society owns. Transparency is not the practice that is associated solely with information sharing but is also connected with the culture of open communication and accountability (Kfukfu, Kitur, and Nyagah, 2024).

Open and transparent communication is a very crucial point of transparency. The leaders should be placed in a situation of communicating in an easy to understand manner that may not involve complex and technical terminologies that may disorient all the stakeholders. They ought not to withhold the dissemination of pertinent information to make the stakeholders aware of important developments, decisions and challenges. This active communication will help realize that the stakeholders are not humiliated, and they may take part in the process of decision-making and discussion. The second factor of transparent communication is that one should be willing to listen to the feedback and respond to questions and concerns intelligently (Kayyali, 2024).

The other aspect of transparency in leadership entails accountability. Leaders should be responsible for whatever they are engaged in and embrace the failures and the successes. This goes as far as admitting the errors or shortcomings and trying to recompense. Accountable leaders are honest and create some form of trust amongst stakeholders. Responsibility nurtures the spirit of ownership and makes everyone feel responsible for his or her work. It is concerning being a role model and showing a desire to act ethically (Davis, 2023).

Leadership transparency is concerned with establishing good and trusting relationships with the stakeholders. It is concerning a sense of having an environment where everyone feels special, valued, and educated. Open leaders encourage free communication, permit feedback, and enable other individuals to take part in the decision-making process. This form of leadership does make a person feel that they belong to something and helps in strengthening the bond within the organization or community. It is also about

establishing a culture of trust, in which all people feel free to contribute their ideas, issues, and opinions (Artyukhova, Churikanova, & Bliumska-Danko, 2024).

Share Decisions

The problem of effective leadership lies in the possibilities to discuss decisions with the staff and openly engage them in discussion that will lead to the evolution of trust and collaboration, as well as a sense of collective ownership. It is not merely informing the employees of what occurred, but providing them with a background, providing a rationale as to why the selection was carried out, and allowing them to discuss. Employees will readily accept and embrace such decisions when they understand the reasons behind the making of decisions, despite the fact that they may disagree with such decisions. Such openness will create a feeling of trust in the leadership and will increase the relationship between the management and the employees. The situation would be preconditioned by the culture of honest communication when it comes to the decision-making process, as a person will feel respected and valued (Norberg and Ylaenen, 2024).

Open decision sharing is one of the things that is obtained through effective communication. Rich language should not also be used through the use of jargons or other technical terminologies to perplex or mislead the leaders. It must be timely and to the greatest extent it must also inform the staff on the time of a decision made. This shows how they respect their time and are thus informed and active. Open communication also refers to the fact that one is open to questions and concerns as well as the provision of a safe environment where workers can express their views and raise their concerns. It is also related to the two-way communication, but not just to the top-down communication (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig, 2013).

Communicates Transparently and Clearly

One of the pillars of a good leader and good relationship, be it in the personal world or at the workplace, is openness in communication. It involves frankness, sincerity, and the transfer of information in a way that can be understood by the receiver. Transparency is not just about the revelation of facts, but also about being transparent, providing context, reasons for actions, and establishing a two-way communication. It builds up confidence, strengthens the bonds, and creates the impression of co-existence. Proper communication minimizes cases of failure in understanding and results in a successful collaboration (Thimmaraju, 2024).

Clarity in communication involves the use of communicative language that is accurate, short, and simple to understand. It involves the avoidance of jargon, tecnicisms, and other ambiguous words that can bring about ambiguity. Clear communication also presupposes organization of information in a logical manner, with major points being made first of all, and taking illustrations or examples to enhance the same. It is about the message being delivered according to the particular audience, based on the degree of their knowledge and their communication style of choice. Effective communication helps to make sure the message is sent correctly, and there are fewer chances of misinterpretations (Insigne, 2024).

Exchange of Information Openly and Succinctly

Openness in communication is one of the pillars of a good leader and a good relationship, whether in the personal world or at the workplace. It entails candor, honesty, and passing of information in such a manner that can be deciphered by the receiver. Transparency is not only about the disclosure of facts but also about being transparent, giving background and rationale on things, as well as creating two-way communication. It develops trust, reinforces the ties, and makes the impression of co-existence. Effective communication reduces instances of communication breakdown and leads to an effective partnership (Thimmaraju, 2024). Clarity in communication entails communicative language that is only accurate, succinct, and easy to comprehend. It entails not using jargon, tecnicisms, and other ambiguous words that are likely to cause ambiguity. Effective communication also assumes that information is organized logically, with the key points being made first of all, and the illustrations or examples should be taken to highlight the same. It concerns the message conveyed in respect of the specific audience, depending on the level of their knowledge and the

type of communication that they prefer to adopt. Good communication can be used to ensure the message is delivered in the right manner, and the probability of miscommunication is reduced (Insigne, 2024).

Shows integrity in Negotiations

Truthfulness in the negotiations is one of the main principles when it comes to ethical communication and the establishment of effective relations. It involves telling the truth, telling in a good way, and telling honestly, even to the extent of talking about a tricky subject. Honesty can be discussed as the absence of lies, exaggeration, and the concealing of relevant information. The expression of personal opinion directly is bold, not to mention the flattery of others. Openness will promote confidence and a platform on which respect will be built, and will precondition good cooperation. They are also essential in the establishment of a healthy and free communication environment (Lubis & Nurhayati, 2023).

Honesty in conversation will also mean that one is being real and true in communication. It is an ability to articulate and imply what I actually mean and think, but respectfully and constructively. Authenticity does not imply that he or she should be mean and rude, but he or she should be honest and full of integrity in his or her words. Open communications might not necessarily mean the distribution of data, but provide context to said data to interpret how this data was obtained to make a decision, and create a back-and-forth communication. It improves the level of trust, development of relationships, and the creation of mutual understanding. As long as communication remains clear and transparent, no misunderstandings can occur, and teamwork in a group is attained (Thimmaraju, 2024).

Transparent Feedback

Giving feedback is also an important leadership behavior and can be helpful in developing other people. It is the honest and respectful praise and good critiques. The concept of transparent feedback has nothing to do with the overall commentary regarding the mistakes or the good; it is speaking of assigning concrete illustrations, addressing the outcomes of the acts, and prioritizing the enhancements. It will be interested in making it a safe environment where open communication must be encouraged, and a growth mentality developed. Transparent feedback will be received more positively and lead to positive change in the situation (Kfukfu et al., 2024).

Good feedback should be focused and precise. Instead of putting the abstract statement, such as you need to work on your communication skills, it will be more productive to provide the exact examples of the situations when communication could have been used in a more effective manner. Numbingly, a case in point would be, in the meeting yesterday, you were in a hurry with your presentation, and some of the key points could not be brought out clearly. Such specialized feedback would ensure that the recipient would be aware of what exactly he must do to improve. Actionable feedback also includes recommendations on how to improve, which also provides the specific actions that can be taken (Liang, Sha, Tsai, Gašević, & Chen, 2024).

Admit Leadership Problems Frankly

Businesses must have strong leadership that brings about confidence and cooperation. When a school head feels comfortable enough to be frank about his/her weaknesses, whether it is a scarcity of resources or staff in fighting, or a policy change, this will be perceived as truth, and a culture of problem-solving will be established. As has been demonstrated by the studies conducted by Jabbar, Akmal, and Hassan (2024), leaders promote psychological safety because they share hardship with teams, and it helps teachers to work more efficiently. Secondary schools are one of the problematic settings in terms of any possible gender difference in the perception of leadership; in this instance, the female heads who discuss the issues openly tend to neutralize the stereotyping and become more transparent in their relationships (Griffin, 2025). It is consistent with the main concepts of the true leader, whereby vulnerability and sincerity yield greater organizational resilience (Sil & Lenka, 2025).

Openness in Leadership Style

The common communication, involvement in decision-making, and vision are the characteristics of a transparent leadership style that should be maintained. Once school heads astonish the workers by opening up, they create clustered mutual respect, which decreases personnel turnover and raises workplace job satisfaction (Gardner, Karam, Alvesson, & Einola, 2021). The transparency of leaders in the education sector is observed to be the most trustworthy, particularly when communicating with the stakeholders to negotiate the policies (Kfukfu et al., 2024). Male and female leaders may present themselves in various ways as far as transparency is involved; women tend to be interested in emotional transparency, whilst men are interested in procedural transparency (Thomas and Sarma, 2022). Real leaders contributing to transparency with the help of regular feedback loops and open-door policies at the workplace create an atmosphere of accountability and innovation irrespective of gender (Scally-Juknevičienė, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Although it is a well-known issue, the particular influence of transparency on the relationships in secondary schools is not a well-measured and cognized issue. The existing literature does not tend to have empirical evidence on the quantitative impacts of transparency as exercised by school administrators on confidence, teamwork, and fulfillment by the main stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and the administrative team. Such a gap complicates the work of educational leaders that have to find and apply specific, evidence-based transparency strategies. As a result, in the absence of such data, it becomes difficult to cultivate good relationships so vital in the improvement and climatic conditions of a school. The current research, then, deals with the issue of measuring the value of transparency in offering practical information towards effective leadership of the school.

Research Objectives

1. To measure the perceived level of transparency-in-relations among secondary school stakeholders.
2. To compare the perceptions of transparency-in-relations between key stakeholder groups.
3. To examine the relationship between stakeholders' perception of transparency-in-relations and their overall satisfaction with the school.

Research Question

1. What is the perceived level of transparency-in-relations among stakeholders?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of transparency-in-relations between stakeholder groups.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between stakeholders' perceptions of transparency-in-relations and their overall satisfaction with the school.

Significance of the Study

The research is very important to the practice and theory of educational leadership. It will make a quantitative contribution to the literature of transparent leadership by creating empirical evidence to move beyond anecdotal discourse on the topic, in order to develop quantifiably. In practice, the results will provide the school administrators with a fact-based framework to evaluate and optimize their communication practices with a direct goal of improving stakeholder trust, cooperation, and climate at school in general. To policymakers, the findings can be used to create training programs and policies that embed transparency as a fundamental leadership skill, which eventually leads to a better functioning, responsible and united school community.

Delimitations

The study is delimited to:

1. Only District Dera Ismail Khan
2. Male and Female stakeholders (Principals, Teachers (SSTs), and Administrators (DDOs))

Research Methodology

The applied descriptive research design was used in a quantitative approach in this study. The sample of the population consisted of male and female heads, teachers, and administrators of six southern districts, which constitute 519 heads, 8,062 teachers, and 12 administrators. The sample, 538 was identified using stratified sampling and the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula after which 187 heads, 339 teachers, and 12 administrators were finally found to have responded. A seven-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect data since it was chosen based on its superior sensitivity, lesser central tendency, and better measurement accuracy as evidenced by the advancement in contemporary methodological studies. The descriptive statistics, frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, and the inferential statistics, T-Test, and the ANOVA specifically were used to analyze the differences among the stakeholder groups and correlation to evaluate the relationships between variables.

Results and Discussions

Table 1

Stakeholders' Perceptions Regarding the Transparency in Relations (Align with Q#1)

Stakeholders	Gender	Transparency in Relations														Total
		SA		A		SWA		N		SWDA		DA		SDA		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	
Heads	F	05	7.8	40	62.5	07	10.9	06	9.3	03	4.6	02	3.1	01	1.6	64
	M	07	5.7	78	63.4	24	19.5	07	5.7	02	1.6	03	2.4	02	1.6	123
Teachers	F	07	6.8	07	6.8	07	6.8	61	59.2	10	9.7	06	5.8	05	4.8	103
	M	13	5.5	22	9.3	31	13.1	128	54.2	18	7.6	15	6.3	09	3.8	236
Administrators	F	01	16.6	04	66.7	01	16.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	06
	M	0	0	05	83.3	01	16.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	06

According to the data, there is a high difference in the perceptions of leadership transparency. However, school heads are very confident and 88.6% of the male heads and 81.2% of the female heads feel they are making clear leadership, but teachers largely differ with them. The male teachers (27.9) and female teachers (20.4) only agree (27.9 and 20.4) with majority of them neutral and a large number of them disagreeing, so there seems to be a perceived lack of communication. However, the administrators unanimously concur with the self-evaluation of the heads with 100 percent of male and female administrators confirming the transparency of leadership.

Figure 1

Transparency in Relations

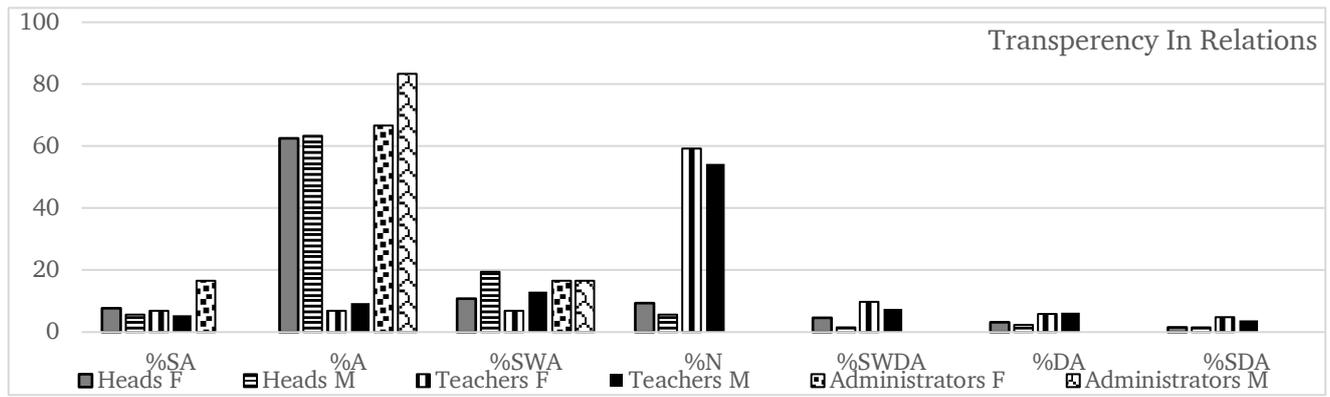


Table 2

Comparison of Stakeholders' Perceptions Regarding the Transparency in Relations (Align with H₀₁)

Stakeholders	Gender	Transparency			Comparison					
		N	Mean	S.D	Gender			Stakeholders		
					t-cal	t-tab	p-value	F-cal	F-tab	p-value
Heads	F	64	5.43	1.27	0.50	±1.97	0.61	84.97	3.00	0.001
	M	123	5.52	1.10						
Teachers	F	103	4.05	1.30	0.73	±1.97	0.46			
	M	236	4.16	1.27						
Administrators	F	06	6.00	0.63	0.55	±2.23	0.59			
	M	06	5.83	0.41						

A comparative statistical analysis of data shows that there are specific trends. There is no significant gender difference in the perceptions of leadership transparency within each of the stakeholder groups as t-tests with high p-values (0.61, 0.46, 0.59 among heads, teachers, and administrators respectively) indicate that the difference falls above the traditional significance level. Nonetheless, a one-way ANOVA among the various categories of stakeholders reveals that there is a very high level of significant divergence in perceptions with the value of F being 84.97 and the p-value of 0.001. This proves that gender is not a distinguishing variable between the groups, but on the other hand, the professional role plays a crucial role. Administrators give the most positive and heads rated themselves the highest, and teachers always give the lowest rating when it comes to transparency.

Figure 2

Gender Based Comparison Regarding Transparency in Relations

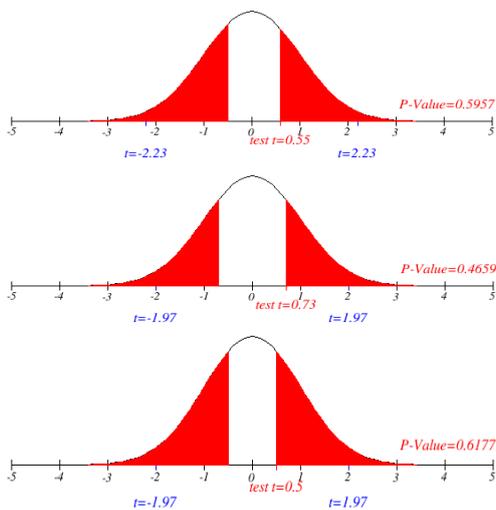


Table 3

Relationship between Stakeholders' Perceptions Regarding the Transparency in Relations (Align with H₀₂)

Stakeholders	Transparency in Relations				
	N	Mean	S.D	r	p-value
Heads	185	5.48	1.19	0.80	0.001
Teachers	339	4.11	1.29	0.33	0.001
Administrators	12	5.92	0.52	0.90	0.001
Overall	538	5.17	1.00	0.55	0.001

The results show that there is significant positive correlation ($p < 0.001$) between the stakeholder groups and their perception of transparency in relations with administrators reporting the highest mean perception ($M=5.92$, $SD=0.52$) and the strongest correlation ($r=0.90$), and head of institutions ($M=5.48$, $SD=1.19$, $r=0.80$). By comparison, teachers also have a much lower average perception ($M=4.11$, $SD=1.29$) and a less significant correlation ($r=0.33$). The whole analysis of 538 respondents has a mean of 5.17 with a standard deviation of 1.00 which is a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.55$).

Discussions

1. This result aligns with Sanchez et al. (2022), who identified a perception gap in which school leaders overestimate communication clarity while teachers often withhold feedback. The neutral responses observed may reflect this lack of psychological safety. Greater skepticism among female teachers further suggests issues of inclusion, pointing to systemic communication failures that undermine trust.
2. Severn's (2024) research supports this outcome, showing professional role does not gender as the strongest predictor of perception gaps in leadership. Teachers consistently rated principals lower on communication and transparency than administrators did. This mirrors the role-based divide in your findings, confirming that disagreement stems from structural distance rather than demographic factors.
3. This finding is consistent with Jian and Fairhurst (2025), who link agreement strength with proximity to leadership. Administrators share a "strategic consensus," producing strong correlation, while teachers' greater relational distance results in weaker agreement and more varied perceptions. Thus, the moderate overall correlation reflects distinct realities shaped by position in the school hierarchy.

Research Conclusions

Research Conclusions is as under:

- Leadership vs. Educators Gap: Leaders and administrative staffs hold positive views on transparency, whereas the majority of the teaching staff describe their views as either reserve or neutral signaling a serious breakdown in communication (Obj. #1).
- Role, Not Gender, Defines Perception: Perception of transparency depends not on gender, but on professional status: Leadership and administration receive positive evaluations similar to each other compared to less positive evaluations of teaching personnel (Obj. #2).
- Systemic Hierarchical Divide: Institutional role perceptions always determine a systemic rift between the leadership/admin and educators which needs specific measures so that this hierarchical rift is addressed (Obj. #3).

Recommendations

- Establish structured, reciprocal communication channels between leadership and teaching staff. (Align with Finding # 1)
- Implement targeted transparency training for school heads, administrators, and teachers based on their professional roles. (Align with Finding # 2)
- Develop and monitor key indicators of perceptual alignment as a core institutional performance metric. (Align with Finding # 3)

Guidelines for Future Researchers

1. Extend the scope to diverse regions and stakeholder groups to improve the generalizability of findings.
2. Adopt a mixed-methods design to add qualitative depth to the quantitative measurement of perceptions.
3. Develop longitudinal or experimental studies to assess the causal impact of transparency on specific outcomes.

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