

Impact of Authentic Leadership Practices of Principals on Employees' Organizational Trust and Work Engagement

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of authentic leadership practices of principals on employees' organisational trust and work engagement. There has been limited research on these dynamics in educational settings compared to business contexts. The research was conducted using a correlational approach. The study's population comprised all teachers working in public high and higher secondary schools of the Gujrat Division. A sample of 345 teachers was selected using the purposive sampling method, based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) population and sample size table. The researcher developed an instrument in the form of a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. The researcher surveyed 345 teachers using the questionnaire to examine the correlation among authentic leadership, organisational trust, and work engagement. Expert opinions were obtained to ensure validity, and a pilot test was conducted to confirm the reliability of the research tool, achieving an overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.87. All data were collected by the researcher and analysed using SPSS version 26. The study found significant positive relationships among the variables. authentic leadership was moderately correlated with organisational trust ($r = 0.787$) and work engagement ($r = 0.773$), while organisational trust was strongly correlated with work engagement ($r = 0.779$). Regression analyses showed that authentic leadership explained 62% of organisational trust and, together with organisational trust, explained 69% of the variance in work engagement, indicating highly significant effects. This research recommends that school leaders be provided with professional development in self-awareness, transparency, ethical judgment, and balanced thinking to build trust and enhance teachers' work engagement and commitment.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, Organisational Trust, Educational Leadership.

Introduction

Over the years, leadership studies in educational environments have advanced, presenting various theories that offer different views on how leadership shapes school dynamics. Authentic leadership is one of the models that has become powerful and relevant, especially in school settings (Bird et al., 2012; Baquero, 2023). Leadership authenticity, which focuses on honesty, self-interest, and morality, has become increasingly important in recent years due to its impact on employee morale, trust, and engagement. Principals play a key role in developing the culture, climate, and performance of educational institutions. Therefore, their leadership practices are central to the success of both teachers and students (Hassan & Ahmed, 2011; Wirawan et al., 2020).

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In recent decades, the scope of principals' work has broadened to include activities such as building trust, fostering spirit, and encouraging involvement within the school labour force. The nature of authentic leadership promotes open communication, integrity, and a sense of community as key principles in creating an atmosphere where teachers feel worthy and inspired (Paracha et al., 2012; Niqab et al., 2014). Authentic leadership among principals is likely to develop trust among employees, thereby enhancing organisational commitment and work engagement. Leadership practices and their relationship with employee outcomes, in terms of trust and engagement, have been widely researched in business environments but not as extensively in education, particularly among school principals (Tufail et al., 2017).

Organisational trust is of significant importance in relationships between school leaders and teachers in the field of education (Kars & Inandi, 2018). Trust in an organisation enhances teamwork, decreases wrangling, and improves performance. Teaching organisations whose principals are well-organised have a good chance of improving job satisfaction, engaging in their work, and being more productive (Sezer & Uzun, 2023). Conversely, the absence of trust may result in disengagement, high turnover rates, and poor performance of the school in general. Identifying the factors that contribute to organisational trust in schools, with specific emphasis on leadership behaviours that encourage this trust, is therefore essential (Louis & Murphy, 2017).

Work engagement, a concept closely related to trust within the organisation, refers to the extent of enthusiasm, commitment, and passion that employees bring to their job (Islam et al., 2024). The more engaged the employees are, the higher the chances of their contributing to organisational tasks, demonstrating a high degree of energy and dedication in accomplishing their responsibilities, and developing initiative (Kavgaci & Öztürk, 2023). True leaders in educational settings have the power to affect the level of engagement among teachers by establishing a work environment that is friendly, open, and trusting. The relationship between a principal's leadership style and teachers' work engagement is becoming an increasingly popular area of exploration because the results of these relationships influence student outcomes and the overall performance of the school (Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019).

Literature Review

One of the most applicable and decisive leadership paradigms in the modern educational establishment is authentic leadership. In comparison to traditional leadership styles where the centre of attention is given to the issue of authority and control or even charisma, authentic leadership is all about honesty, openness, and morality (Srivastava & Dhar, 2019; Bento & Ribeiro, 2013). The leadership style is essential in a school setting since the principal affects not only the academic development of the school but also organisational culture and the welfare of the personnel (Long et al., 2024). Authentic leadership encourages leaders to lead with personal integrity, self-awareness, and a strong commitment to their values, thereby fostering trust and teamwork among leaders, teachers, and staff.

More importantly, authentic leadership can be summarised into four fundamental principles, namely: self-awareness, relational Transparency, internalised moral perspective, and balanced processing (Srivastava & Dhar, 2019).

1. Self-awareness is the capability of a leader to know their incumbencies as well as weaknesses, values and emotions. Authentic leaders do this by using self-reflection, understanding their own beliefs, and asking whether what they are doing is consistent with their values. When applied to a school, a self-aware principal can develop an environment of safety and openness whereby the teachers will be free to discuss their concerns, ideas and difficulties.
2. Relational transparency is the capacity of the leader to share his ideas, emotions and reasoning with other people in a candid manner. Authentic leaders are not afraid to show

these roles. Manipulative actions are not part of genuine leadership. There is no hiding except during communications, which builds trust and closeness. School principals can use relational transparency to establish a friendly and open school community in which teachers feel respected and appreciated.

3. Internalised moral perspective refers to a capacity to behave regularly in a way which conforms to the intrinsic values and principles of a person. Legitimate leaders live up to a rigid code of morality even in challenging circumstances. This principle allows school principals to make sound decisions, not based on external pressure or their own interests. The outside pressure and selfish interest undermine schools, which are based on principles of fairness, equity, and the well-being of students and staff.
4. Balanced processing refers to the leader's skill in being objective when analysing information and considering every side when making decisions. Authentic leaders elicit ideas from others, consider various opinions, and think profoundly. At the school level, the balanced processing conducted by the principals increases the likelihood of making well-informed decisions that benefit the entire school community.

Trust in an organisation is a pillar of good leadership and organisational operations, especially in an educational setting. It is commonly defined as the concept that others in the organisation recognise as capable and moral actions (Adnan et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2022). Organisational trust is also essential in schools, where the success of staff and students relies on collaboration and teamwork to create a supportive, helpful, and productive working environment (Mubashar et al., 2022; Aman et al., 2023). If teachers trust their colleagues and principals, they become more motivated to engage in work, knowledge sharing, and cooperation to achieve common educational objectives. Trust, thus, is not only the welcomed by-product of good leadership, but also the foundation of good organisational functioning.

Work engagement is a psychological condition that describes the degree of interest, devotion, and vigour an individual has regarding their job. Highly engaged employees are very motivated, they are proud of their work and feel meaningful and passionate about their jobs. Work engagement is highly critical in schools because it directly influences the effectiveness of teachers, their satisfaction, and overall performance. Teachers with interests have a higher tendency to work beyond their terms, apply innovative methods to solve their problems, and even take the initiative to address them (Sheikh et al., 2019; Yaseen et al., 2025). They are also in a better position to establish positive relationships with students, facilitate collaboration with others, and work towards the school's success. Thus, the factors that lead to work engagement are necessary to promote school culture and achieve breakthroughs in educational outcomes (Rahal & Farmanesh, 2022).

The relationships between organisational trust, work engagement, and organisational success are extensively studied in the body of knowledge, particularly in the school setting. Trust has also been considered an antecedent to work engagement because it provides psychological protection, leading to employee commitment to their work. Teachers who trust the principals and other members of staff tend to feel supported and appreciated, which prompts them to take up their jobs more seriously (Erdoğan et al., 2022). Job satisfaction is also an essential part of work engagement, as teachers who trust their leaders are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. This trust, in its turn, leads to a positive working environment, lowers stress and makes one more motivated.

Moreover, when principals demonstrate behaviours that generate trustful relationships, such as being transparent, honest, or supportive, they create an environment where teachers feel more confident and are empowered to step forward, express their ideas, and cooperate. This is not only applicable in schools, as it boosts individual teacher performance, but also helps the entire institution perform better. Motivated teachers have increased chances of enhancing student learning and providing a supportive environment in the classroom, which eventually affects the

outcome of the students (Anderman et al., 2011; Pintrich, 2003). In this way, engagement in work is connected to the success of both the teacher and the students.

Improvements in the specific effects of trust and engagement is also reflected in the wider organisational outcomes. In the case where there is high organisational trust, the chances of the employees getting committed to the organisational goals are high, the chances of the employees indulging in harmful behaviours like absence or turnover are low, and the chances of indulging in Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (OCBs) are high. At schools, this means better teacher retention, increased collaboration between staff, and a stronger overall school culture (Moin & Hassan, 2021; Saleem et al., 2023). Trust in organisations can not only influence the individual performance of employees but also be a determining factor in the overall climate and performance of the school.

Moreover, the relationship of trust, engagement, and organisational performance in the educational environment is evident in the personality of teachers and how they conduct their practices (Liaqat et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2025). Trust helps in the development of shared responsibility and ownership among teachers. In cases where teachers believe their principals and colleagues trust them, they exercise initiative, contribute to decision-making processes, and develop a strong sense of responsibility for the school's success. This feeling of ownership leads to greater involvement in their work, as they become more concerned about the outcomes and are eager to contribute to the school's educational goals.

Finally, the effectiveness of a school remains strongly connected with trust and engagement. Authentic leadership helps the principals to develop trust among teachers, making them feel empowered, motivated, and committed to their jobs. In its turn, this results in the additional positive outcomes for students to the extent that active and supported teachers become good at their teaching process and can provide a qualitatively good and productive learning environment. Consequently, organisational trust and work engagement play preeminent roles in the success of schools, and they cue teacher satisfaction and student achievement (Mahmood et al., 2020; Aslam et al., 2024). Thus, in view of the above, the following research objectives were developed.

Research Objectives

- a. To investigate the impact of authentic leadership practices of principals on employees' organisational trust.
- b. To discover the effects of authentic leadership practices of principals on employees' work engagement.
- c. To explore the impact of organisational trust on employees' work engagement.

Research Questions

These research questions were formulated:

1. What is the relationship between the authentic leadership practices of principals and organisational trust among employees?
2. What is the relationship between the authentic leadership practices of principals and employees' work engagement?
3. What is the relationship between organisational trust and employees' work engagement?

Theoretical Framework

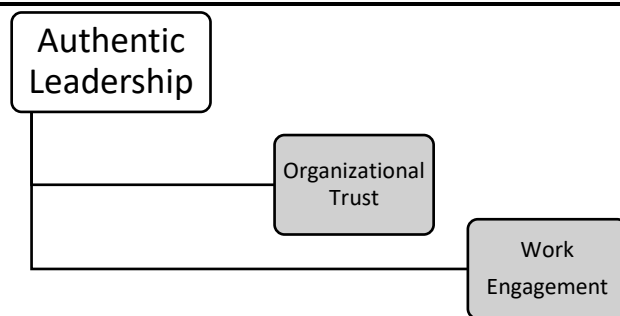
Among the latest and strongest leadership theories to emerge in the sphere of educational environments is the authentic leadership theory, which focuses on leaders being what they claim to stand by, believe in, and uphold with their moral upright values. The genuine leadership in schools focuses on leadership transparency, honesty and development of trust between the leaders and their followers. Such a model not only implies that the principal should

control the institution but also creates an atmosphere of openness and trust, in which teachers are appreciated and feel encouraged to participate in their job (Ali, 2014). The given approach can be well integrated into the increasingly widespread use of social-emotional learning, teacher well-being and the establishment of supportive school culture. Authentic leadership encourages principals to become more self-aware and lead the community with heart, being open in decision-making. This approach, in reality, creates a favourable working environment and a greater degree of trust and engagement among employees (Nawab & Asad, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

The present research was completed by using the research framework shown in Figure 1. According to this framework, there is one independent variable (authentic leadership) and two dependent variables (organisational trust and work engagement).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

This study used a correlational research design to collect quantitative data from respondents and investigate the relationship between authentic leadership, organizational trust, and work engagement. The target population of the present study included teachers of public high and higher secondary schools in the Gujrat Division of Punjab, Pakistan. The researcher used the purposive sampling method and selected 345 teachers from high and higher secondary schools representing all four districts of the Gujrat Division in Punjab. After reviewing the existing literature, the researcher developed a research tool in the form of a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. This questionnaire was used to collect teachers' responses regarding principals' authentic leadership practices, organizational trust, and work engagement. The content and construct validity of the questionnaire were confirmed through expert professionals in the fields of leadership and education. These professionals provided valuable feedback regarding the effectiveness, appropriateness, and relevance of the questions. Based on their recommendations, minor revisions were made to ensure the questions were clear, accurate, and aligned with the constructs to be measured, i.e., authentic leadership, organizational trust, and work engagement. A pilot study involving 20 teachers from high and higher secondary schools was also conducted to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha value was found to be $\alpha = 0.87$, indicating good internal consistency and suitability for large-scale data collection. The entire dataset was collected personally by the researcher, adhering to all ethical considerations during data collection. SPSS Version 26 was used to analyze the collected data, and mean scores, correlation, and regression analyses were applied to address the study objectives.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Demographic information of Respondents (n=345)

Demographic Variables	Category	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	203	58.8
	Female	142	41.2
Teaching Experience	1-5 years	68	19.7
	6-10 years	65	18.8
	11-15 years	68	19.7
	16-20 years	65	18.8
	More than 20	79	22.9
Educational Qualifications	Bachelor	85	24.6
	Masters	144	41.7
	Mphil or higher	116	33.6

Table 1 shows the gender, teaching experience, and educational qualifications of the study participants. The sample consists of variations from both genders. A total of 142 participants (41.2%) are female, while 203 participants (58.8%) are male, reflecting the gender distribution among the teachers surveyed. This shows that male representation was higher than female representation. This allocation ensures that the aspect of gender in the research study is well represented, allowing the results to provide a better understanding of leadership, trust, and engagement between the two genders.

Regarding teaching experience, the largest group of teachers, 79 participants (22.9%), have above 20 years of experience. A substantial number of teachers, 68 (19.9%), have between 1 to 5 years of experience, indicating a notable proportion of relatively new teachers. Additionally, 65 teachers (18.8%) have between 6 to 10 years of experience, and another 65 teachers (18.8%) have between 11 to 15 years of experience. The remaining group, 68 teachers (19.9%), have between 16 to 20 years of experience. This diversity in experience levels ensures that the study captures the views of both novice and experienced educators, providing a comprehensive analysis of leadership dynamics in schools.

Regarding educational qualifications, the majority of teachers hold Master's degrees, with 144 participants (41.7%) falling into this category. Eighty-five participants (24.6%) have a Bachelor's degree, and 116 participants (33.6%) have M.Phil. or higher qualifications. This demonstrates a comparatively high level of academic qualification among the respondents, ensuring that the sample population primarily comprises educated professionals capable of providing informed opinions on the objectives of the research.

Table 2: Correlation between Authentic Leadership, Organizational Trust and Work Engagement

Variable	Authentic Leadership	Organizational Trust	Work Engagement
Authentic Leadership	1		
Organizational Trust	0.787**	1	
Work Engagement	0.773**	0.797**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$ indicates a statistically significant correlation

Table 2 indicates the results of the correlation analysis that depict the association of authentic leadership, organizational trust, and work engagement in the domain of the present research. The Pearson correlation coefficients (*r*) help us understand the strength and direction of these

relationships. The correlation between authentic leadership and organizational trust is moderately positive ($r = 0.787$), with a p -value < 0.01 , indicating a statistically significant relationship. This implies that the greater the perceptions of authentic leadership, the greater the organizational trust on the teachers. The authentic leaders such as principals who value and target self-awareness, relations transparency, balanced processing, and moral perspective can help develop more trust within a team of teachers. This implies that the more principals can involve themselves in such practices that conform to the qualities of authentic leadership, the more the teachers will be trusting in them and this will imply positive work environment.

The correlation between authentic leadership and work engagement is also moderately positive ($r = 0.773$), with a p -value < 0.01 , suggesting a statistically significant relationship. This implies that educators who feel that their principals are genuine leaders will be in a better position to feel involved in their profession. Teachers with a higher level of trust and confidence in their principal's leadership are likely to invest more effort, energy, and commitment to their teaching roles. This is because of the significance of leadership in enhancing the motivation level of teachers and general work satisfaction.

The correlation between organizational trust and work engagement is strongly positive ($r = 0.779$), with a p -value < 0.01 , indicating a highly significant relationship. Such an impressive positive relationship indicates that in case of teacher trust towards their principals, there are high chances that they will become highly engaged in their work. When teachers have a sense of integrity, competence and fairness in their principals, they would have a feeling of purpose and dedication in teaching. The confidence that teachers have on their leaders brings about a high commitment, zeal and immersion in their work as teachers.

The correlation analysis points out the relationships between authentic leadership, organizational trust and work engagement. The results indicate that authentic leadership behaviors are crucial towards instilling trust in the experience of teachers, which, in any case, encourages the greater rates of work engagement. A principal with open, moral and competent leadership style have higher chances to establish trustful and inspiring atmosphere resulting in stronger involvement of the teachers in processes and better job satisfaction. These results underscore the significance of leadership in influencing teachers' work-related outcomes, emphasizing the need for schools to prioritize leadership development that aligns with authentic leadership principles to achieve positive organizational and teaching outcomes.

Regression Analysis I

RQ1: Impact of authentic leadership practices of principals on organizational trust.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.787	0.620	0.618	3.89954

The results of the regression analysis of Organizational Trust as the dependent variable indicate important findings that we can use to interpret how different leadership practices make a difference and lead to trust among members of the educational establishment. As indicated in Table 3 (Model Summary), the model explains 62.0% of the variance in Organizational Trust ($R^2 = 0.620$), with an Adjusted R^2 of 0.618, suggesting a good fit for the data. This means that Authentic Leadership also makes an impressive contribution to the building of trust in the educational setting. The standard error of the estimate is 3.89954 which shows that there is rather little deviation of the estimated values (the regression model) estimates.

Table 4: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7379.786	1	7379.786	485.307	0.000
Residual	4531.515	298	15.206		
Total	11911.301	299			

Additionally, the ANOVA Table 4 shows that the regression model is statistically significant, with an F-value of 485.307 and a p-value of 0.000, confirming that the leadership practices collectively predict organizational trust.

Table 5: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.711	0.934		5.045	0.000
	Authentic Leadership	0.863	0.039	0.787	22.030	0.000

Dependent Variable: Organizational Trust

In Table 5 (coefficients), the individual contributions of authentic leadership practices to organizational trust are presented. The unstandardized coefficient of the authentic leadership is 0.863, which means that everyone upsurge in the authentic leadership entails a 0.863 upsurge in organizational trust. Beta of the value of 0.787 and t value of 22.030 also establishes strong positive concurrent relationship between authentic leadership and organizational trust as a statistically significant relationship. These results indicate that the authentic leadership is significant in helping principals to instill a culture of trust in learning institutions, and that Authentic Leadership has been found to be a major factor that determines the level of trust among teachers in schools. Regression analysis indicates that there is a very strong and significant relationship between authentic leadership practices of principals and organizational trust among teachers. The results demonstrate that the leadership attributes of self-awareness, relational transparency, balancing of decision-making and a high moral attitude increase the root of trust in the academic setting. This emphasizes the need of authentic leadership in promoting an open and reliable school climate that will in turn enhance the overall performance and unity of teaching staff.

Regression Analysis II

RQ2: Impact of authentic leadership practices of principals on employees' work engagement.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.773	0.598	0.596	5.87340

The results of the multiple regression analysis of the work engagement as the dependent variable suggest some valuable information about the impact of the different leadership practices i.e. self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internal moral perspective. These results help assess how these leadership dimensions contribute to teachers' overall engagement in their work. Table 6 (model summary) shows a strong relationship between the independent variables (authentic leadership practices) and work engagement, with

an R value of 0.773. It means that these aspects are average to strong affected by each other. The R Square value of 0.598 indicates that the variable of work engagement can be explained by the leadership practices almost by 59.8 percent which translates to the fact that leadership is vital in enhancing work engagement. The good fit to the relationship and the use of the Adjusted R Square value of 0.596 would imply that the model has been adapted to the relationship without too much overfitting. Standard Error of the Estimate is 5.87340 and shows that there is good prediction accuracy.

Table 7: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	15269.673	1	15269.673	442.640	0.000
Residual	10280.060	298	34.497		
Total	25549.733	299			

The ANOVA of Table 7 shows that the regression model is statistically significant, with an F-value of 442.640 and a p-value of 0.000. This finding verifies that Authentic Leadership practices have a substantial effect on the prediction of engagement in work and the current model explaining the variance in the teacher engagement is adequate. The p-value of 0.000 indicates that the likelihood of these results occurring by chance is extremely low, further solidifying the model's validity.

Table 8: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.158	1.406		1.534	0.126
	Authentic Leadership	1.242	0.059	0.773	21.039	0.000

Dependent Variable: Work Engagement

Table 8 (Coefficients) presents the individual contributions of authentic leadership practices to work engagement. The unstandardized coefficient of authentic leadership is 1.242, and this is telling of the fact that with every unit increase in authentic leadership, the work engagement is going to increase by 1.242 units. The value of Beta that is obtained as 0.773 indicates that the leadership practices have a strong positive impact on work engagement with the t-value also being large and its p-value that is obtained as 0.000 less than 0.05 and hence it constitutes to a significant impact. Although the constant value is 2.158 with a t-value of 1.534, it is not statistically significant ($p = 0.126$), meaning that the baseline level of work engagement without any leadership influence is not a reliable predictor. The regressions analysis has established that the authentic leadership is indeed critical in boosting the work engagement among the teaching fraternity. Self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internal moral perspective are leadership practices that culminate to subsequent elevations in teachers motivation, dedication levels and general involvement in the job. These results serve as a testament to the role of principal leadership in establishing an organizational environment, which prompts the enhancement of employee engagement in education.

Regression Analysis III

RQ3: Impact of organizational trust on employees' work engagement.

Table 9: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.797	0.635	0.634	5.59520

The regression analysis conducted to assess the impact of organizational trust on employee engagement provides valuable insights into how various elements of organizational trust such as trust in integrity, competence, and fairness affect employees' emotional commitment, motivation, and overall involvement in their work. Table 4.19 (model summary) indicates a strong relationship between organizational trust and employee engagement with an R value of 0.797. That indicates that there is a moderate to a high level of relationship between the two variables. The R Square value of 0.635 means that 63.5% of the variance in work engagement can be explained by organizational trust, signifying a substantial effect of trust on employees' engagement. Adjusted R Square = 0.634, which states the fact that the model is a good fit to the data with little or no over fit to the data. The Standard Error of the Estimate is 5.59520 which is a good value and the average deviation between the observed and predicted values are very minimal.

Table 10: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	16220.475	1	16220.475	518.123	0.000
Residual	9329.258	298	31.306		
Total	25549.733	299			

Results of table 10 shows the F-value of 518.123 with a p-value of 0.000 further validates the significance of the model, indicating that Organizational Trust significantly influences Employee Engagement. The p-value of 0.000 supports this finding as it shows that results is statistically significant, that is, the possibility of getting such findings by chance is very low.

Table 11: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.080	1.305		1.593	0.112
	Organizational Trust	1.167	0.051	0.797	22.762	0.000

Dependent Variable: Work Engagement

The results of Table 11 (coefficients table) reveal the specific contribution of organisational trust to work engagement. Organisational trust's unstandardized coefficient is 1.167, indicating that with each unit increase in organisational trust, there is a corresponding increase of 1.167 units in work engagement. The Beta value of 0.797 and t-value of 22.762 indicate a strong positive relationship between the two variables, with a statistically significant effect ($p = 0.000$). This suggests that higher levels of trust within the organisation lead to a significant increase in employees' engagement in their work. The regression analysis also confirms that organisational trust is a vital concept that can contribute to improving employee engagement. The findings emphasise that the more employees feel they can trust within their organisation, the more motivated, committed, and passionate they become about their work. These results

highlight that building trust within an organisation is worthwhile to enhance employee performance, job satisfaction, and overall organisational success.

Based on tables 2 to 11, results revealed significant positive relationships among the key variables. Authentic leadership showed a moderately positive correlation with both organisational trust ($r = 0.787$, $p < 0.01$) and Work Engagement ($r = 0.773$, $p < 0.01$). Likewise, organisational trust and work engagement demonstrated a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.779$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analyses further supported these associations. Authentic leadership explained 62% of the variance in organisational trust ($R^2 = 0.620$), indicating a good model fit. Moreover, strong relationships were observed between authentic leadership and work engagement ($R = 0.773$) and between organisational trust and work engagement ($R = 0.797$). When both authentic leadership and organisational trust were considered together, they explained approximately 69% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = 0.6913$, $p = 0.000$), signifying a highly significant model.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed significant relationships among authentic leadership, organisational trust, and work engagement within the educational context. Authentic leadership demonstrated a moderate correlation with both organisational trust and work engagement, where organisational trust showed a strong correlation with work engagement. Regression analyses further indicated that authentic leadership accounted for 62% of the variance in organisational trust and, together with trust, explained 69% of the variance in work engagement. These findings highlight the substantial role of authentic leadership behaviours, particularly self-awareness, relational transparency, and an internalised moral perspective, in fostering trust and enhancing employee engagement among teachers.

The findings show that principals' self-awareness, relational transparency, and ethical decision-making are crucial for building trust within schools. Self-awareness allowed principals to reflect on strengths and weaknesses, creating openness and vulnerability that encouraged teachers to share opinions and participate in decision-making, fostering trust. Relational transparency, through clear communication about decisions and goals, further strengthened trust and a sense of belonging among teachers. Ethical leadership reinforced fairness and integrity, contributing to a supportive and equitable work environment. These results align with previous studies highlighting the role of authentic leadership in promoting trust and engagement (Adil & Khan, 2020; Abiodullah & Aslam, 2020; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Saeed & Hussain, 2021).

The regression results also confirmed the positive influence of authentic leadership on work engagement, consistent with the broader literature on leadership and employee motivation (Sarwar et al., 2022; Muhammad et al., 2023). Principals who exhibited self-reflection, open communication, and ethical conduct were found to create work environments conducive to teacher development and engagement. Self-awareness played a particularly critical role by allowing principals to align their leadership styles with the needs of their staff. When teachers perceived their leaders as understanding and empathetic, they reported greater satisfaction, motivation, and emotional investment in their work (Ansari & Asad, 2023; Rehman et al., 2010).

The strong correlation between trust and engagement supports the view that trust forms the psychological foundation for employee commitment and performance. Teachers who trusted their principals felt empowered and secure, which enhanced their willingness to contribute proactively and take ownership of school objectives (Hussain et al., 2022; Akbar et al., 2019). This finding underscores that trust functions as a motivational resource, enhancing teachers' engagement by fulfilling their needs for safety, fairness, and belonging (Basit & Siddiqui, 2020).

Conclusion

The study on the impact of principals' authentic leadership practices on organisational trust and employee work engagement has provided valuable insights into the dynamics of leadership within educational institutions. The results indicated significant positive relationships among the key variables. Authentic leadership was positively associated with both organisational trust and work engagement. Similarly, organisational trust and work engagement also showed a strong positive relationship. Regression analyses further supported these findings, demonstrating that authentic leadership significantly contributes to organisational trust and work engagement.

Additionally, when both authentic leadership and organisational trust are considered together, they substantially explain the variance in work engagement, highlighting the importance of these factors in fostering employee engagement and trust within organisations. Moreover, the research underscores the importance of authentic leadership practices in shaping the school environment and enhancing teacher engagement. Through practising self-awareness, maintaining relational transparency, and making ethical decisions, school principals can cultivate an environment of trust that significantly impacts the motivation, job satisfaction, and performance of teachers. As a result, educational leaders are encouraged to invest in their own authentic leadership development to create a culture of trust and collaboration that benefits both teachers and students, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes.

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