



Original Article

Effect of Principals' Self-Awareness as Authentic Leaders on Innovative Work Behaviour of Teachers at Higher Secondary School Level

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of principals' self-awareness as a core dimension of authentic leadership on teachers' innovative work behaviour at the higher secondary school level in Islamabad. Self-awareness enables leaders to understand their values, strengths, weaknesses, and emotional impact on others, thereby fostering trust and psychological safety within schools. Innovative work behaviour refers to the generation, promotion, and implementation of new instructional ideas that enhance teaching effectiveness. A quantitative survey research design was employed. The population comprised principals and teachers from public higher secondary schools in Islamabad. Using stratified random sampling, data were collected from principals and teachers through validated questionnaires. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis in SPSS. The findings revealed a significant positive effect of principals' self-awareness on teachers' innovative work behaviour. The results suggest that self-aware principals create supportive environments that encourage creativity, professional engagement, and instructional innovation. The study highlights the importance of leadership development programs focusing on self-awareness to enhance innovation in secondary education institutions.

Keywords: *Authentic Leadership, Higher Secondary Schools, Innovative Work Behaviour, Self-Awareness*

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays a vital role for an organization or institution to develop and progress. As they demand that leaders overcome challenges and collaborate with others to accomplish goals, leadership philosophies put an organization in a better position (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020). Authentic leadership is a leadership approach grounded in self-awareness, which involves understanding one's own strengths, weaknesses, values, and emotions. This deep self-knowledge enables leaders to act with honesty, consistency, and transparency in their interactions with others. By leading in alignment with their true values and principles, authentic leaders foster trust among team members and create a positive, productive, and psychologically safe work environment (Gardner & McCauley, 2022).

Employees who feel inspired and valued by self-aware and authentic leaders are more likely to display initiative, explore new solutions, and implement innovative ideas. Self-awareness in authentic leadership is not only vital for ethical and transparent decision-making but also plays a crucial role in cultivating a work environment that supports creativity, engagement, and continuous innovation (Bai et al., 2022). Authentic leadership fosters employee creativity, which drives innovative work behaviour, and this process is significantly enhanced when leaders use self-awareness. Authentic leaders who are Self-aware leaders are more likely to behave consistently and really with their employees because they have a strong understanding of their own strengths, emotions, and values. This honest conduct fosters an environment of openness and trust where workers feel psychologically secure enough to express their opinions, take initiative, and try out creative ideas (Laguna et al., 2019).

In the contemporary educational environment, schools are expected to support innovation in order to adapt to fast technological, social, and pedagogical changes. Teachers are required to provide students with curricular knowledge, but also to develop innovative instructional practices that improve student engagement and academic performance. This proactive approach is known as Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB), which entails the creation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas in the workplace. Teachers' creative work behaviour adds greatly to school success and ongoing development (Lu et al., 2025). Research reveals that innovation in schools is mostly dependent on organizational and leadership support systems that foster experimentation and creative problem-solving (Li et al., 2019). Leadership

has a significant impact on teachers' creative work behaviours. School principals shape the environment, culture, and professional dynamics of educational institutions. Supportive leadership behaviours such as consultation, empowerment, recognition, and resource facilitation dramatically increase teachers' desire to engage in innovative activities (Almessabi & Alhosani, 2024).

According to Zhou and Yusof (2024), Leadership support improves psychological safety and organizational environment, both of which are important determinants of creative work behaviour. As a result, knowing key leadership characteristics that promote teacher creativity is crucial for educational success. Amid the numerous leadership abilities, self-awareness has emerged as a critical component of effective leadership. Self-awareness refers to a leader's capacity to identify their own emotions, values, strengths, and shortcomings, as well as the influence of their actions on others. Authentic leadership theory considers self-awareness a vital component that supports transparency, ethical decision-making, and balanced information processing (Nair et al., 2022). In the current educational context, schools are expected to support innovation in order to adapt to fast technological, social, and pedagogical changes. Teachers are required not only to present curricular knowledge but also to develop innovative instructional practices that improve student engagement and academic performance. This proactive approach is known as IWB, which entails the creation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas in the workplace. Teachers' creative work behaviour adds greatly to school success and ongoing development (Miao et al., 2018).

Principals' self-awareness in educational settings impacts instructors via relational and psychological factors. Self-aware principals tend to display empathy, openness to criticism, and justice in administrative choices, strengthening teachers' trust and involvement. Self-aware leaders foster authenticity, which improves followers' attitudes and work practices (Nguyen et al., 2026). discovered that genuine leadership improves teachers' well-being and motivation, both of which are important predictors of creative work behaviour. When instructors see their leaders as thoughtful and open, they are more inclined to engage in discretionary behaviours like idea invention and execution. Zargar and Farmanesh (2026) found that the leadership-driven school atmosphere mediates the association between principal traits and teachers' creative work behaviour. Psychological safety, defined as the common sense that

it is safe to take interpersonal hazards, is a significant element driving teacher creativity.

Effective management has been shown to boost psychological safety, which leads to more inventive work behaviour. Principals that encourage cooperation and democratic decision-making create settings conducive to teacher creativity. Self-aware administrators are better equipped to foster such cultures since they are aware of how their actions affect teachers' confidence and creativity (Almessabi & Alhosani, 2024). Authentic leadership predicts teachers' creative work behaviour in secondary school settings. Their research found that when school leaders show self-awareness, openness, and ethical decision-making, teachers feel psychologically empowered and professionally valued. This sense of empowerment boosts instructors' confidence in generating new ideas, experimenting with teaching tactics, and implementing innovative solutions in the classroom. The findings also indicate that supportive and value-driven leadership promotes a healthy corporate atmosphere that supports creativity. As a result, real leadership is critical to increasing teacher motivation and creative practices inside educational institutions (Shao et al., 2025).

Zargar and Farmanesh (2026) found that Leadership authenticity has been verified to increase teachers' proactive involvement in innovative assignments. The study found that authentic leadership traits such as self-awareness, ethical integrity, and relational openness are critical in increasing teachers' professional commitment. When educational leaders show real care for teachers' growth, teachers are more likely to participate in new teaching techniques and academic activities. These findings emphasize the significance of leadership self-awareness in fostering creativity during important educational phases. As a result, genuine leadership helps to foster a good learning environment that promotes professional development, research involvement, and continual improvement in teaching and learning processes inside educational institutions.

Higher secondary schools in Islamabad function under established administrative structures, and leadership style has a significant impact on teacher performance and motivation. Although there has been extensive study in Pakistan on transformative and genuine leadership. Limited empirical research has focused on the component of principals' self-awareness and its direct impact on teachers' creative work behaviour. This study gap is significant because self-aware leadership fosters emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and professional trust in teachers. Examining this dimension in Islamabad's

higher secondary schools can give useful insights into improving leadership practices, encouraging teacher innovation, and promoting the creation of a more progressive and quality-focused educational environment (Shao et al., 2025). Given that self-awareness is important to the concept of genuine leadership, researching its specific contribution might give further insight into leadership development initiatives in Pakistani schools.

Self-awareness enables school leaders to understand their emotions, strengths, and shortcomings, hence improving decision-making and interpersonal interactions with teachers. Such a study is especially important in Islamabad, where educational reforms prioritize quality enhancement and pedagogical innovation. By investigating self-aware leadership, educational institutions may improve principal professional development programs and foster a healthy school atmosphere. This eventually boosts teacher motivation, fosters creative work behaviour, and improves teaching and learning results in upper secondary schools (Nguyen et al, 2026). Principals' self-awareness is an important leadership ability that affects school atmosphere, teacher motivation, and IWB. Self-aware administrators may better manage their emotions, reflect on their actions, and respond carefully to teachers' needs, promoting trust and professional respect in the school setting.

Contemporary research repeatedly shows that leadership authenticity, emotional intelligence, and psychological safety are key determinants of creative workplace behaviour. When instructors believe their leaders are real, truthful, and ethically sound, they feel emboldened to take the initiative and apply innovative teaching approaches. As a result, increasing administrators' self-awareness can be a strategic method to promote creativity, boost teacher engagement, and improve overall educational quality in upper secondary schools (Nguyen et al, 2026; Miao et al., 2018; Zhou & Yusof, 2024; Zargar & Farmanesh, 2026). Authentic leadership predicts teachers' IWB in secondary school settings, especially when they feel empowered and professionally respected. When school leaders are self-aware, transparent, and ethical, they provide a supportive climate that boosts teachers' confidence and professional identity. Such leadership characteristics enable instructors to try new teaching tactics, collaborate on problem solving, and provide innovative ideas to improve student learning results. Still, sentiments of empowerment and praise boost instructors' intrinsic drive, which fosters more inventive practices. As a result, genuine leadership is crucial in

creating a good school atmosphere that encourages and sustains creativity, professional growth, and continual improvement (Shao et al., 2025).

Self-awareness enables educational leaders to lead with integrity, empathy, and justice because they are better able to comprehend their own emotions and capabilities. By being genuine, they are able to establish connections with teachers that are trustworthy and encouraging, fostering an environment at work where teachers feel appreciated and inspired. Teachers are encouraged to try out innovative methods of instruction and adopt creative work practices in an environment that promotes transparency, teamwork, and innovation (Asim et al., 2023). In Pakistani schools, self-aware leaders are essential in encouraging teachers' creativity and professional development. One essential element of genuine leadership that has a big impact on Pakistani teachers' creative work practices is self-awareness. Self-conscious school leaders are able to act consistently and honestly as they are aware of their own strengths, values, and emotions. Teachers feel more encouraged and inspired to innovate in their teaching methods when they believe their leaders are authentic and self-aware (Niazi & Arshad, 2022).

Problem Statement

Principals who are self-aware as authentic leaders can foster an environment of honesty that encourages teachers to exhibit IWB, generate new ideas, explore, support, and apply new ideas in the classroom. This study aimed to assess the effect of principals' self-awareness as authentic leaders on IWB of teachers at higher secondary school level.

Objective

- To identify the principals' self-awareness as authentic leaders at higher secondary school level
- To assess the IWB of teachers at higher secondary school level
- To investigate the effect of principals' self-awareness as authentic leaders on IWB of teachers at higher secondary school level

Hypotheses

- H₁: There is statistically no significant effect of principals' self-awareness as authentic leaders on IWB of teachers at higher secondary school level

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-awareness involves understanding one's own knowledge, abilities, habits, values, views,

interests, and ambitions. Authentic leaders must hold themselves responsible for ethical leaders regularly and recognize their responsibilities. Developing self-awareness involves constant psychological, moral, and inspirational changes. Positive self-affirmation of talents, such as work completion, team management, emotional control, creativity, and self-discipline, boosts leaders' confidence in their goals (Walumbwa et al., 2008). According to De Jong and Den Hartog (2010), IWB refers to the process of Idea Exploration, Idea Generation, Idea Championing, and Idea Implementation in work workplace. Innovation involves identifying opportunities, developing ideas, securing support, and implementing them. IWB is essential for continuous improvement and organizational success (Černe et al., 2013). As leaders display authenticity, transparency, and justice, they foster a trusting environment that lets employees feel psychologically secure sharing new ideas and taking creative risks. Such leadership eliminates the fear of failure and fosters mutual respect, encouraging creativity. Self-awareness is an essential component of authentic leadership that promotes creative work behaviour. Leaders who are self-aware understand their own beliefs and emotions, allowing them to lead with authenticity and consistency.

This authenticity builds trust and psychological safety among workers, motivating them to share innovative ideas (Zhou & Yusof, 2024). Authentic leaders generate creativity by cultivating workers' psychological capital, which includes hope, optimism, confidence, and resilience. These positive feelings encourage instructors to overcome problems and use innovative teaching strategies (Niu et al., 2018). Self-awareness is an essential attribute in which leaders recognize their own ideals, strengths, and how their actions influence others. It helps leaders understand themselves better, but it does not directly motivate teachers to act creatively. Self-awareness is important but insufficient by itself to enhance IWB among teachers (Sharif et al., 2023). Leadership plays a key role in encouraging teachers to engage in creative work behaviours.

Supportive and enabling leaders provide an environment in which instructors are encouraged to voice new ideas and experiment with various teaching approaches. Effective leadership gives teachers with direction, recognition, motivating them to solve problems creatively. Leaders who demonstrate openness, trust, and clear communication assist instructors gain confidence in taking creative approaches. Overall, the study found that strong,

supportive leadership is critical for encouraging creative work behaviour and improving instructional innovation in schools (Baharuddin et al., 2019). Authentic leaders encourage open communication, collaboration, and mutual learning among employees. Such leaders create supportive environments where individuals exchange ideas freely, leading to greater innovation. Social informal learning acts as a bridge between authentic leadership and creativity (Ullah et al. 2025).

When teachers collaborate effectively and share ideas, they become more creative and open to innovation. Principal support was identified as a key factor, as supportive leaders encourage experimentation and value teachers' contributions. Effective leadership plays a unique role by reducing stress, improving relationships, and fostering a positive atmosphere that promotes creativity. These factors create an environment where teachers feel confident to introduce and implement new teaching methods. Schools that promote teamwork and supportive leadership are more likely to cultivate teachers who think innovatively (Johari et al. 2021; Li et al., 2020). IWB as employees' ability to generate, promote, and implement new ideas in the workplace. Their study found that leadership style and organizational support positively influence employees' IWB. Employees with higher engagement and confidence in their abilities tend to show greater innovation.

Leadership in educational institutions has a considerable impact on teacher motivation, professionalism, and creative methods. In recent years, genuine leadership has evolved as a vital leadership paradigm that encourages ethical conduct, openness, and self-awareness in corporate settings. Authentic leadership is defined as a pattern of leader conduct that includes self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and an internalized moral stance (Nguyen et al, 2026). Self-awareness is commonly recognized as the core characteristic of genuine leadership because it influences leaders' ability to manage emotions, reflect on personal strengths and limits, and make morally sound. Leaders with high self-awareness may better link their principles with their actions, increasing credibility and trust among followers. Principals who exhibit high levels of self-awareness in schools promote open communication, fairness, and mutual respect. Such environments foster psychological safety, allowing teachers to freely express ideas and experiment with new instructional approaches without fear of being judged.

IWB is the purposeful process by which individuals

develop, promote, and apply unique ideas that help to increase organizational performance. In educational settings, this involves using innovative teaching tactics, incorporating technology, developing new evaluation methods, and launching school improvement initiatives (Zhou & Yusof, 2024). Miao et al. (2018) found that authentic leadership promotes innovative behaviour by fostering psychological empowerment and trust in leadership. Their research found that when leaders are transparent and ethically consistent, people feel more comfortable sharing new ideas and experimenting with creative solutions. This technique is especially important in educational settings, where instructors may be hesitant to implement novel methods owing to fear of criticism or administrative conservatism. Principals that are self-aware and introspective are better able to provide psychological safety, which acts as a stimulus for creativity.

According to Nguyen et al. (2026), self-awareness improves leadership authenticity by harmonizing ideals, actions, and decisions. Leaders who understand their own strengths, limitations, and emotional triggers are better equipped to exhibit openness and ethical consistency. This alignment promotes trust, open communication, and mutual respect inside the business. In educational institutions, such leadership skills develop teachers' professional identities and foster a collaborative atmosphere. When teachers believe their leaders are authentic and ethically sound, they feel psychologically protected and professionally supported. As a result, they are more ready to engage in IWB, such as trying out new teaching approaches and proposing creative solutions. The link between authentic leadership and IWB is examined, with a focus on the mediating function of psychological safety. The outcomes indicated that authentic leadership generates a work climate in which people feel safe enough to take chances and propose innovative ideas without fear of being judged.

In upper secondary schools, innovation frequently necessitates instructors departing from established instructional approaches and using current teaching technology. Such adjustments necessitate a supportive and empathetic leadership style. Principals that are self-aware are more likely to promote introspection, offer constructive comments, and view failures as learning opportunities, which keeps instructors motivated to engage in new methods (Zhou & Yusof, 2024). Leadership authenticity enhances teachers' constructive participation in innovation-related activities. Teachers who worked under real leaders indicated greater initiative, inventiveness, and professional participation

in school activities. The findings also revealed that self-awareness, a key component of genuine leadership, improves administrators' capacity to comprehend teachers' needs, expectations, and professional goals. Principals build a sense of trust and empowerment by recognizing teachers' achievements and reacting to their concerns in an empathic and fair manner.

This encouraging atmosphere enables instructors to take responsibility for their work and actively engage in creative techniques that improve teaching and learning achievements (Zargar & Farmanesh, 2026). Miao et al. (2018) argued that authentic leaders have deep emotional relationships with their followers, which boosts organizational loyalty and intrinsic drive. When leaders display openness, empathy, and ethical consistency, their people feel appreciated and respected. Teachers who receive emotional support from their administrators are more willing to put in extra effort to develop innovative teaching practices and participate in joint research activities. This viewpoint is consistent with modern perspectives emphasizing the need for emotional intelligence in effective educational leadership. Emotionally intelligent and authentic principals create adaptive school climates that promote creativity, resilience, and ongoing innovation in teaching and learning approaches.

Given the expanding global evidence supporting the importance of authentic leadership in encouraging innovation, little empirical research has been conducted on principals' self-awareness as an independent predictor of teachers' IWB in Pakistani upper secondary schools. Most local research has focused on positive or real leadership styles, without recognizing self-awareness as a significant trait (Shao et al., 2025). Authentic leaders promote creativity by boosting their colleagues' psychological capital, which includes hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience. When leaders display transparency, ethical consistency, and self-awareness, they foster favourable psychological states among their followers. Positive emotions boost instructors' confidence in their talents and inspire them to persevere in the face of adversity. In educational contexts, teachers with greater levels of psychological capital are more inclined to experiment

with novel teaching techniques, incorporate innovative technology, and use creative problem-solving approaches. Such supportive leadership settings enable instructors to overcome professional challenges and actively participate in new teaching approaches (Niu et al., 2018).

Authentic leaders demonstrate integrity, openness, and a strong sense of purpose. Self-awareness, a key component of authentic leadership, involves leaders understanding their own values, abilities, and flaws. Self-aware leaders understand how their actions affect people and the working environment. This awareness enables them to make transparent decisions and build trust among the employees (Khan et al., 2017). When leaders act with fairness, honesty, and integrity, employees feel trusted and motivated to share creative ideas. Leaders create a positive environment that supports learning and innovation. The study also emphasizes the need to explore other leadership styles, such as authentic leadership, for broader insights (Liu et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This was a quantitative study, and the survey method was used to collect the data. The population of the study was principals and teachers of all higher secondary schools. There were a sample of 19 principals and 285 teachers at a higher secondary school in Islamabad. The study was delimited to all public sectors of higher secondary schools in Islamabad (1st year and 2nd year). A stratified random sampling technique was used in this study. An adapted questionnaire was used in this study, and three experts validated the questionnaire. Five-point Likert scale was used. The reliability of the questionnaire for principals was .937, and the reliability of the questionnaire of teachers was .903. Descriptive and influential statistics were applied through SPSS to analyse the collected data.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the findings in the form of descriptive statistics. The mean score of self-awareness was 3.51 and the mean score of authentic leadership was 3.77.

Table 1
Authentic Leadership of Heads (N=19)

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Remarks
Authentic Leadership	.377	Agree
Self-awareness	3.51	Agree

Table 2 shows the mean scores of teachers' IWB. The

overall mean value of IWB is 3.89.

Table 2
Teachers' IWB (N=260)

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Remarks
IWB	3.89	Agree
Idea Exploration	3.86	Agree
Idea generation	3.95	Agree
Idea championing	3.98	Agree
Idea Implementation	3.78	Agree

Table 3 demonstrates a correlation between self-awareness and IWB (n = 260), with regression coefficient values at Beta value = .790, and t= 4.205 at p-value.000 reflecting this relationship. Additionally,

the R² value at .510 shows that there is variation in a single element of self-awareness as a result of applying IWB to the extent of 51%.

Table 3
Self-Awareness of Teachers' IWB (n=260)

B	t- value	Sig.	R Square
.790	4.205	.001	.510
**P< 0.01"			
"P< 0.05"			

Discussion

Self-awareness is a key component of authentic leadership, which includes leaders' comprehensive awareness of their own strengths, flaws, ideals, and the way their conduct impacts others. The study's favourable findings corroborate. Self-aware leaders build more transparent, ethical, and supportive work cultures. Leaders with strong self-awareness are better able to control their behaviours, connect decisions with internal beliefs, and respond constructively to followers' demands (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Self-awareness has a favourable influence on IWB, indicating the psychological underpinning that enables long-term innovation at the individual level. Self-aware employees are more confident in providing ideas, more resilient in the face of criticism, and more able to adjust their behaviour throughout the implementation phase. This understanding enables them to better connect their creative efforts with company goals and respond positively to input (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010).

Employees' inventive work behaviour is determined by how they perceive and manage various forms of stress, namely challenge and hindrance stress. While self-awareness was not specifically investigated, it is a key underlying psychological factor in this process. Employees that are self-aware are better able to detect their emotional states, stress levels, and coping abilities, allowing them to see challenging stress as an opportunity for growth rather than a danger. This knowledge encourages flourishing at work, which is defined by learning and energy, hence enhancing

inventive work behaviour. Self-awareness, on the other hand, might exacerbate emotional weariness under stressful situations, decreasing creativity and inventiveness. Self-awareness indirectly promotes IWB by allowing individuals to efficiently manage stress, maintain energy, and remain open to new ideas and execution (Xie et al., 2024). Leaders who exhibit sincerity, openness, and fairness create a trusting atmosphere in which workers feel comfortable expressing new ideas and taking creative risks. Such leadership removes the fear of failure and encourages mutual respect, which promotes creativity. Self-awareness is a necessary component of authentic leadership, and this encourages IWB.

Self-aware leaders understand their own thoughts and feelings, allowing them to lead authentically and consistently. This authenticity fosters trust and psychological safety among employees, encouraging them to share new ideas (Zhou & Yusof, 2024). Self-aware leaders are critical for fostering teachers' creativity and professional growth. Self-awareness is an important aspect of authentic leadership that has a significant influence on the creative work practices of Pakistani teachers. Self-conscious school leaders can behave consistently and honestly because they understand their own abilities, values, and emotions. Teachers are motivated and inspired to innovate in their teaching approaches when they perceive their leaders are authentic and self-aware (Saeed & Ali, 2019). The study discovered that self-awareness, as a key component of genuine leadership, has a favourable

and significant impact on innovative workplace behaviour. Leaders with great self-awareness see their own talents, limitations, values, and emotions, allowing them to behave consistently and openly. This true conduct instils trust and psychological safety in workers, enabling them to produce, discuss, and adopt new ideas. Studies also show that self-aware leaders create a supportive corporate culture that values openness and learning, which reinforces creative work behaviour. In general, self-awareness promotes creativity by establishing a climate in which people feel comfortable experimenting and taking initiative (Indrayanti & Ulfia, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The current study identifies self-awareness as authentic leadership at the secondary school level as essential for developing an innovative, successful, and equitable educational system. Establish a culture of trust, cooperation, and continuous development, allowing teachers to innovate and thrive, eventually improving students' educational experiences and outcomes. This leadership style is critical for educating students to face future problems and opportunities while also contributing to the general growth and success of the educational system. It was concluded that the authentic leadership of heads at higher secondary school level contributes transparent educational environment and had genuine connection with their followers. Teachers possess a tendency of IWB at higher secondary school level. So the authentic leadership of heads had a significant effect on teachers' IWB at higher secondary school level. This study shows that employees' IWB can be predicted by authentic leadership. Employee IWB is positively correlated with authentic leadership.

Recommendations

School heads may design and implement specialized professional development programs tailored to the needs of improving the work behaviour of higher secondary school teachers. Heads of higher secondary schools may facilitate the teachers to use creative and student-centred methods in class room. The study focused only on the higher secondary school level; therefore, future research can be conducted at the higher education level. Further studies may also be extended to universities and colleges in different countries to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Future research may also focus on transformational leadership and its relationship or effect on IWB in higher education institutions.

Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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