

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

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Effective communication is one critical characteristics of effective and successful school principal. Research on effective schools and instructional leadership emphasizes the impact of principal leadership on creating safe and secure learning environment and positive nurturing school climate. This paper was designed to study the relationship between effective communication of high school principal's and school climate. Two instruments were used to measure school climate and communication effectiveness between principals and teachers. Participants were 555 students (293 males and 262 females) and 208 teachers (107 males and 208 females) from Abu Dhabi District, UAE. Results indicated that school climate is positively associated with principal's communication effectiveness. Better climate school was expected in schools where effective communication between school principal and his/her teachers exists. In addition, schools were found to be different in their principal's communication effectiveness and on their climate especially on Security and Maintenance and Instructional Management. Significant differences were also observed between males and females for the advantages of female schools on Security and Maintenance, Student Behavioral Values, Student-Peer Relationships, and Instructional Management. On the other hand, communication between principals and teachers in male schools was more effective than that in female schools.

## **Introduction**

A key element of an effective school is an effective principal (Whitaker, 1989). Although school success is influenced by many people, school principals remain one of the most important factors in this success. Research on effective schools, school restructuring, and instructional leadership point to the impact of principal leadership on student learning and improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). The effect of the principal on student learning cannot be overemphasized. Establishing safe and secure learning environment and positive,

nurturing school climate are merely the first steps in a long series of critically high expectations effective principals set for themselves, as well as the educational communities they lead. Most important, however, is the love for learning and students, which is at the heart of every successful principal (Cotton, 2004). Principals play important role in establishing school discipline, both by effective administration and by personal example. Effective principals are liked and respected, rather than feared, and communicate caring for students as well as willingness

to impose punishment if necessary (NAESP 1983).

Teachers' satisfaction with school discipline policy is related to their relationship with the principal (Duckworth, 1984). Good communication and shared values are important elements in this relationship. Student achievement is likely to be greatest where teachers and administrators work together (Buffie, 1989). Ideally, a principal should be able to create consensus among staff on rules and their enforcement. The principal must have knowledge and understanding of effective communication strategies. Creating a collaborative environment and open communication has been described as the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives. Good communicators are good listeners. Experts in communications rate poor listening as the number-one problem in human relationships. Principals may want to improve their communication by improving their listening skills.

School climate affects principal's effectiveness. It also interferes with outcomes for teachers and students. Improvement in school climate enhances the principal's effectiveness, teacher's performance, and students' achievement and behavior. This improvement, however, only occurs if the principal, teachers, and students are empowered. Principals must model behaviors consistent with the school's vision and develop a clear purpose in the school, so that student achievement can improve. They must identify and implement instructional strategies that will result in achieving the school's vision and mission (Korir & Karr-Kidwell, 2000).

Schools are multi-faceted organizations. Achieving and sustaining a high quality institution within a complex environment demands that the principal, as school leader, possess a wide range of leadership capabilities (Achilles, 1987). Today, efforts are underway to improve the fragmented approach to principal preparation. Increasingly, people are recognizing that if educational leaders are to better serve schools and students in our rapidly changing society, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they possess must be different than those reflected in traditional educational administration curricula. Successful school reform cannot take place apart from a better understanding of school leadership (Daresh & Barnett, 1993).

Yet, little is known about how principal-teachers good communication can positively affect school climate. This paper is designed to study the relationship between effective communication high school principals' and school climate. Research in this area should increase the principals' awareness of the need for keeping an open climate and good communication with their teachers and staff.

### **Review of the Literature**

For schools to be effective a high level of satisfaction must exist among all the players of the school. Faculty and staff must have a role in the decision making process in the school. Students must believe in the faculty and feel good about what the school is doing. No change or improvement can take place without the teacher. The principal who does not organize and use his/her staff will truly be

lonely and unsuccessful. These people have skills and knowledge in specific subject areas as well as a basic need to be a part of something. It is a mistake when the principal does not cultivate these individuals to assist in planning (Brown, 1985).

According to Beck and Murphy (1993), "Principals were assumed to be more like business executive, using good management and social science research to run schools effectively and efficiently." (p. 2). Cordeiro (1994) claims that most research on the principalship has not captured the themes which bind successful principals together with their schools; however, she encourages principals to be generalists, developing their abilities to collaboratively distribute and coordinate leadership opportunities. Strengthening aspiring principals' conflict resolution skills, face-to-face communication skills, as well as the emotional demands of the principalship are key issues in effective and successful school principal (Anderson, 1991). A profile of an effective principal can be created by considering his or her role in human relations. Effective principals recognize the unique styles and needs of teachers and help them achieve their own performance goals. They encourage and acknowledge good work by teachers (Murphy, 1983).

Guskey (2003) analyzed 13 of the lists of the characteristics of effective school principal which was published by the U.S. Department of Education and found that individual characteristics vary widely in their frequency of inclusion in the lists. The most frequently mentioned characteristics of effective professional development is enhancement of teachers

content and pedagogic knowledge. Research also shows that professional development based on higher order thinking skills within a subject can be particularly effective (Wenglinsky, 2000).

Stable and supportive administrative leadership was the "overriding factor" determining whether a discipline program was effective. Schools that successfully implemented a pilot program experienced distinct improvements in discipline (Gottfredson & others, 1989). It may not be an overstatement to suggest that a principal is not fully equipped if he or she does not have a deep understanding of human learning. Recent research in cognitive science has produced a wealth of knowledge about human learning. It is crucial that principals know and understand these theories so that they may serve as a resource in enhancing instructional effectiveness. Principals also need to be equipped with the knowledge of technology integration in teaching and learning. Principals are looked upon as leaders who will inspire teachers to adopt innovative pedagogies in the classroom (Mendez-Morse, 1991).

The role of the principal as an instructional leader is outlined by (Brewer & Blasé, 2001) as "one that focusing on instruction; building a community of learners; sharing decision making; supporting ongoing professional development for all staff members; and creating climate of integrity, inquiry, and continuous improvement." Effective school researchers hold that a key element of an effective school is an effective principal (Whitaker, 1997). There is a relationship between positive school climate and increased student achievement. The principal's performance

influences student achievement, including cognitive behavior, through the mediating influence of school climate (Korir & Karr-Kidwell, 2000).

The visible principal has the opportunity to model his or her beliefs and to promote a positive instructional climate-major leadership behaviors of effective principals. Principals who create an exciting and reinforcing learning environment will find that students and teachers will want to do needs to be done (Krug, 1992). Effective principals engage in efforts to manage curriculum and instruction, managing with a focus on education-related rather than administrative-related issues. This can be done by providing the knowledge and information, materials and supplies that support the work of teachers and staff members as they go about accomplishing the mission of the school. Villa, (1992) concluded that effective principals also promote an instructional climate that strongly values and reinforces learning and achievement. The school climate is established as interest, concern, and support for all students. It is most important that principals articulate goals, timelines, and procedures to promote change and foster a climate of unity.

The literature reviewed showed that schools to be effective there must be a high level of satisfaction among all the players of the school. Faculty and staff must have a role in the decision making process of the school. Students must believe in the faculty and feel good about what the school is doing. This study attempted to study the relationship between effective communication of high school principal's and school climate. In addition, this relationship was

compared among schools and between male and female.

## Method

### *Instruments*

Two instruments were used in this study. The first was the Evaluation of School Climate (The Evaluation Center, 2005) which was designed to assess school climate by secondary students. The instrument consisted of 42 items into 8 categories: Teacher-Student Relations (12 items), Security and Maintenance (5 items), Student Academic Orientation (4 items), Student Behavioral Values (3 items), Guidance (4 items), Students-Peer Relationships (4 items), Instructional Management (7 items), and Students Activities (3 items) (See Appendix A). Each item was measured using a Likert scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" (1 point) to "strongly agree" (5 points). The second instrument was designed to measure communication effectiveness between school principals and teachers (Rafferty, 2003). This instrument consisted of 16 Liker-type items that ranged from "strongly disagree" (1 point) to "strongly agree" (5 points) (see Appendix B). In addition, necessary demographic information was collected from participants.

### *Participants*

The study was conducted at Abu Dhabi District, United Arab Emirates (UAE). There were 23 high schools in Abu Dubai District (11 for males and 12 for females). Six schools were selected randomly (three males and three females) to participate in this study. To keep the names of schools

confidential, the schools were coded as Males 1, Males 2, and Males 3 for male schools, and Females 1, Females 2, and Females 3 for female schools. Around 90 students from each school participated in this study by responding to the climate school survey. The total was 555 students (293 males and 262 females). The average age of students was 17.2 years. For the second instrument, around 35 teachers from each school of the six schools with a total of 208 (107 males and 101 females) participated in this study by responding to the principal's communication effectiveness survey. The average experience in teaching for these teachers was 15.9 years.

#### *Procedure*

Reliability of the two instruments used in this study was assessed through calculating both internal and split-half reliability. For the climate school survey, the internal reliability for each of the seven categories in the survey was also calculated. Relationship between school climate and principal's effective communication was assessed by comparing the results of students' responses on the school climate survey with the results of teachers' responses on the effective communication survey on the corresponding school. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare schools and an independent t-test was used to compare male and female schools.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### *Reliability Analysis*

The overall internal reliability of the school climate survey using Cronbach's alpha was .85, while the Guttman split-

half reliability coefficient was .83. In addition, the internal reliability of each of the eight categories in the survey was also calculated and values ranged from .52 to .81. Considering that reliability is a function of number of items in an instrument and that number of items is few in some categories, the school climate survey and its categories were considered internally reliable. As for the effective communication survey, the internal reliability was .94, while the Guttman split-half reliability coefficient was .89.

#### **School Climate and Principal Communication Effectiveness**

School climate in each school was measured by averaging student's responses on the school climate survey. Averages as well as number of students from each school are shown in Table 1. The principal's communication effectiveness was assessed by averaging teacher responses on the effectiveness communication survey. Results and number of teachers for each school are shown in the same table. All mean values for responses on the school climate survey were little above the theoretical average of the scale. This indicated that, generally, school climate in these schools as assessed by students was of moderate situation or level. Although, there is no criterion or standard at the country level to compare with, these results can be seen as indicators that climate in these schools should be improved. Improving school climate is the responsibility of school principal, teachers, staff, and others. An important role to consider here is that of principals. Principals must model behaviors consistent with the school's vision and

Table 1  
Mean and Standard Deviations of Responses on both Instruments

School	No. of Students	School Climate		No. of Teachers	Principal's Communication	
		Mean	SD		Mean	SD
Males 1	95	3.00	.62	29	3.82	.72
Males 2	100	3.41	.65	41	4.47	.36
Males 3	98	3.12	.61	37	4.26	.60
Females 1	100	3.54	.51	40	3.97	.60
Females 2	97	3.21	.49	37	3.13	.69
Females 3	65	3.42	.44	24	3.84	.53

develop a clear purpose in their schools. As for principal's effectiveness in the studied schools, most of the mean values were well above the theoretical average of the scale. This indicated a high level of effective communication between principals and teachers in most of these schools. As noted in the review of the literature, teachers satisfaction with school discipline policy is related to their relationship with the principal (Duckworth, 1984). Good communication and shared values are important elements in this relationship.

By comparing the mean values of student's responses with those of teachers in each school in Table 1, a fixed pattern can be observed. The high values for school climate were associated with high values of principal's communication effectiveness. This pattern was true over the six schools. This of course is not a cause-effect relationship, but rather indicates that better climate school is expected in schools where effective communication between school principals and his/her teachers exists. This result supported what has been

observed in the literature about the important relationship between effective communication of high school principal and school climate. As noted by Buffie (1989), principals who have knowledge and understanding of effective communication strategies positively affect on the school climate. In addition, creating a collaborative environment and open communication has been described as the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives.

#### Comparing Schools

To get more information about the climate in each school and to compare it with that of other schools, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using the eight categories (subscales) in the school climate survey as the dependent variables. Because there were several comparisons and to control on Type I error, hypotheses were statistically tested at .01 level of significance. Results were summarized in Table 2. Schools were found to be different on the eight climate categories or

subscale that make the over all school climate. Although all differences were statistically significant, F-test values were different among these categories. The smallest difference among schools was on Guidance and Student-Peer Relationships. This showed how teaching goes beyond transmitting knowledge to students. Teachers and counselors understand that high school students are mature so they encourage them to think about their future and help them to plan for future classes and for future jobs. In addition to that, students at this age need to get advice and help for their personal problem. High school students behave in a more mature way and have a sense of belonging to their school. They respect and care about each other and become aware of the important the relationship among them.

The biggest difference among schools was on Security and Maintenance and Instructional Management. According to (Murphy, 1983) principals should be systematic about getting around the school each day so they had a chance to observe however briefly, all aspects of the school's functioning. Principals should visit all the different subsettings within their school. This is very important for the principals because it gives them a chance to assess how well their school is running and go to catch in the bud any potential problems. Gottfredson (1984) pointed out that careful planning and the implementation of sound programs can lead to safer schools. If principals diagnosis is that the school is unsafe because of a lack of clear rules and firm rule enforcement, their goal might be to increase safety by making sure the rules

are understood by all and consistently and fairly enforced.

An analysis of variance was used also to compare schools on their responses on the principal's communication survey. The result was also significant ( $F(5, 169) = 19.36, P < .001$ ) which indicated that schools were different in their principal's communication effectiveness. All the principals should understand the role of effective communication on their jobs. They also should increase their awareness of the need for keeping an open climate and good communication with their teachers and staff.

To compare between male and female schools on their school climate, an independent t-test was conducted on each of the 8 categories of the school climate survey. Again, to control on Type I error, level of significance was set at .01. The results are shown in Table 2.

Significant differences were observed between males and females on Security and Maintenance, Student Behavioral Values, Student-Peer Relationships, and Instructional Management. In each of these categories, school climate in female schools was better than that in the male schools. Although environment is the same for males and females schools in the UAE, these differences might due to the nature of females either staff or students who like to keep the school building clean and neat. As for Student Behavior, Student-Peer Relations, and Instructional Management, it is difficult to conclude from the available data why there are differences between males and female students on these categories.

Table 2  
Comparisons among Schools and between Males and Females

Category (Subscale)	F-test	Sig.	T-test	Sig.
Teacher-Student Relations	6.70	.000	0.58	.559
Security and Maintenance	14.04	.000	3.21	.001
Student Academic Orientation	6.28	.000	2.55	.021
Student Behavioral Values	5.62	.000	3.74	.000
Guidance	3.54	.004	0.51	.608
Student-Peer Relationships	4.00	.001	4.12	.000
Instructional Management	10.75	.000	4.93	.000
Student Activities	4.54	.000	1.42	.157

When comparing between male and female schools on the principal communication effectiveness, the overall mean of males responses was 4.20 while the overall females responses was 3.61. This difference was statistically significant ( $t = 5.78, p < .001$ ). This means that communication in male schools is more effective than that of females. Andrews (1965) noted a positive correlation between principal personality and leadership style and the overall openness or "closedness" of school climate. That is, open climate schools tended to have confident, cheerful, sociable, and resourceful principals, while principals in closed climate schools tended to be evasive, traditional, worried, and frustrated. Dukess (2001) asserted that principals must have sound records of success. They need very strong interpersonal skills; they should be good listeners and effective communicators who can speak the truth. Principals need a variety of supports to help them on their way to success. While there is a great deal of professional development that can be offered to groups and much of this is critical to a principal being

able to lead a school there is also some support that can best be provided on a one-to-one basis.

There is no question that the job of school principal is difficult, multi-faceted, and extremely demanding. Principal also is key element in creating effective school climate where student learn, improve, grow, and achieve their goals efficiently. Creating a collaborative environment and open communication is a critical factor for successful school improvement. The results of this study emphasis the importance of effective communication between principals and teachers in schools. School climate was found to be positively associated with principal's communication effectiveness. Better climate school was expected in schools where effective communication between school principals and his/her teachers exists.



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**Appendix A**  
**School Climate Survey**

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**Teacher-Student Relations**

1. Students treated individually
2. Teachers greet students in the hallway
3. Students willing to go to teachers with personal and academic problems
4. Teachers give students the grades they deserve
5. Teachers in this school like their students
6. Teachers help students to be friendly and kind to each other
7. Teachers patient when students have trouble learning
8. Teachers make extra efforts to help students
9. Teachers understand and meet the needs of each student
10. Students receive praise more than they are scolded by their teachers
11. Teachers are fair to students
12. Teachers explain carefully so that students can get their work done

**Security and Maintenance**

13. Students usually feel safe in the school building
14. Classrooms usually clean and neat
15. The school building kept clean and neat
16. The school building kept in good repair
17. The school grounds neat and attractive

**Student Academic Orientation**

18. Students in this school understand why they are in school
19. Students in this school interested in learning new things
20. Students in this school have fun but also work hard on their studies
21. Students work hard to complete their school assignments

**Student Behavioral Values**

22. If one student makes fun of someone, other students join in
23. Students in this school well-behaved even when the teachers are not watching them
24. Most students do their work even if the teachers stepped out of the classroom

**Guidance**

25. Teachers or counselors encourage students to think about their future
26. Teachers or counselors help students plan for future classes and for future jobs
27. Teachers or counselors help students with personal problems
28. Students in this school get help and advice from teachers or counselors

**Student-Peer Relationships**

29. Students care about each other
30. Students respect each other
31. Students want to be friends with one another
32. Students have a sense of belonging in this school

**Instructional Management**

33. There is a clear set of rules for students in this school to follow
34. Taking attendance and other tasks interfere with classroom teaching
35. Teachers spend almost all classroom time in learning activities
36. Students in this school usually have assigned school work to do
37. Most classroom time spent talking about class work or assignments
38. Teachers use class time to help students learn assigned work
39. There are a lot of outside interruptions during class time

**Student Activities**

40. Students able to take part in school activities in which they are interested
  41. Students be in sports, music, and plays even if they are not very talented
  42. Students are comfortable staying after school for activities such as sports and music
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**Appendix B****High School Principal's Communication Survey**

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	Item
1	Your principal makes you feel free to talk with him/her
2	Your principal encourages you to let him/her know when things are not going well on the job
3	Your principal makes it easy for you to do your best work
4	Your principal encourages you to bring new information to his/her attention, even when it may be bad news
5	Your principal makes you feel that things you tell him/her are really important
6	Your principal listens to you when you tell him/her about things that are bothering you
7	It is safe to say what you are really thinking to your principal
8	You can "sound off" about job frustration to your principal
9	You can tell your principal about the way you feel he/she administers your department, grade level, school, etc
10	You are free to tell your principal that you disagree with him/her.
11	You think that your principal believes he/she really understands you.
12	Your principal really does understand you
13	Your opinions make a difference in the day-to-day decisions that affect your work
14	Your principal lets you participate in the planning of your work
15	You believe your views have real influence in your school
16	You expect that recommendations you make will be heard and seriously considered

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