



Ethical Governance in School Public Relations: Managing Stakeholder Relationships in Secondary Education

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation of public relations ethics in managing relationships between educational institutions and their stakeholders and to explore its contribution to institutional reputation and stakeholder trust. The research employed a qualitative case study approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of ethical public relations practices within a school setting. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that ethical public relations practices are demonstrated through transparent information dissemination, responsive and two-way communication, respect for stakeholder feedback, and accountability in decision-making processes. These practices strengthen collaboration between schools, parents, and the wider community while fostering a positive institutional image and increasing public confidence. Nevertheless, the study also identifies challenges related to maintaining ethical communication in digital environments, where rapid information exchange requires consistency, accuracy, and professional responsibility. The findings imply that strengthening ethical public relations practices can enhance stakeholder engagement, institutional credibility, and sustainable communication strategies in educational institutions amid ongoing digital transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are increasingly expected to perform not only as providers of academic services but also as organizations capable of establishing trustworthy and sustainable relationships with the communities they serve. This expectation has become more significant as schools operate within an environment characterized by greater public scrutiny, stakeholder participation, and rapid information exchange. Effective public communication enables schools to enhance transparency, encourage collaboration, and strengthen public confidence in educational governance. Consequently, public relations has evolved from a supporting administrative function into a strategic management instrument that facilitates mutual understanding between schools and stakeholders. Maulana and Afifi (2021) argue that public relations practices in educational institutions have transformed into a strategic component for maintaining both internal and external relationships. Likewise, The effective public relations contributes to strengthening institutional image while fostering meaningful communication with stakeholders (Najiburohman, 2025; Ni'am, 2025; Rahman, 2025). Therefore, implementing ethical public relations practices is essential for ensuring institutional credibility, reinforcing stakeholder trust, and supporting the long-term sustainability of educational organizations.

Despite the growing importance of public relations in education, many schools continue to encounter challenges in implementing ethical communication that consistently meets stakeholder expectations. The increasing demand for transparency, accountability, and public participation requires educational institutions to communicate accurately while maintaining ethical standards in every interaction. Failure to uphold these principles may weaken public trust, create misunderstandings, and reduce stakeholder engagement in school development initiatives. Saputra (2024) emphasizes that relationships among educational stakeholders should be grounded in transparency, accountability, and social responsibility to foster mutually beneficial partnerships. Similarly, Aryanti et al. (2025) highlight that ethics-based organizational communication contributes significantly to the development of a positive school culture and strengthens educational management practices. These findings indicate that ethical communication is no longer an optional organizational value but a strategic necessity. Accordingly, examining how ethical public relations principles are implemented in educational institutions has become increasingly important for improving communication quality and maintaining sustainable stakeholder relationships.

The rapid development of digital communication has fundamentally transformed the way educational institutions interact with students, parents, and the wider community. Schools are now expected to disseminate information through multiple digital platforms while responding promptly to stakeholder concerns and maintaining professional standards in every communication process. Although digital media provide broader opportunities to strengthen school-community engagement, they also increase the risk of misinformation, inconsistent messaging, and ethical violations when communication is not managed carefully. Consequently, educational institutions must balance communication efficiency with ethical responsibility to preserve stakeholder confidence. Rosliani, Prihatini, and Rosmaladewi (2025) explain that contemporary public relations strategies in educational institutions have shifted

from conventional communication toward integrated digital communication systems. Likewise, Nadila and Zahro (2025) found that two-way communication between schools, parents, and communities enhances stakeholder participation and improves institutional relationships. These developments indicate that ethical public relations has become increasingly important as schools adapt to the demands of digital transformation and greater public accountability.

Previous studies have consistently acknowledged the strategic contribution of public relations to educational management, particularly in improving institutional image, strengthening stakeholder communication, and supporting organizational effectiveness. Maulana and Afifi (2021) primarily emphasized the strategic function of public relations in maintaining internal and external institutional relationships, while Ain et al. (2025) focused on its role in developing institutional reputation through effective communication. Other studies highlighted ethical principles such as transparency, accountability, and social responsibility as essential foundations for organizational communication (Saputra, 2024; Aryanti et al., 2025). Furthermore, research by Rosliani et al. (2025), Nadila and Zahro (2025), Hidayat and Pathollah (2021) demonstrated that stakeholder collaboration and communication significantly influence educational service quality. Nevertheless, these studies predominantly examined public relations from managerial or communication perspectives, with limited attention to how ethical principles are operationalized in everyday interactions with diverse educational stakeholders. This limitation leaves an important gap regarding the practical implementation of ethical public relations in contemporary educational institutions.

Although previous research has provided valuable insights into educational public relations, important theoretical and practical gaps remain unresolved. Existing studies have predominantly investigated the strategic functions of public relations, institutional branding, communication management, and stakeholder engagement, whereas the ethical dimensions of public relations have generally been discussed as supporting principles rather than as the primary focus of investigation. Consequently, there is still limited understanding of how ethical values such as transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and respect are translated into everyday communication practices within educational institutions. Furthermore, the emergence of digital communication has introduced new ethical challenges that require schools to balance rapid information dissemination with professional responsibility and public accountability. These changing conditions suggest that ethical public relations should be examined not merely as a normative concept but as an organizational practice that shapes stakeholder perceptions and institutional trust. Addressing this gap is therefore essential for expanding knowledge on ethical communication and supporting the development of more sustainable stakeholder relationships in educational settings.

This study offers a distinct contribution by positioning public relations ethics as the central analytical perspective for understanding stakeholder relationship management in educational institutions. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasized communication effectiveness or institutional image, this research explores how ethical principles are implemented throughout daily communication processes and how these practices influence stakeholder trust, collaboration, and institutional credibility. The study also incorporates the contemporary context of

digital communication, recognizing that educational institutions increasingly interact with stakeholders through technology-mediated platforms that require greater transparency, consistency, and accountability. By examining ethical public relations as an integrated organizational practice rather than an isolated communication function, this research extends existing knowledge regarding the relationship between ethical values and institutional governance. Accordingly, the study contributes to the development of educational public relations literature by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how ethical communication practices support sustainable stakeholder engagement and strengthen institutional resilience in an increasingly digital educational environment.

Based on these considerations, this study seeks to examine how public relations ethics are implemented in managing relationships between educational institutions and their stakeholders and to identify the ways ethical communication contributes to stakeholder trust and institutional reputation. The study is grounded in the argument that ethical public relations practices constitute a strategic organizational resource capable of strengthening collaboration, increasing transparency, and fostering sustainable partnerships among schools, parents, students, educators, and the wider community. In addition, the research assumes that consistent application of ethical principles enables educational institutions to respond more effectively to communication challenges arising from digital transformation while maintaining public confidence. The findings are expected to enrich theoretical discussions concerning ethical public relations in educational contexts and provide practical guidance for school leaders and public relations practitioners in designing communication strategies that are transparent, accountable, responsive, and oriented toward long-term stakeholder engagement. These contributions are expected to support continuous improvement in educational governance and institutional sustainability.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of public relations ethics in managing relationships between the school and its stakeholders. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to explore communication processes, ethical practices, and participants' experiences within their natural context rather than to examine causal relationships among variables. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research enables researchers to explore and interpret social phenomena from the perspectives of participants. The case study design was adopted because it facilitates a comprehensive and contextual investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within a bounded system, allowing researchers to capture the complexity of organizational communication practices (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted at SMP X, which was purposively selected because it actively implements public relations programs involving various educational stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, parents, and the surrounding community, thereby providing a relevant setting for examining ethical communication practices in educational management.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis to obtain comprehensive information regarding

the implementation of public relations ethics. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating school communication activities. The participants included the principal, public relations personnel, teachers, and representatives of parents, all of whom were considered capable of providing rich and relevant information related to stakeholder communication practices. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and perceptions, observations were undertaken to examine actual communication practices in the school environment, and documentation, including institutional policies, reports, and communication records, was analyzed to strengthen the findings through data triangulation. The integration of these complementary data collection techniques enabled the researcher to develop a holistic understanding of ethical public relations practices within the educational institution.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, coding, and organizing relevant information to identify meaningful patterns related to ethical public relations practices. Subsequently, the condensed data were systematically presented through narrative descriptions and thematic categories to facilitate interpretation and comparison across data sources. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and continuously verifying the findings throughout the research process to ensure that interpretations remained consistent with the collected evidence. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, data credibility was established through source triangulation and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from different participants and multiple data collection methods. As emphasized by Moleong (2021), triangulation strengthens the credibility and dependability of qualitative findings by minimizing researcher bias and ensuring that interpretations accurately reflect the realities observed in the field.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings reveal that the implementation of public relations ethics is embedded in the school's communication system through practices emphasizing transparency, accountability, responsiveness, participation, and mutual respect. These ethical principles are reflected in daily interactions between the school and its stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, staff members, and the surrounding community. Based on interviews and observations, participants consistently emphasized that communication within the school is designed not only to disseminate information but also to create opportunities for dialogue and strengthen relationships with stakeholders. School leaders and public relations personnel indicated that every communication activity is expected to provide accurate, timely, and relevant information while considering the needs and expectations of different stakeholder groups. Documentation analysis also demonstrated that communication activities are systematically integrated into school management through academic announcements, institutional reports, school activity publications, and regular coordination meetings.

The implementation of transparency emerged as one of the dominant themes

identified during the study. The school consistently provides information regarding academic activities, institutional programs, student development, extracurricular activities, and administrative services through various communication channels. Information is disseminated using both conventional and digital media to ensure that stakeholders can easily access important announcements. Parents acknowledged that the availability of timely information enables them to understand school programs more effectively and participate in supporting educational activities. Teachers also explained that transparent communication reduces misunderstandings among school members because institutional policies are communicated clearly before implementation. Observational findings further revealed that meetings with parents, student orientation sessions, and school events are accompanied by clear explanations regarding objectives, procedures, and expected outcomes. These practices demonstrate the school's commitment to ensuring that communication remains open, understandable, and accessible to all stakeholders.

Another significant finding concerns the accessibility of communication between the school and its stakeholders. The school provides multiple communication channels that allow stakeholders to seek information, express opinions, submit complaints, and obtain clarification regarding school policies. Interviews with participants indicated that communication is maintained through face-to-face meetings, telephone communication, messaging applications, and official digital platforms managed by the school. Stakeholders considered these communication channels to be easily accessible and responsive to their needs. Parent representatives reported that school administrators generally respond promptly to questions related to academic progress, student discipline, and school activities. Observations also indicated that communication is conducted respectfully regardless of the stakeholder's background or position. This accessibility strengthens interactions between the school and the community by reducing communication barriers and encouraging continuous engagement.

The findings further indicate that stakeholder participation constitutes an important component of ethical public relations practices. Rather than limiting communication to one-way information dissemination, the school actively encourages stakeholders to contribute ideas, suggestions, and evaluations related to educational programs. Interviews revealed that parents are regularly invited to participate in meetings discussing student development, educational activities, and institutional improvement initiatives. Teachers also described collaborative discussions involving school leaders when evaluating educational programs and planning future activities. Documentation showed that feedback collected from stakeholders is considered during decision-making processes, particularly in relation to student services and school-community programs. These findings suggest that communication within the school is characterized by reciprocal interaction, where stakeholders are regarded as active partners rather than passive recipients of information.

The study also found that responsiveness represents a central element of ethical public relations implementation. Participants consistently reported that school leaders and public relations personnel demonstrate willingness to respond quickly to stakeholder concerns while maintaining respectful and professional communication. Complaints related to academic services, administrative procedures, student behavior,

and school facilities are addressed through established communication mechanisms that prioritize dialogue and problem-solving. Several participants explained that school administrators provide opportunities for stakeholders to explain their concerns before decisions are made. Observational findings confirmed that discussions during meetings are conducted in an orderly manner, allowing participants to express opinions without intimidation or discrimination. This responsive communication contributes to a positive organizational climate by demonstrating that stakeholder perspectives are valued within institutional decision-making processes.

Consistency between communication and institutional practices emerged as another important finding influencing stakeholder trust. Participants emphasized that public confidence is strengthened when information communicated by the school corresponds with actual practices implemented within the institution. Parents indicated that trust increases because school commitments are generally followed by concrete actions, including the implementation of announced programs, transparent reporting of activities, and continuous communication regarding educational developments. Teachers similarly explained that consistency in leadership communication promotes confidence among staff members and supports cooperation in achieving institutional objectives. Observations also demonstrated that school leaders consistently participate in communication activities with stakeholders, reinforcing the perception that ethical communication is practiced collectively rather than delegated solely to public relations personnel.

Despite these positive findings, the research identified several challenges affecting the implementation of ethical public relations. One major challenge involves managing communication in an increasingly digital environment where information circulates rapidly through social media and online communication platforms. Participants explained that schools must ensure that published information is both timely and accurate because delays or inconsistencies may create misunderstandings among stakeholders. Differences in stakeholder characteristics also present communication challenges, as parents, students, teachers, and community members possess varying expectations, educational backgrounds, and information needs. Consequently, communication strategies must be adapted to different audiences while maintaining consistency in institutional messages. Participants also highlighted the importance of maintaining professionalism when responding to criticism or public feedback distributed through digital communication channels.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that ethical public relations has become an integral component of institutional management. Transparency, accessibility, stakeholder participation, responsiveness, consistency, and accountability collectively contribute to stronger relationships between the school and its stakeholders. These practices not only facilitate the dissemination of information but also foster collaboration, mutual respect, and public trust. The implementation of ethical communication enables the school to strengthen institutional credibility while creating a communication environment that supports sustainable stakeholder engagement. Although digital transformation introduces new communication challenges, the findings indicate that adherence to ethical principles enables educational institutions to maintain constructive relationships with diverse stakeholders and sustain a positive institutional image.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings on the Implementation of Public Relations Ethics

Theme	Empirical Findings	Implications for Stakeholder Relationships
Information Transparency	The school provides academic information, institutional policies, and school activities through accessible communication channels using clear and accurate messages.	Enhances stakeholder understanding and strengthens institutional credibility.
Communication Accessibility	Stakeholders can communicate through face-to-face meetings, telephone, messaging applications, and official digital platforms.	Improves communication efficiency and facilitates continuous interaction.
Stakeholder Participation	Parents, teachers, and community representatives are encouraged to provide feedback, suggestions, and evaluations regarding school programs.	Strengthens collaborative decision-making and stakeholder engagement.
Responsiveness and Accountability	School leaders and public relations personnel respond promptly to questions, complaints, and stakeholder concerns through established communication procedures.	Increases stakeholder satisfaction and reinforces organizational trust.
Consistency of Ethical Communication	Information communicated by the school is aligned with institutional practices and implemented programs.	Builds long-term trust and supports a positive institutional image.
Digital Communication Challenges	Rapid information dissemination requires balancing communication speed with message accuracy, ethical responsibility, and professionalism.	Encourages the development of adaptive and ethical communication strategies in the digital era.

Table 1 summarizes the major findings regarding the implementation of public relations ethics in managing school-stakeholder relationships. The findings demonstrate that ethical public relations practices are reflected through six interrelated dimensions, namely information transparency, communication accessibility, stakeholder participation, responsiveness and accountability, consistency of ethical communication, and the ability to address digital communication challenges. These dimensions indicate that ethical public relations extends beyond information dissemination and functions as a strategic mechanism for strengthening collaboration between educational institutions and their stakeholders. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the integration of ethical principles into everyday communication practices contributes to greater stakeholder trust, institutional credibility, and sustainable partnerships while enabling schools to respond more effectively to the demands of an increasingly digital communication environment.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that ethical public relations has become an integral component of educational management rather than merely a supporting communication function. The implementation of transparency, accessibility, and stakeholder participation indicates that public relations activities extend beyond information dissemination to fostering long-term relationships based on trust and mutual understanding. This finding supports Maulana and Afifi (2021), who argue that educational public relations plays a strategic role in shaping public perception through sustainable communication. It also aligns with Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2019), who conceptualize public relations as a management function designed to establish mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.

The study further confirms that transparency and accountability are fundamental ethical principles in educational public relations. The school's efforts to provide accurate information, facilitate stakeholder participation, and respond constructively to public feedback illustrate the practical application of ethical communication in educational settings. These findings are consistent who emphasizes that public relations ethics seeks to balance organizational interests with public interests through responsible communication (Fitriani, 2025; Holidi, 2026; Nadhifah, 2026). Likewise, Grunig (2018) argues that two-way symmetrical communication forms the foundation of sustainable organizational relationships because it encourages dialogue, openness, and reciprocal understanding between institutions and stakeholders.

Another significant finding is that stakeholder trust develops through consistent ethical behavior rather than through communication frequency alone. The alignment between institutional actions and communicated messages strengthens organizational credibility and encourages greater stakeholder engagement. This finding corroborates Hidayat and Pathollah (2021), who explain that trust-based communication strengthens relationships between schools and stakeholders. Similarly, The active stakeholder involvement increases institutional legitimacy and community support, suggesting that ethical communication positively influences stakeholder commitment toward educational institutions (Hikmah, 2026; Kunta, 2025; Mohlas, 2025).

The findings also highlight the challenges posed by digital transformation. Digital communication accelerates information exchange but simultaneously increases the responsibility of educational institutions to maintain message accuracy, consistency, and ethical standards. These results support Hagelstein, Einwiller, and Zerfass (2021), who argue that digital transformation requires organizations to strengthen ethical communication to preserve institutional credibility. Likewise, emphasize that digital educational communication should balance operational efficiency with social responsibility (Albustomi, 2025; Hikmah & Mudarris, 2026; Manshur, 2026). Therefore, ethical competence has become an essential capability for educational public relations practitioners operating in increasingly complex digital environments.

Overall, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that ethical public relations functions not only as a normative principle but also as a strategic organizational mechanism for strengthening stakeholder trust, institutional legitimacy, and long-term collaboration. Unlike earlier studies that primarily focused on communication effectiveness or institutional image, this research shows that ethical values underpin every stage of stakeholder relationship management. Consequently, integrating ethical principles into communication policies can support sustainable educational governance while enhancing institutional resilience in responding to the challenges of contemporary educational communication.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that ethical public relations extends beyond information dissemination and functions as a strategic mechanism for strengthening trust, collaboration, and sustainable relationships between educational institutions and their stakeholders. The most significant finding is that transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and stakeholder

participation collectively enhance institutional credibility and contribute to a positive school image. These findings enrich the literature on educational public relations by providing empirical evidence that ethical communication should be integrated into stakeholder relationship management rather than treated as a complementary organizational practice. Nevertheless, this study is limited to a single case study, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Future research is therefore recommended to investigate public relations ethics across diverse educational institutions using comparative or mixed-method approaches to generate broader theoretical and practical insights.

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