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Teachers' Attitudes Toward Change: A Study in Malaysian High Performing Secondary School

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to examine teachers' attitudes toward change (TATC) in Malaysian High Performing Secondary School (HPSS). A total of 936 teachers from 47 HPSS completed the survey. The findings revealed that i) teachers of HPSS scored high in TATC; ii) teachers of HPSS achieved the highest mean in *Cognitive* domain, followed by *Behavioral* and *Affective* domain; iii) TATC was reliably related to the type of HPSS; iv) teachers of Religious Secondary School achieved the lowest mean in *Affective* domain but the highest mean in *Behavioral* domain; v) teachers did differ in *Cognitive* and *Behavioral* domain but not *Affective* domain. The study concluded that: a) as changes are mostly strongly associated with emotions, to strengthen TATC, concerted efforts are equally important to enhance teachers' affective responses toward change; b) as organizational culture were found closely related to TATC, purposeful initiatives to promote and strengthen positive school culture will help increase the level of TATC; and c) as change is mostly managed from a technical perspective, constructively balancing human needs emerges as a dire need as at the central pivot of any change is to gain the heart of the teachers to work through the change process.

Key words: Teachers' Attitudes toward Change · High Performing Secondary Schools · School Change · Cognitive Domain · Affective Domain · Behavioral Domain

INTRODUCTION

In light of globalization, accelerated by the rapid rate of change in the world, today, educational reform has become a top priority for many countries. Schools, as the core of education, thus are subject to inescapable internal and external change pressures. As the front-line change implementers in school, teachers are the real source of and the vehicle for, school change.They are the closest to the students and more aware of the needs of the students in the learning process. Indeed, in recent decades the requirements to a teacher have changed greatly [1]. Importantly, they are expected to play an important role in any school change. Since changes must ultimately be implemented by school teachers, understanding how teachers react to change will provide very practical insights into how to best lead change in schools.

All too often, the main dilemma in any organizational change is whether there is acceptance to change. Resistance to change, the number one reason organization change initiatives fail [4], is always seen as the enemy of change. In fact, without buy-in from the change recipients change will be 'doomed'. Likewise, although schools are being bombarded by change, as long as teachers, the front-line change implementers in schools, do not buy-in or put change into practice, school reform will be adopted superficially or even fails. However, if teachers demonstrate positive change attitudes, they will work together; they will pull together to make change happen. Clearly, teachers' attitudes toward change (TATC) are one major determinant of their intention to embrace or resist change. Over the decades, studies on change management have paid little attention to public sector [5]. This is particularly true with respect

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to Malaysian education context whereby how teachers perceive, react and adapt to change still remains unexplored.

The Malaysian education system is entering an intensive period of change with the launching of Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 in September 2013. In order to equip young Malaysians holistically to allow them to succeed in the 21century, the Blueprint suggests eleven strategic and operation shifts for the enhancement of the education system. Specifically, it features universal access all the way through to secondary education, halving the achievement gaps between the rich and poor, urban and rural, produces students who perform in the top third of international student assessments and provides equal and quality educational opportunities for all students regardless of background [14]. Obviously, the envisaged reform is of great complexity in both breadth and depth. In line with this, unless school teachers posses positive TATC, if not school reform will fall short of the ambitious aspirations set out in the Blueprint. Therefore, there is a pressing need for research to examine the patterns of TATC as teacher is the single most important school-based factor which determines the change outcomes in the change process [6].

In fact, TATC is the internal factor that influences a teacher's choices of personal action, or a response tendency towards the change. It refers to a teacher's overall positive or negative evaluative judgment of a change initiative implemented by his or her school. It is conceived as a tri-dimensional concept which consists of cognitive, affective and behavioral responses to change ranging from strong positive attitudes to strong negative attitudes [17]. Cognitive reaction to change refers to the teacher's beliefs about the need for change, the significance of the change, the favorability of outcomes i.e. the extent to which the change will be personally and organizationally beneficial and the knowledge required to handle change [17]. Affective reaction to change refers to teachers' feelings about the change. It is teachers' tendency to enjoy changes in schools. Teachers' response to change along this emotional dimension might range from positive emotions e.g. excitement, enthusiasm and happiness to strong negative emotions such as anger, resentment, frustration, anxiety or fear [17]. Next, behavioral reaction to change measures the extent to which teachers would take action to support or initiate change. Simply, it is the actions for or against change. Behavioral responses can range from strong positive intentions to support change, for example, actively involves in change to negative intentions to resist it such as quitting intentions due to the change [17].

As change recipients, teachers in school make sense of change and develop certain attitudes toward change. The present study aimed to examine the patterns of TATC in Malaysian High Performing Secondary School (HPSS).The study would offer relevant parties a lens through which they could better understand, prepare for and enhance TATC. Specifically, it provides direction for practitioners as useful feedback in planning and designing future training programs for teachers – instead of the one-size-fits-all approach, but rather, the interventions which are based on the distinct needs of the teachers so as to enhance TATC and increase the likelihood of teachers to embrace school change.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Population and Sample: The study population comprised 13,900 HPSS teachers in Malaysia. Multiple-staged stratified random sampling procedure was used in this study. There were three strata in the study population namely, Daily Secondary School (DSS), Fully Residential School (FRSS) and Religious Secondary School (RSS). Among 186 HPSS in Malaysia, there were 80 DSS, 60 FRSS and 46 RSS [12]. The researcher decided to have a total of 25 percent of each stratum of the population and as a result 20 DSS, 15 FRSS and 12 RSS or a total of 47 HPSS were selected randomly for the survey. Next, 20 respondents or teachers from each school were chosen as sample by using simple sampling method based on the official list of teachers provided by the State Education Department respectively. As a result, 400 teachers were selected for DSS, 300 for FRSS and 240 for RSS. All in all, a total number of 940 respondents were identified for the survey and it represents 33% of the total number of teacher in 47 HPSS (N=2,863) (Table 1).

Survey Instrument: TATC is measured by using *Teachers' Attitudes toward Change Scale* [17]. It consists of three main constructs namely: (a) *Cognitive*; (b) *Affective*; and (c) *Behavioral* responses to change and each construct comprised three items with factor loadings ranging from.64 to.83. The composite reliability index for each construct of TATCS is.67,.65 and.62, respectively, thus provided evidence for convergent validity [10]. Besides, TATCS also hold discriminant validity since

Table 1: The Number of School and Respondent Involved in the Survey for Each State Based on Proportional Stratification

	Daily Secondary School			Fully Residential Secondary School			Religious Secondary School			Total		
State	ANS	NSS	NR	ANS	NSS	NR	ANS	NSS	NR	ANS	NSS	NR
Pahang	11	3	60	6	2	40	2	0	0	19	5	100
Johor	15	4	80	6	1	20	4	1	20	25	6	120
Selangor	9	2	40	6	1	20	8	2	40	23	5	100
Penang	9	2	40	2	1	20	3	1	20	14	4	80
Sarawak	0	0	0	4	1	20	0	0	0	4	1	20
Kelantan	5	1	20	5	1	20	6	2	40	16	4	80
N.Sembilan	3	1	20	5	1	20	3	1	20	11	3	60
Perak	6	1	20	6	2	40	3	1	20	15	4	80
Kedah	7	2	40	6	1	20	4	1	20	17	4	80
Sabah	0	0	0	2	1	20	0	0	0	2	1	20
Perlis	2	1	20	1	0	0	1	0	0	4	1	20
K.Lumpur	6	1	20	5	1	20	1	0	0	12	2	40
Melaka	2	1	20	2	1	20	1	0	0	5	2	40
Trengganu	5	1	20	4	1	20	10	3	60	19	5	100
Total	80	20	400	60	15	300	46	12	240	186	47	940

Note. ANS=Actual number of school; NSS=Number of school for survey; NR=Number of respondent

Average Variance Extracted of the factors is greater than 0.50 [13]. The instrument was a six-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to rank their responses from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Scoring was accomplished by assigning 1 to "strongly disagree", 2 to "disagree", 3 to "moderately disagree", 4 to "moderately agree", 5 to "agree" and 6 to "strongly agree".

Data Analysis: Out of 940 sets of questionnaires sent out by post, a total of 938 sets were returned, with a response rate of 99.78%. Two sets of questionnaires had more than 25% obvious errors and illegible responses and were thus excluded from further analysis. Finally, a total of 936 sets of questionnaires were retained for the final analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed in this study whereby data was computed to obtain scores, means and standard deviations. Besides, inferential statistical analysis was adopted too in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics: The analysis of the sample profile showed a higher number of female (N=705, 75.3%) respondents than male (N=231, 24.7%). In relation to respondents' age group, those aged between 41 to 50 years (N=337, 36%) were the largest group. This was followed by the age group of 31 to 40 years (N=319, 34.1%), 21 to 30 years (N=157, 16.8%) and 51 to 60 years (N=122, 13%). Demographic details of the respondents also showed that approximately half of the respondents were from DSS (N=456, 48.7%). About 27.9% (N=261) and 23.4% (N=219) were from FRS and RSS, respectively. Besides, 71.6% (N=670) of them were from urban school whereas a further 28.4% (N=266) were from rural school.

The Level of Teachers' Attitudes toward Change: As shown in Table 2, the mean score of TATC for teachers in HPSS was 4.56 (SD=.66). The distribution of scores showed that most of the teachers scored at the higher end of the distribution for TATC. There were 51.07% (n=478) of the teachers scored between 4.00 and 4.99, 28.63% (n=268) scored between 5.00 and 5.99 and 1.07% scored 6 (n=10). In other words, most of the teachers (80.77%) had high scores in TATC. Such teachers possess positive evaluation judgment of a change initiative implemented by his or her school. Meanwhile there were 18.38% (n=172) scored between 3.00 and 3.99 and only 0.85% (n=8) scored between 2.00 and 2.99. Simply, there were very few teachers whose scores fell at the lower end of the distribution. This reflected that only a small number of the teachers were very low in TATC or they had very negative response tendency towards school change.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Change Across Domain: As showed in Table 3, teachers in HPSS achieved the highest mean of 4.64 (SD=.74) in *Cognitive* domain, followed by *Behavioral* domain with a mean of 4.62 (SD=.76) but achieved the lowest mean of 4.41 (SD=1.12) in *Affective* domain. One possible reason is that as civil servant, teachers may appreciate change efforts,

Table 2: Frequency Distribution, Mean Score and Standard Deviation of the Level of Teachers' Attitudes toward Change

Raw Scores	Frequency	Percent
1.00 - 1.99	0	0
2.00 - 2.99	8	0.85
3.00 - 3.99	172	18.38
4.00 - 4.99	478	51.07
5.00 - 5.99	6.00	268
10	28.63	1.07
Mean Score	4.56	
Standard Deviation	0.66	

Table 3: The Level of Teachers' Attitudes toward Change across Domain

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cognitive	936	4.64	.74
Affective	936	4.41	1.12
Behavioral	936	4.62	.76

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviation of TATC Based on Type of HPSS

Type of HPSS	n	M	SD
Daily Secondary School (DSS)	456	4.51	.68
Fully Residential School (FRSS)	261	4.63	.64
Religious Secondary School (RSS)	219	4.56	.65

Table 5: One-way ANOVA of TATC Based on Type of HPSS

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	3.892	1	3.892	8.920	0.003
Within Groups	407.540	934	.436		
Total	411.432	935			

on a cognitive level and perform behaviors to support the change implemented in schools. Be there as it may, they need to accept and implement the change initiated through top-down approach, regardless the change is valuable to them, or either they enjoy the rewards or benefits realized from adopting change. As a result, comparatively, they scored high in *Cognitive* and *Behavioral* domain. However, on an emotional level, they may dislike change as change might disrupt their daily routines and practices or even reduce their autonomy or work flexibility. As change upset the balance and thus teachers do not have the tendency to enjoy changes in schools and therefore comparatively they were low in *Affective* domain.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Change and Type of High Performing Secondary School: Table 4 showed the means and standard deviations of TATC among teachers of different type of HPSS. The mean scores ranged from 4.51 to 4.63. Teachers in FRSS achieved the highest mean of 4.63 (SD=.64) while teachers in DSS achieved the lowest mean score of 4.51 (SD=.68). Teachers in RSS had a mean of 4.56 (SD=.65). Obviously, there were apparent differences in the mean scores among teachers in three different types of HPSS. The result of F-test in Table 5 again affirmed that the differences between the groups were statistically significant, $F(1,933)=8.920$, $p<.05$, MS=.436. This meant that teachers of HPSS differ in their TATC. In other words, TATC was reliably related to the type of HPSS.

The crux of the situation seems lay in the fact that different organizational culture shapes different level of TATC in HPSS. Although DSS, FRSS and RSS all are HPSS, differences were observed in terms of its organizational culture. Compared to DSS and RSS, the main aim of FRSS is to increase the opportunities for indigenous students to receive quality education as preparation for higher education to fulfill national needs [18]. It therefore provides students with better education resources, complete and updated facilities which are conducive to healthy school culture. Meanwhile, DSS is the most popular type of secondary school in Malaysia whereby the admissions are not selective as FRSS. As a whole, it contributes 85% of the secondary schools in Malaysia. RSS, on the other hand, employs an overly Islamic-based curriculum which is totally different from FRSS and DSS [18].

Table 6: Means and Standard Deviation of TATC Based on Domain

Type of School	Domain of TATC	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
DSS	COG	456	4.59	.74
	AFF	456	4.43	1.09
	BHV	456	4.52	.74
FRSS	COG	261	4.72	.72
	AFF	261	4.51	1.15
	BHV	261	4.67	.78
RSS	COG	219	4.64	.75
	AFF	219	4.26	1.15
	BHV	219	4.77	.76

Note. DSS=Daily Secondary School; FRSS=Fully Residential School; RSS=Religious Secondary School; COG=Cognitive; AFF=Affective; BHV=Behavioral

Clearly, the organizational culture of DSS, FRSS and RSS would not be the same. The organizational culture is the set of beliefs, shared values [7, 15], work styles and relationships [9] that distinguish DSS, FRSS and RSS. In relation to this, the expectations toward teachers, what the teachers should and should not do, which teachers' competencies are most likely to produce favorable outcomes and the status and influence bestowed on them vary considerably as a result of the cultural forces in the organizations in which they function. Importantly, the anatomy of an organization's culture can strongly impacts staff performance, commitment [11] and mission effectiveness which ultimately influences that organization's potential for success or failure. Specifically in relation to this study, the school culture of FRSS and DSS were distinctly different. The expectation toward teachers in FRSS was comparatively high in achieving the mission of well preparing the indigenous students for higher education in comparison with teachers in DSS whereby such specific mission was not the core agenda. Thus, it was not surprising that teachers in FRSS achieved the highest mean whereas teachers in DSS scored the lowest mean in TATC.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Change Across Domain and Type of High Performing Secondary School: Next, analyzing across three domains of TATC for DSS, FRSS and RSS, as shown in Table 6, the mean scores ranged from 4.26 to 4.77. Basically the finding was congruent with the earlier findings that teachers in FRSS achieved the highest mean whereas teachers in DSS achieved the lowest mean in TATC. However, it was interesting to note that among three different types of HPSS, teachers in RSS achieved both the lowest mean of 4.26 (SD=1.15) in *Affective* domain and the highest mean of 4.77 (SD=.76) in the domain of *Behavioral*.

To a large extent, one reason why such a distinction has been observed may have to do with the fact that RSS possess a very unique organizational culture in comparison with FRSS and DSS. In fact, it not only employs an overly Islamic-based curriculum, the daily routines and practices in RSS are also manifested in an Islamic characteristic. Often times, people do not like change as change may threaten their established values and understandings [8] and thus they do not enjoy changes. This phenomenon is obvious in RSS as they are located at the nexus of social difference specifically in maintaining their religious identity within secular public schools and hence they scored the lowest mean in *Affective* domain. Indeed, this reflected the teachers' feelings about the change in the midst of the modern philosophy of education while negotiating the politics of the continuity of their religious identity and practices within schools.

However, on the other hand, as civil servants, like those in FRSS and DSS, teachers in RSS need to accept and implement the change initiated through top-down approach, regardless whether the notion of the change contradicts with their values, or they enjoy the benefits realized from adopting change. They may not appreciate change efforts, on an affective level, nevertheless they need to perform behaviors to support the change implemented in schools. It can be argued that the pressure of conformity to the dominant culture and the interplay of the educational and religious interests and values of the teachers were so great. As a result, unconsciously they developed a number of internal defence mechanisms through organizational socialization process [16] to protect themselves from the unpleasant feelings of anxiety [3]. In psychology, this habitual use of defences will result in them becoming part of their attitude system [2]. Hence, it was not a complete surprise that they perform

Table 7: One-way ANOVA of Three Domains of TATC Based on Type of HPSS

Domain	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Cognitive	Between Groups	2.780	1	2.780	5.090	.024
	Within Groups	510.108	934	.546		
	Total	512.888	935			
Affective	Between Groups	2.747	1	2.747	2.192	.139
	Within Groups	1170.603	934	1.253		
	Total	1173.350	935			
Behavioral	Between Groups	6.727	1	6.727	11.690	.001
	Within Groups	537.443	934	.575		
	Total	544.170	935			

behaviors to support the change and scored at the highest mean in *Behavioral* domain in comparison to teachers in FRSS and DSS.

Despite that there were apparent differences in the mean scores across the three domains of TATC among the three different types of HPSS, the result of F-test in Table 7 affirmed that the differences between the groups were statistically significant for *Cognitive*, $F(1, 934)= 5.090$, $p<.05$, MS=.546 and *Behavioral*, $F(1, 934)= 6.727$, $p<.05$, MS=11.690. This meant that teachers of three different HPSS did differ in the domain of *Cognitive* and *Behavioral* of TATC. However, the result of F-test for *Affective* domain, $F(1, 934)= 2.192$, $p>.05$, MS=1.253 clearly showed that the differences between the groups were small and not statistically significant. In summary, teachers of three different HPSS did not differ in the domain of *Affective.*

Again, as can be seen, variations across organizational culture contributed substantially to the above phenomenon that teachers of FRSS, DSS and RSS did differ in the domain of *Cognitive* and *Behavioral* of TATC as discussed earlier. However, in terms of *Affective* domain of TATC, it was not reliably related to the type of HPSS reinforced the point that regardless organizational culture differences, no matter they came from FRSS, DSS or RSS, people basically do not like change. All too often, it is usually easier to accept the *status quo* and working within the comfort zone particularly when things appear to be running smoothly than to make changes. Obviously, the phenomenon of people disliking change appears as a common feature across the terrain of the organizational culture differences of HPSS.

CONCLUSION

The result of the findings demonstrated three meaningful observations. First, teachers may appreciate change efforts, on a cognitive level and perform behaviors to support the implemented change, however, they may dislike change at an emotional level. Undeniable that TATC is influenced by the intervention of cognitive, affective and behavioral elements, nevertheless, changes are mostly strongly associated with emotions, as emotions form the lowermost portion of any urge for change. Hence, in order to maximize teachers' responses to change, concerted efforts are equally important to enhance teachers' affective responses toward change. Or else it will generate negative emotions such as anger, resentment, frustration, anxiety, stress or fear which will make the change more difficult to be implemented. Second, organizational culture was found closely related to TATC whereby certain type of organizational culture facilitates most the acceptability of change. Organizational culture in fact has the potential to enhance attitudes toward desired behaviors. Specifically, those organizations with their core values which are intensely held and widely shared within the organization. Thus, school principals should create ways and conditions to promote and enhance positive organizational culture so to harness the purposeful positive TATC and the likelihood to turn change goals into reality. Third, as teachers achieved the lowest mean in *Affective* domain and the above phenomenon happened across FRSS, DSS and RSS, as a whole, it is obvious that change is mostly managed from a technical perspective whereas human factors have always been neglected. A case in point, Ministry of Education may invest huge amount of money in the envisaged reform set out in the Blueprint, however, if little is invested in communicating, teachers' involvement in decision making, teachers' professional development, follow-up and follow-through needed to successfully implement the change, school reform certainly will be adopted superficially or even fail as at the central pivot of any school change, is to gain the heart of the teachers to work through the change process.

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