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PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS FOR MALAYSIAN TEACHERS

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**PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS
FOR MALAYSIAN TEACHERS**

BY

NOOR FILZAH BINTI KAMARUDDIN

**A RESEARCH PROJECT PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF MANAGEMENT**

**MANAGEMENT CENTER
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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to find out about the perceptions of teachers on the extent of learning organization characteristics that exist in Malaysian schools. Through a survey of the literature, it was determined that transforming schools into learning organizations requires a systematic approach that includes the measurement of learning capability. Therefore, this study was designed to address the following research questions: (1) to what extent do certain selected demographic factors affect teachers perceptions on the characteristics of learning organization, and (2) to what extent do the characteristics of learning organization exist in Malaysian schools.

The Organizational Learning Survey by Goh and Richards (1997) was used in the survey. A total of 89 secondary school teachers participated in the survey, of which 51 were studying at Masters level at three local universities and the remaining 38 teachers were following the Smart School Training Program at the Institute of Aminuddin Baki. Independent t-test, one sample t-test, and paired sample t-test were used to evaluate the five hypotheses.

The results reveal that teachers perceive not even one dimension of the learning organization characteristics exists in Malaysian schools. The results also indicate that gender and positions in schools have a certain effect on teachers' perceptions of learning organization characteristics in schools, whereas organizational tenure and teaching service tenure do not have any effect on ... their perceptions. The study suggests that specific interventions be taken by educational administrators to overcome barriers in building learning organizations.

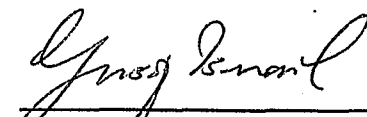
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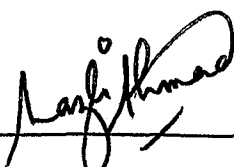
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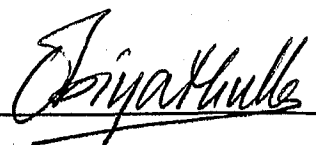
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project paper is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by reference note and a bibliography is appended.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the past few years, we have been exposed to numerous writings that focussed on maximizing the power and effectiveness of schoolteachers, the human capital of education. Being the schools' greatest asset (Day, 1996), teachers stand at the interface of the transmission of knowledge and values. Therefore, close attention must be paid to their professional development. In fact, only through teachers' professional growth and development can schools achieve marked success (Frase and Conley, 1994). However, in reality teachers' professional and self-development are being ignored despite their significance in nurturing effective teachers. In addition, the findings (Farber, 1991) from much research on the conditions for teacher development are very depressing. This phenomenon is reflected in the observation of Seymour Sarason (1990) in *The Predictable Failure of School Reform*:

It is virtually impossible to create and sustain over time conditions for productive learning for students when they do not exist for teachers.

Indeed, in England, for many teachers the last 20 years have been years of survival rather than development (Day, 1996). Similar scenario can be found in

Malaysia and around the globe.

As of year 1995, there are over 240 000 teachers in Malaysia (Laporan Tahunan 1995). There are more than 56 000 graduate teachers, while the non-graduates numbering more than 181 000. The Teacher Education Division of the Ministry of Education is responsible for recruiting and training of teachers. However, most of the resources were used in the training of new teachers.

Professional development for in-service teachers, in some form, is addressed at the ministerial level. This exercise includes in-house training at the school level, specialized courses at the district or state level and postgraduate studies at various higher learning institutions. However, most efforts to develop teachers at the school, district or state levels are often driven by administrative and political pressures to get preferred, sometimes "faddish" innovation implemented quickly. As noted by Fullan and Hargreaves (1992), these initiatives take the form of something that is done to teachers rather than with them, still less by them. On the other hand, the postgraduate studies which are more preferred by teachers, as they can freely choose their area of specialization, is limited to only selected few teachers.

In most instances, professional development for teachers means that they will have to be physically out of the school environment. This seems to suggest that schools are incapable of providing conducive learning environment for teachers, let alone developing them professionally. Like any other business organizations facing an uncertain future, schools need to change so as to provide teachers with an organizational environment, which is personally enriching and satisfying, and at the

same time productive for the organization.

In order to attain such goal, teachers' jobs and work environments should be redesigned so that they offer teachers maximum potential for developing maximum motivation and satisfaction in teaching. This can be done by putting teachers into new organizational environment, which imposes new roles, responsibilities, and relationships on them. In other words, authorities need to make schools as a learning organization for teachers too!

1.2 Need for the Study

Studies have shown that schools like any other business organizations need to change in order to face the uncertain future. Findings by Seymour and Arnott (1994) revealed that schools are not particularly good organizations for supporting and developing the adults who work within them. Further studies carried out by Leithwood et al. (1998) looked into conditions that foster or inhibit organizational learning in schools. Other studies have identified and measured the essential organizational characteristics and management practices that promote learning (Goh and Richards, 1997). However, there appears to be dearth of similar studies to determine these characteristics and practices in the Malaysian school context. Do Malaysian schoolteachers share the same view as their western counterpart? Hence, there exists a critical need to have an insight into the perception of teachers in Malaysia on schools as their learning organizations.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Schools must provide teachers maximally effective opportunities to learn and professionally develop themselves. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future recommended schools to be redesigned, "to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Although changing schools to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers could produce the kind of learning environment desired for teachers, no studies have been done to look at schools in Malaysia as learning organizations. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to carry out this study in order to determine the extent to which the characteristics of learning organization are found in Malaysian schools.

1.4 Research Objectives

The purpose of the study is to describe the perception of teachers towards the extent to which the characteristics of learning organization are found in Malaysian schools.

1.5 Research Questions

In order to achieve this purpose, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does gender affect teachers' perception of learning organization characteristics in Malaysian schools?
2. To what extent does the difference in years of service in current school affect teacher's perception of learning organization characteristics in Malaysian schools?
3. To what extent does the difference in years of teaching service affect teacher's perception of learning organization characteristics in Malaysian schools?
4. To what extent does holding a position affect teacher's perception of learning organization characteristics in Malaysian schools?
5. To what extent do the characteristics of learning organization exist in Malaysian schools?

1.6 Hypothesis Statements

Table 1 summarizes the null hypotheses and the previous research study done on the subject.

Table 1.1
Summary of Hypotheses and Related Studies

No.	Variables	Hypotheses Statement	Previous Studies
H ₁	Gender	There is no significant difference in the level of perceptions of learning organization characteristics between male and female teachers	Dinham and Scott (1997)
H ₂	Organizational tenure	There is no significant evidence that teachers with longer organizational (the same school) tenure perceived a lower degree of learning organization characteristics in schools than teachers with shorter organizational tenure	Dinham and Scott (1997)
H ₃	Service tenure	There is no significant evidence that teachers with longer teaching service tenure perceived a higher degree of learning organization characteristics in schools than teachers with shorter teaching service tenure	Dinham and Scott (1997)
H ₄	Position in school	There is no significant evidence that teachers holding positions in school perceived a higher degree of learning organization characteristics in schools than teachers without position	Seymour and Arnott (1994)
H ₅	Learning organization characteristics	There is no significant evidence that teachers perceived at least one of the dimensions of learning organization characteristics does not exist in Malaysian schools	Goh and Richards (1997)

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is important in looking into the characteristics of learning organization that may have already existed in Malaysian schools. To date, there is yet to be any study done to look at this issue. This findings could be used to develop benchmarks of learning capability that would enable educators to design interventions to overcome specific barriers in transforming schools into learning organizations. The knowledge gained should assist educational administrators to create an environment where teachers can continually reflect on what they are doing and, to strongly advocate collective learning. This information could then help educational administrators to provide an environment that nurtures, supports and values the well being, development and learning of every individual in their organizations.

1.8 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions will be used:

- I Educational administrators: Includes educational officers in various divisions of the Ministry of Education, State Education Department officers and schools principals.
- II Learning organizations: Organizations capable of learning as prescribed by Senge in his book "The Fifth Dimension."
- III Teachers' Professional Development: Any attempt to improve teachers learning and teaching performance by imparting knowledge, changing attitudes, or increasing skills.

1.9 Organization of the Project Paper

This study is written and organized into five chapters. The first chapter deals with introduction that discusses the background of the study, the need of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, hypothesis statements, the significance of the study, and definition of several important terms.

Chapter Two surveys the historical as well as theoretical background of learning organizations. This chapter is divided into four subsections. The first subsection of this chapter will look at the concept of learning organization. This is followed by literature on how other organizations transform themselves into learning organizations. The third section will look into characteristics of a learning organization from the school perspective. Other findings and conceptual framework of the study will also be included in this chapter.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology employed in the present study that includes the research design, research sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures.

The results of the survey study of learning organization characteristics are the highlights of Chapter Four. In this chapter, respondents' characteristics and psychometric properties of the instruments are examined. This is followed by tests of hypotheses and ends with further interest on the results.

Chapter Five discusses the findings of the study on which conclusions are drawn and interpretations made accordingly. Limitations as well as implications of the study and suggestions for future research are also included in the final chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is subdivided into the following sections: (1) the concept of learning organization, (2) building learning organization, (3) characteristics of a learning organization: school perspective, (4) other findings, and (5) conceptual framework of the study.

2.2 The Concept of Learning Organization

Organizational learning is not a new concept. Historically, the first publications on organizational learning appeared in the sixties (Cangelosi and Dill, 1965). Peter Senge (1990a) through the publication of *The Fifth Discipline* provided momentum into the research of learning organizations. He defines learning organizations as places:

where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together