

**A STUDY ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF A
SCHOOL IN SHAH ALAM**

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**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

This study is an exploratory investigation on the organizational culture of a school and its relationship with the behavior of the three main groups that make up the school community, namely the students, teachers and the principal. A total of six hypotheses were tested and the empirical evidence adduced had shown to support all the hypotheses, except for one. The first major finding from the study reveals the multiple or multilayered nature of school culture, that is, there exists several sub-cultures within the main school culture. These sub-cultures can be identified through the sharing of at least one common element that each group member has. In this study, it was found that sub-cultures exist among students of different forms and the teachers having their own sub-culture as well. Older students and male students seem to view the culture less positively than younger students and female students. This is in agreement with facts that have been established in earlier studies. Another important element of school culture is the nature of existing relationship between different groups or members of the school. A significantly positive correlation between supportive principal behavior and collegial and collaborative teacher behavior and the low correlation between restrictive principal behavior and teachers' commitment supported by the empirical evidence indicates the extent to which principal's behavior is related to the behavior of teachers in the school. The measurement scales used, i.e. the School Culture Scales (SCS) and the School Culture Inventory (PSCI) which has been validated by the empirical evidence gathered in the study give school administrators more choices in selecting a suitable instrument to evaluate their school culture. Evaluation of the present school culture is a prerequisite to any reform or change effort in a school.

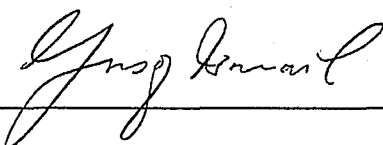
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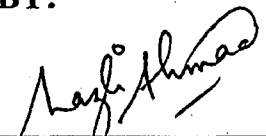
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I hereby declare that this project paper is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by references note and a bibliography appended.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Positive organizational culture has been cited as a powerful force that can be harnessed by leaders of organizations to influence their organizations' effectiveness. Significantly in education, it is an emerging area of research where the focus is more on social-cultural norms such as collaborative-problem solving, shared commitment, development of collaborative cultures, mutual values and goals. These are deemed more important than on more traditional issues of organizational structure when considering improvements in school performance or school change. The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate and identify the positive cultural trait which exists in a relatively effective school that could provide useful insights as to how the organizational culture of the school influences the behaviors of its members.

1.1 Statement of Problem

There is a growing trend in discussions and on-going debates among the various stakeholders of the Malaysian education system on the need for further improving the performance of government public schools. The rise in school disciplinary cases as well as negative perceptions on teachers' effectiveness as educators are not only worrisome but also reflect a fundamental need for change and reform of government public schools.

School reform literally means to give new forms to the school, that is, to change the school in fundamental ways. The United States' experience in school reform, however, has failed, i.e. so little has changed in American schooling by 1990 despite all the hype brought up by the school reform movement (Sarason, 1990).

It is not a surprising outcome to educators, because being teachers, they know change in schools is difficult to accomplish. Research in this area has indicated that is easier to introduce new tools than to change relationships, attitudes, or values and that innovations requiring individual acceptance are easier to install than those requiring group or widespread acceptance.

Sarason (1990) in his analysis of the failure of the school reform movement in the U.S. noted that the strategies and tactics selected to carry out reform efforts had largely been ineffective. This was because they had failed in significantly altering the central core of assumptions and structures or organizational culture of schools.

A similar view was expressed by Cunningham and Cresso (1985). They suggested that structure should not be used to change organizational performance and effectiveness. It should be vice versa where, by focussing on the culture of excellence, the structures will evolve to support that culture. They noted that it is through the school culture that lies the greatest chance of improving what students learn in schools.

The term culture has been defined in various ways by many authors but generally, culture of the school is viewed as the existence of an interplay of three factors, i.e. the attitudes and beliefs of persons both inside the school and in the external environment, the cultural norms of the school, and the relationships between persons in the school. Each of these factors may present barriers to change or a bridge to long-lasting implementation of school improvement.

Therefore, culture is an issue that needs to be addressed before any school improvement efforts are attempted because schools are complex social organizations and the behaviors of their members are often difficult to change. Attitudes and behaviors have too great a staying power to be easily modified by external restructuring and reform.

Deal (1990) suggested that understanding the symbols and culture is a prerequisite to making the school more effective. He too believed that, unless improvement strategies and programs are guided by a sensitive awareness of the role played by school culture, the effective school movement could collapse under its own weight.

Therefore, educators, especially school leaders need to have a grasp on the concept of culture because it can be a powerful tool in school improvement strategies and restructuring. In fact, developing a cultural leadership is the single most important task that educational leaders must work upon.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to unearth the positive cultural norms of a selected effective, secondary public government school. It is hoped that by identifying the positive cultural traits of the school studied will allow present and future school administrators a greater understanding of the working concept of culture as a powerful tool for effective and sustainable school improvement.

As it stands today, the research done in the area of organizational culture in school improvement studies is significantly small in number. Therefore this study would be a small but significant contribution to the continuous research efforts in the field of education especially in the Malaysian context.

1.3 Definitions of Terms

These are the definitions of the various concepts used throughout the paper.

School Culture

It refers to the common set of attitudes and beliefs held by person both inside and outside the school, particularly attitudes about schooling, change, students, and other persons; the cultural norms of the school, composed of a set of informal, unwritten rules governing behavior in the school and community; and the relationships of persons inside the school, on both an individual and group level.

School Climate

It refers to the perception held by stakeholders groups (e.g., students, parents and teachers) about the physical, social and learning environments of a school.

Effective Schools

These are schools that promote learning and do so by a design that results in increased achievement on the part of the students.

Exemplary School - as in Effective School

Good School – as in Effective School

1.4 Research Questions

There have been a large number of studies on effective schools and school effectiveness. However, the number of studies on the influence of school culture on school effectiveness is limited. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What is the nature of school culture in a good school?
2. What are the important principal's behaviors that can contribute to the building of a positive organizational culture in a good school?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

In order to discover how influential and significant a positive organizational culture is to the behavior of school members, the following hypotheses will be tested:

Table 1.1
List of Hypotheses Statements

No	Variables	Hypothesis Statement	Previous Studies
Ha1	Supportive Principal Behavior	There is a significant positive correlation between supportive principal behavior, and collegiality and collaboration among teachers in a good school.	Hoy et al. (1989)
Ha2	Restrictive Principal Behavior	There is a low correlation between restrictive principal behavior and committed teacher behavior	Hoy et al. (1989)
Ha3	Teacher Behavior	There is a significantly positive correlation between collaborative and collegial teacher behavior and committed teacher behavior	Hoy et al. (1989)
Ha4	Student- Teacher Relationship	There is a difference in the level of perception of the school culture between students of different gender	Purkey & Smith (1983); Hoy et al. (1996) Higgins-D'Allesandro and Sath (1997)
Ha5	Students' Culture	There is a difference in the level of perception of the school culture between students of different forms	Higgins-D'Allesandro and Sath (1997)

Ha6	School culture	There is a significantly positive correlation between the level of perception of school culture among the students using the School Culture Scales (SCS) and the School Culture Inventory (PSCI).	-none-
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1.6 Significance of the Study

This study will enable us to understand the positive cultural norms that are present in the school studied. By identifying the positive cultural elements, it is hoped that other school administrators will be able to adopt the positive norms and practices in their respective schools in improving their school culture and hence improving school performance.

1.1 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter discusses the background of the problem, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, the significance of the study and definition of several important terms.

Chapter 2 deals with the review of the literature. It gives a concise review of the literature pertaining to the problem as well as related concepts in school effectiveness, school reforms and school improvement. The concepts of school culture and climate as well as a theoretical framework for the study of school culture are also presented.

Chapter 3 outlines the research procedures, research subjects, research instruments, and data collection techniques and data analysis.

Chapter 4 is on data analysis. This chapter examines the respondents' perceptions of the existing school climate, which is the manifestation of the deeper, underlying values or basic assumptions held by members of the schools or the school culture of the schools studied on. Hypothesis testing was also carried out.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion and implications of the study. Major findings attributed to the study are discussed, followed by a discussion on the limitations, implications and future research directions.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter gives a concise review of the literature related to the problem. The first section briefly describes the categories of effective school research in the literature. The second section examines the concepts of school culture and climate that concludes with a theoretical framework for the study of school culture. The next section describes the relationship between school culture and school effectiveness. This is followed with an overview of the literature regarding the nature of organizational culture in schools and the existence of subcultures within the main school culture; the visible aspects of the school culture and the idea of schools working as communities. The last section of the review describes the role of the school principal in building a positive school culture for school improvement and effectiveness.

2.1 Introduction

Effective schools research has been in vogue since three decades ago. Due to its popularity, a voluminous amount of literature abounds on *effective schools research* and this had given rise to the use of different concepts and language to explain the same educational events. Despite the emerging patterns of research in *effective schools research*, Jansen (1995) noted the danger in drawing on studies without determining the meanings assigned by different authors to the events being studied. Therefore, it is

important for those interested in doing research in this topic to be able to distinguish the broad concepts in the school effectiveness literature, since different authors employ the same concepts in different ways and context.

2.2 Effective Schools Research: Categories of Research

Clark et al. (1984) divided the literature into two lines of inquiry, (1) the literature on "instructionally effective schools" (IES) which has as focus a measure of student achievement; (2) the literature on "school improvement" (SI) which focuses on the extent to which a school adopts an innovation. In the former case (IES), the question is whether altering resources, processes, and organizational arrangements, will affect student outcomes. In the latter case (SI), the issue is whether schools can change and, if they can, how they do it.

Purkey and Smith (1983) offered a different way in clustering this literature. They distinguish four groups: (1) Outlier studies that distinguish highly effective (positive outliers) and highly ineffective (negative outlier) schools; (2) Case studies that offer detailed descriptions of small samples of schools or individual schools, (3) Program evaluations which assess existing programs in order to explain school-level performance related to these programs, and (4) Other studies which are also cited in the school effectiveness literature but do not fit into the above three categories.

Another categorization was offered by Ralph and Fennessey (1983) who distinguish: (1) the study of effective schools and important differences among them, and (2) the study of school effects that focus on school-classroom level variables that have an effect on student achievement.

The most comprehensive approach to desegregating this literature comes from a 1984 Northwest Regional Education Laboratory Study titled, "Effective Schooling Practices: A Research Synthesis" which identified six components of the research based on effective schooling. They are:- (1) School effects research are studies of the school to identify practices that help students learn, (2) Teacher effects research which study effective teaching practices, (3) Research on instructional leadership which focus on principals and effective support of teaching and learning from the school administration, (4) Curriculum alignment research where studies are made on the effective methods of organizing curriculum, (5) Program coupling research in which studies of practices at different levels in the educational system, and (6) Research on educational change where practices that promote change in schools or programs on a sustainable basis are conducted.

Jansen (1995) articulated a conclusion from his extensive review of the present literature on effective schools research: that in its language design, methods and conclusions, the effective schools literature works strictly within a positivist paradigm which assumes that schools basically consist of interrelated units that can be 'fixed' by