

Teacher Professionalisation And Organisational Commitment: Evidence From Malaysia

Fauziah Noordin, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Rahmah Mohd Rashid, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Rohani Ghani, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Rasimah Aripin, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
Zabani Darus, Ministry of Education, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The findings suggest that teachers have low to moderate levels of professionalization and moderate levels of affective, continuance, and normative commitments. There is no correlation between affective commitment and job environment.

Keywords: Professionalisation, affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important institutional organizations of any nation as it oversees issues on the national agenda. Its effective running depends firmly on its coordination in the direction of societal expectation. Successful educational programs lie on the important contributions of effort, involvement and, most importantly, on the overall teacher professionalisation. Teacher commitment, among other factors, is crucial to effective schools. Teacher professionalisation, therefore, is the key in establishing the degree in teacher commitment and job satisfaction. This study aims at determining the level of teacher professionalisation and organisational commitment of primary school teachers in Malaysia.

Teacher professionalisation is referred to as the movement to upgrade the status, training, and working conditions of teachers. According to NCES (1997), since the mid-1980s, a growing number of education reformers, policymakers, and researchers have argued that many of the well-publicized shortcomings of the elementary and secondary education system in the United States are, to an important extent, due to inadequacies in the working conditions, resources, and support afforded to school teachers. Proponents of this view hold, for example, that teachers are underpaid, have too little say in the operation of schools, are afforded too few opportunities to improve their teaching skills, suffer from a lack of support or assistance, and are not adequately rewarded or recognized for their efforts. The key to improving the quality of schools, these critics claim, lies in upgrading the status, training, and working conditions of teaching; that is, in furthering the professionalisation of teachers and teaching. The rationale underlying this view is that upgrading the teaching occupation will lead to improvements in the motivation and commitment of teachers, which, in turn, will lead to improvements in teachers' performance, which will ultimately lead to improvements in student learning (e.g., Carnegie Forum 1986; Darling-Hammond 1984; Rosenholtz 1989; Sergiovanni and Moore 1989; Weis et al. 1989; Conley and Cooper 1991; Holmes Group 1986; Darling-Hammond 1995; Talbert and McLaughlin 1993).

Organisational commitment is the subject of a number of organisational behaviour studies and is considered an important variable in understanding employee behaviours and attitudes (Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982; Meyer and Allen, 1984; De Cotiis and Sumners, 1987; Meyer and Allen, 1986, 1988; Farkas and Tetrick, 1989; Allen & Meyer, 1990). With increased research attention devoted to organisational commitment, definitions and measures of the construct have proliferated. Studies (for example, McGee and Ford, 1987; Meyer and Allen, 1984) confirm that organisational commitment has two, and possibly three, components; namely, affective,

continuance and normative (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Meyer and Allen (1991) conceptualise organisational commitment in three approaches which they refer to as affective, continuance and normative organisational commitment. They stress that common to these three components of organisational commitment is the view that organisational commitment is a psychological state which (a) characterises the employee's relationship with the organisation and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organisation. Beyond this, however, the nature of the psychological state differs. Affective organisational commitment refers to an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation. Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment with the organisation because they want to do so. Continuance commitment refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organisation. Employees whose primary link to the organisation is based on continuance organisational commitment remain because they need to do so. Finally, normative organisational commitment refers to a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees with a high level of normative commitment feel that they ought to remain with the organisation.

Meyer and Allen (1991) believe that it is more appropriate to consider affective, continuance and normative organisational commitment as components, rather than as types, of organisational commitment. The latter implies that the psychological states characterising the three forms of organisational commitment are mutually exclusive. According to Meyer and Allen (1991), it is more reasonable to expect that an employee can experience all three forms of commitment to varying degrees. For example, one employee might feel both a strong desire and a strong need to remain, but little obligation to do so, while another employee might feel little desire, a moderate need, and a strong obligation to remain. Given these conceptual differences, it seems likely that the psychological states reflecting the three components of organisational commitment will develop as the function of quite different antecedents and have different implications for work-related behaviour. Based on the above discussion, the present study has formulated the following research questions: (1) What is the level of professionalisation of primary school teachers in Malaysia?; (2) What is the level of organisational commitment of the primary school teachers in Malaysia?; and (3) Does teacher professionalisation have an impact on organisational commitment of the primary school teachers in Malaysia?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on survey research. The method used for collecting survey data used in the present study was the self-administered questionnaire. Respondents consisted of primary school teachers. A total of 3,400 questionnaires were distributed to respondents consisting of 340 schools selected around peninsular Malaysia. The biggest problem with mailed questionnaires is the lack of returned responses. To reduce this problem, the "Total Design Method" for the mail survey (Dillman, 1977) was employed.

Assessment Instruments

Rather than using an explanatory study that generates its own items, the measures were selected from established sources for three reasons: 1) these measures have already demonstrated an appropriate level of reliability in previous studies, 2) De Vaus (1990) states that researchers should try to evaluate the many well-established and tested scales, as they may need updating or rewording to fit a particular context or sample, and 3) using well-established indicators has the advantage of enabling a comparison of results with those of other researchers. This can be helpful in building up a cumulative body of knowledge rather than each person carrying out their own research with idiosyncratic measures.

Teacher Professionalisation

Professionalisation was measured using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (NCES, 1997) which consists of credentials, inductions, professional development, authority, and compensation. For the purpose of the present study, only the authority component of the measure was used. Authority, in this case, included perceived authority, involvement in decision-making, perceived problems, and job environment. Since the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (NCES, 1997) is an American-developed instrument, the other components of professionalisation were not used in this study because the aspects of the components are not applicable in the Malaysian context. A Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) was used.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment was measured using the 24-item scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). This scale measures affective, continuance, and normative commitments. Affective commitment refers to the employees’ emotional commitment to, identification with, and involvement in the organizations. Continuance commitment refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization and normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). A Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) was used.

A set of items on demographic information data was prepared to establish the profiles of the respondents.

ANALYSIS

In seeking answers to the research questions, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed using SPSS software. A Spearman’s Rank Coefficient Correlation between variables were computed for all respondents. Internal consistency of the scales was tested using the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951).

Teachers’ Profile

Involved in this study was a total of 3,037 teachers (respondents) around peninsular Malaysia. The majority of the respondents were Malays (94.1%); hence, this also gives an immediate effect on the religion outcome or result with the same percentage. In general, the respondents’ ages are mainly between 31 and 44 (62.4%), followed by the age group younger than 31 and over 44 years old (18.8%). The statistics also show that 90.2% of the individuals are married. The majority of the respondents (75.1%) were in the RM1000-RM1999 salary range.

Teachers’ Analysis

Tables 1 through 6 below show the means of the variables used in the present study.

Level of administrative involvement and authority

Table 1 indicates the responses of the respondents on the level of involvement and authority for various administrative tasks.

Table 1: Teachers - Level Of Administrative Involvement And Authority

Level	Task	Percent Involved	Median	Mean
Involvement	a) Setting discipline policy	93.9	4.00	3.37
	b) Determining the content of teachers’ development of the school	92.5	3.00	3.18
	c) Deciding on the school budget spending	81.0	3.00	2.68
	d) Evaluating the performance of teachers and other staff	66.6	3.00	2.74
	Overall	-	3.00	2.97
Authority	a) Evaluating and grading students	100	4.00	4.29
	b) Selecting teaching techniques	100	4.00	4.24
	c) Disciplining students	100	4.00	4.08
	d) Determining the amount and nature of students’ homework assigned	100	4.00	4.00
	e) Selecting content, topic and skills to be taught	100	4.00	3.80
	f) Selecting textbooks and other instructional materials	100	4.00	3.25
	Overall	-	4.00	3.90

Note: Likert’s scale: 1 - 5

More than 90% were involved (responded 1 to 5) in setting discipline policy (93.9%) and determining the content of teachers’ development of the school (92.5%). However, a lower proportion among them is involved in deciding on school budget spending (81.0%) or evaluating the performance of teachers and other staff (66.6%). These measures indicate that the level of involvement is moderate for setting discipline policy (mean>3.0), but low (mean<3.0) for the other three tasks, giving an overall low level (mean=2.97) of involvement. All of them said that they had the authority in matters related to their teaching such as selecting textbooks, content and students’ assessment. The level of authority varies, but on the average, it is also moderately high, as indicated by the median values of 4.00 for all tasks which indicate that more than half said so. Comparing the mean values, the respondents felt that they had a higher authority for tasks directly related to their classrooms (mean >4.0), but not on matters outside the classroom, such as selecting materials and topics to be taught or selecting which textbooks and other instructional materials are to be adopted.

Perceived Problems Related to Students and the School

The overall mean for the perceived problem is 3.64 (Table 2). The respondents were also asked to rate the extent of problems related to students in their schools. The mean scores are arranged in ascending order in order to rank them from least to most serious. The percentage of respondents who responded with a scale of 4 or more indicates the proportion who consider the item as a problem. Lack of racial interaction is not a problem in most schools as less than half of the respondents (42.5%) rated it as a problem. However, the majority of the respondents feel that their schools face various problems, ranging from poor health (50.1%) to poor command of English among their students (85.0%). Poverty (53.4%) is also a problem, but not as prevalent as those related to students’ indiscipline: tardiness (64.2%), theft (61.2%), physical conflict (64.7%), disrespect for teachers/headmasters (67.5%) and vandalism of school properties (69.1%). The above results are further supported by the respective median and mean values.

Table 2: Teachers - Perception on the Extent of Problems Faced by the School

Problem	Percent with 4 or more	Median	Mean
1. Lack of racial interaction	42.5	3.0	3.11
2. Poor health among students	50.1	3.0	3.26
3. Poverty	53.4	4.0	3.38
4. Student tardiness	64.2	4.0	3.46
5. Theft	61.2	4.0	3.55
6. Physical conflict among students	64.7	4.0	3.62
7. Student disrespect for teachers /headmaster	67.5	4.0	3.72
8. Vandalism of school property	69.1	4.0	3.75
9. Lack of parents involvement	75.2	4.0	3.84
10. Student absenteeism	77.3	4.0	3.90
11. Student apathy	77.7	4.0	3.92
12. Students come to school unprepared to learn	80.1	4.0	3.94
13. Lack of competitiveness for academic excellence	82.6	4.0	4.00
14. Students having problems with the command of English	85.0	4.0	4.85
Overall	-	3.65	3.64

Note: Likert’s scale: 1 - 5

Among them, a large proportion is also concerned about the lack of parents’ involvement (75.2%), students’ absenteeism (77.3%) and students’ apathy (77.7%). The three most serious problems are related to students’ communication ability and attitude. They are: (1) the command of English (85.0%; 4.85), followed by lack of competitiveness for academic excellence (82.6%; 4.00) and coming to school unprepared to learn (80.1%; 3.94). However, the standard deviation for the communication skills (8.10) is a few times larger than those of the other items due to a very high proportion who said that this problem is prevalent among their students as indicated by the mean score of 4.85, which is the highest among the 14 items rated. The above statistics indicate that, in general, the teachers feel that they are faced with a multitude of students’ problems, with communication skills and attitude toward learning as the most serious.

Job Environment

The overall mean for job environment is 3.65 (Table 3). The respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction toward various aspects related to their profession.

Table 3: Teachers - Job Environment

Statement	Percent with 4 or more	Median	Mean
1. The principle knows what kind of school he/she wants and has communicated it to the staff	94.2	4.0	4.32
2. Goals and priorities for the school are clear	93.6	4.0	4.19
3. My principal enforces school rules on students	88.9	4.0	4.15
4. I make an effort to coordinate the content of my subject with that of other teachers	88.8	4.0	4.09
5. Most of the colleagues share my views about what the central mission of the school should be	86.3	4.0	4.00
6. Student’s misbehavior does not interfere with my teaching	83.0	4.0	4.07
7. I believe that school’s rules and procedures are administered fairly	80.3	4.0	3.90
8. In this school, staff members are recognized for a job well done	76.1	4.0	3.89
9. The headmaster does a good job of getting resources for the school	74.5	4.0	3.87
10. The headmaster frequently hold discussions on my instructional practice	72.1	4.0	3.74
11. I never feel it is a waste of time to try to do my best as a teacher	64.7	4.0	3.68
12. I plan with the librarian for the integration of the library services into my teaching	57.3	4.0	3.47
13. I am satisfied with my salary	53.2	4.0	3.23
14. The amount of student tardiness and absenteeism in the school does not interfere with my teaching	52.9	4.0	3.24
15. Library materials are adequate to support my instructional objectives	44.3	3.0	3.02
16. Rules in the school do not conflict with my best professional judgment	38.7	3.0	3.07
17. Routine duties and paperwork is not a problem	21.4	2.0	2.32
Overall			3.65

Note: Likert’s scale: 1 - 5

The majority (more than 60%) of the respondents are satisfied with most aspects related to their work environment (11 out of 17). In particular, they are most satisfied with the efforts made by the headmaster in managing the school in setting missions (94.2%), goals and priorities (93.6%), enforcing rules (88.9%), and communicating with the staff (88.8%). The opinion is approximately divided for three other aspects with only slightly more than half who said that: 1) they plan with the librarian for the integration of the library services into their teaching (57.3%), 2) they are satisfied with their salary (53.2%), and 3) students’ problems, such as tardiness and absenteeism, in the school do not interfere with their teaching (52.9%).

On the other hand, the majority feels that: 1) the amount of library materials is not sufficient (54.7%), 2) rules in the school conflict with their best professional judgment (61.3%), and 3) routine duties and paperwork interferes with their work (78.6%). From the above responses, it can be gathered that teachers do not have much involvement in decisions regarding the school’s library, which in turn explains the low level of satisfaction toward the materials provided.

Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitments

As indicated in Tables 4 through 6, overall, the teachers have moderate levels of affective commitment (mean = 3.808), continuance commitment (mean = 3.710), and normative commitment (mean = 3.420). Affective commitment appears to have the highest mean compared to the other components of organisational commitment. This is a good indicator that the respondents are committed to their schools, even though they are at the moderate

level. Continuance commitment should be a concern to management of the schools since its mean is the second highest after affective commitment (Table 5). This is due to the fact that the respondents commit to their schools because they perceive losing organizational membership, including economic (pensions, benefits, etc.) and social costs (such as friendship ties with other staff in the schools) which would incur a low sense of loyalty to the school. As shown in Table 6, normative commitment appears to have the lowest mean (although still at a moderate level) compared to the affective and continuance commitments. This may indicate that the respondents commit to and remain with the school because of the feelings of obligation. This may be a reflection of an internalized norm developed before the respondents joined their respected schools through family or other socialization processes in that they thought they should be loyal to their schools. In other words, the respondents felt they needed to stay with the schools because they “ought to,” and not because they “want to” or “have to.”

Table 4: Teachers - Individual Means: Affective Commitment

Items		Mean
1	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this school*	4.01
2	I enjoy discussing my school with people outside it	3.83
3	I really feel as if this school’s problems are my own	3.88
4	I think that I could easily become as attached to another school as I am to this one*	3.42
5	I do not feel like ‘part of the family’ at my school*	4.17
6	If given the opportunity, this school would take unfair advantage of me	3.78
7	I do not feel ‘emotionally attached’ to this school*	3.37
8	This school has great deal of personal meaning to me	3.83
9	I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my school*	3.98
Total Mean		3.808

Table 5: Teachers - Individual Means: Continuance Commitment

Items		Mean
1	I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up*	4.09
2	It would be very hard for me to leave my job right now, even if I wanted to*	2.95
3	Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my job now	3.80
4	Right now, staying on my job is a matter of necessity	4.18
5	Right now, staying on my job is a matter of desire	3.96
6	I feel that I have too few options if I quit my job	3.56
7	One of the few serious consequences of leaving this job would be the scarcity of available alternatives	3.56
8	One of the major reasons I continue to work is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice-another job may not match the overall benefits I have here	3.58
Total Mean		3.710

Table 6: Teachers - Individual Means: Normative Commitment

Items		Mean
1	I think that people these days change jobs too often*	2.90
2	I do not believe that a teacher must always be loyal to his or her profession*	3.20
3	One of the major reasons I continue to teach is that I believe that loyalty is important and therefore I feel a sense of moral obligation to remain	3.98
4	Even if I got another offer for a better job elsewhere, I would not feel it was right to leave my teaching	3.60
Total Mean		3.420

*Reverse-scored items (Tables 4 - 6). Note: Likert’s scale: 1 - 5

Correlations Analysis

In seeking answer to the third research question, i.e., the relationships between professionalisation and organizational commitment of teachers, an analysis on the said variables were conducted and summarized as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Teachers: Summary of Correlations Analysis

Variable	Administrative Involvement	Administrative Authority	Perceived Problems	Job Environment
Affective	.113**	.229**	.030	.455**
Continuance	-.048*	.076**	.091*	.070**
Normative	.089**	.127**	-.046*	.260

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level; ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level;

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

As can be seen in Table 7, affective commitment has positive moderate correlations with administrative involvement, administrative authority, and job environment. Continuance commitment has a weak negative correlation with administrative involvement, a weak positive correlation with perceived problems, and positive moderate correlations with administrative involvement and job environment. Normative commitment appears to have moderate positive correlations with administrative involvement and administrative authority, a weak negative correlation with perceived problems and no correlation with job environment. It should be noted that the relationships depicted and discussed between the variables do not imply causality, but indicate association.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Overall, the findings of the present study provided answers to the research questions. The findings suggest that teachers have low-to-moderate levels of professionalisation and moderate levels of job satisfaction. The study also found that teachers have moderate levels of affective, continuance, and normative commitment. No correlations were found between affective commitment and perceived problems and between normative commitment and job environment. The other correlations are either positive or negative as indicated in Table 2.

The results of this study are important for a number of reasons. First, they provide empirical corroboration of the theoretical perspectives NCES (1997) on teacher professionalisation and Allen and Meyer (1990) on organizational commitment. Second, they may be of interest and assistance to management of schools, policy-makers, or the Ministry of Education who need to manage the academic staff to improve on the level of professionalisation and to understand the differences in their work behaviour and work attitudes. Third, by examining the results in detail may provide some insights to management in terms of how management may approach affective, continuance, and normative commitment, career commitment, and to improve the level of teacher professionalisation in Malaysia.

Teacher professionalisation in Malaysia is still at a low level. This is supported by the low to moderate level of professionalisation as perceived by the primary school teachers in the present study. More efforts on the part of the relevant authorities are needed.

The findings of this study contribute to a growing body of research which illustrates the need to take a multidimensional approach to the study of teacher professionalisation and organizational commitment. Management needs to determine how their schools can inspire and nurture teacher commitment. Management no longer needs to bribe, cajole, or humour people into being committed and more loyal to the school. Rather, they must try to craft management strategies around the most valuable assets of the schools; i.e., human resources. Understanding the behaviour of individuals, groups, and organization is of utmost importance for any organization to gain the most from its human resources. Teaching professionalisation is the final area that needs improvement in order to increase the teachers’ commitment and reduce the attrition rate in Malaysia. Teacher professionalisation must originate with the educational leaders and it must be demonstrated and valued at all levels of the educational bureaucracy. Teachers

must be reimbursed for continuing education tuition fees, given decision-making power, and paid on a level commensurate to their education and value to the society as a whole. Policy-makers and the educational administration at the state and federal levels must work diligently to increase the levels of commitment of the teachers and to reduce the number of teachers that are leaving the profession.

Future studies on teacher professionalisation and organisational commitment should also include the study of relationships between parents' perception and role with the school community roles and how these factors may relate in helping to determine better future teacher professionalisation and organisational commitment over school performance.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Fauziah Noordin is a professor of Human Resource Management at the Faculty of Business, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

Rahmah Mohd Rashid is an Assoc. Professor at the Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

Rohani Ghani is a lecturer at the Institute of Education Development, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

Rasimah Aripin is an Assoc. Professor at the Faculty of Information Technology and Quantitative Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

Zabani Darus is a senior officer at the Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

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