

School Culture and School Improvement Challenges in Kedah

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to identify the level of school culture practices in Kedah and the Challenges of school improvement faced by school management. The study was conducted in a mixed-method. A total of 375 teachers working in regular daily high school were selected as respondents to answer the School Culture Triage Survey questionnaire (Wagner, 2006) while 5 school management representatives were interviewed in connection with the improvement challenges. Data findings show that in general, Kedah secondary school culture min score is within the range of 60 to 75. From the data collected, Wagner (2006) stated that the school being reviewed needs to be controlled and given positive changes. As for the challenges of improvement, the contributing factors are: i) teacher's attitude; ii) excessive number of students; iii) curriculum change; iv) lack of financial resources; v) classification of student's achievement level and; vi) Lack of Facilities. The findings show that improvements to the typical daily secondary schools are being examined in order to create a positive school culture environment in order to generate student's performance excellence.

Keywords: School Culture; School Improvement; Professional Co-operation; Relationship and Serenity; Efficacy or Self Reflection

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I. Introduction

School culture is very complex and important at the same time (Hollins, 2008). School culture is related to student's achievement (Cleveland, Chambers, Mainus, Powell, and Skepple, 2012). This is because it can have an impact on the school, including teaching, learning, and staff development (Lucas, 2001). School culture also affects everything that happens in schools including the way their staffs are attired, conversations, their readiness to change, teaching practices and the focus given to the students. Overall, culture affects all aspects of a school (Deal and Peterson, 2009).

Indeed, schools are provided with the same curriculum, equivalent teacher qualifications and have similar basic needs. However, the school culture practised between one school and another is not the same due to a different member (Hofstede, 2011). The impact of school culture is huge because without cultural support, reforms will not be successful and students will fail in learning (Sullivan, 2010).

This suggests that school culture is an important component of the school's improvement process and it will affect the overall decision in the phase of the improvement process through the leadership of the school. Whether or not the school improvement process is successful, it depends on the level of teachers' acceptance linked to the elements of improvement (Rutledge, 2009).

This study examines the three-dimensional school culture listed by Wagner (2006), namely professional collaboration, affiliative and collegial relationship and efficacy or self-determination and challenges which are faced by the management in implementing improvements in schools.

II. Research Objective

The main objectives of this study are to identify:

- 1) the level of cultural practice of secondary schools in Kedah.
- 2) the level of cultural practice for schools according to the local district of Kedah.
- 3) challenges in upgrading domestic schools in Kedah.

III. Research Questions

Based on the objective of the study, a questionnaire was constructed:

- 1) What is the level of school culture practice for Kedah secondary schools?
- 2) What is the level of school culture practice for secondary schools according to districts in Kedah?
- 3) Do the challenges of school improvement affect the culture of domestic schools in Kedah?

IV. Methodology

Sample: This study involved teachers who are currently serving in Kedah secondary school. The selection of teachers is based on the criteria of the school (i) regular daily secondary school; (ii) school capacity of at least 100 teachers; (iii) schools that are below Band 3 in Malaysian Quality Education Standards.

Respondents were selected from eight schools according to the local districts of Kedah, Malaysia. A total of 375 respondents were involved in answering the questionnaire while five respondents were interviewed.

Research Design: The quantitative and qualitative combination methods have been used for this study as it can provide a better understanding of the study problem (Creswell, 2012). Data collection through the combination of quantitative and qualitative method is also suggested as member involvement may be a crucial criterion in achieving quality programs as it can be influenced by other aspects of implementation (Cross, Gottfredson, Wilson, Rorie, and Connell, 2010).

Quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire related to school culture. Meanwhile, the qualitative method used is the interview method with the school management to identify school improvements conducted at the school level. The interviews were intended to explain in detail the quantitative data acquisition and could explain the study questions (Creswell, 2012).

Research Instrument: To evaluate school culture, the School Culture Triage Survey (Wagner, 2006) was used. This instrument is intended to measure the extent to which three "cultural behaviors" exist in schools. There are 17 items submitted according to dimensions (i) Professional Collaboration; (ii) Affiliative and Collegial Relationship and; (iii) Efficacy or Self-determination.

Focused interview methods were used to identify challenges in improving school performance. In addition, through interviews, respondents can give their views and share stories in their perspective more deeply.

V. School Culture

(Schein, 2004) states that school culture can not be established within a single day, but it is gradually formed when teachers go through any changes, adapt to the environment and solve the problems that exist. A school with a positive culture has a set of values that support teacher's professional development, a sense of responsibility for student's learning, and a positive and caring atmosphere (Deal and Peterson, 2009). This is in line with Delisio (2006) in his study that the culture or school climate can have a significant impact on student's performance. In addition, positive school culture is also a culture that always celebrates the success of its community, emphasizing team achievement and teamwork and fosters commitment to staffs and student learning (D. Cooke, et al., 2000). However, (Baloglu, Karadag, and Çakir, 2011) found that although there was a significant positive correlation between school culture and organizational commitment, there was no significant relationship between all sub-scale school cultures and one sub-scale of commitment that is a constant commitment.

School culture should always be monitored to remain positive. If school culture is deteriorating, the school leadership needs to change the culture of the school. School culture changes may occur through centralized mandates. However, the root cause of change by centralized mandate is because of the school climate, the leadership and the characteristics of the school with the teachers in that school in particular (Hinde, 2004). School cultural changes can also be done through school leadership but it is a difficult process to go through if they intend to completely change the culture of a school.

Professional Collaboration

In the process of changing the culture of the school, leadership wisdom is needed to influence the teachers in the school so that the commitment of the school community can be improved (Melville, Bartley, and Weinburgh, 2012). What is certain is that school community should have the willingness to spend more time if they want to develop an effective school culture.

School culture needs to be changed and renewed. But if it is done often, nothing can be accomplished (Hudson, 2012). This means that before making any changes to the school culture, the school leadership needs to plan wisely and thoroughly so that the cultures formed later will be of good quality, acceptable to all members and can last for a long time. The involvement of teachers in decision-making when planning school changes should also be taken into account in order to foster a sense of collegiality and create a sense of belonging among the school community. Andronico (2013) finds that continuous professional development is necessary and teachers should be empowered and accountable to help principals manage the transformational leadership strategies to transform existing negative cultures as well as inspire and motivate other teachers.

Affiliative and Collegial Relationship

At school, the relationship among its community is important (Alavi and McCormick, 2004). Byard (2011) in his study found that school community should be aware that interactions and relationships affect the overall learning environment in a school and they should be prepared to recognize the changes that need to be made to improve student academic achievement. While Arnodah (2013) found that peer teaching teachers' assessment includes characteristics such as collaboration; collaboration and dialogues to enhance positive working relationship among teachers. Evaluation of peer teaching among teachers allows teachers to assess each other and indirectly eliminate the culture of privacy and individualism. If this culture is practised well, it can strengthen the relationship and trust of fellow teachers.

Efficacy or Self-determination

Emotional intelligence and self efficacy have a significant relationships with work attitude (Anari, 2012). Sullivan (2010) found that teachers with positive attitudes towards innovation, teaching and feeling confident in their teaching ability were teachers who demonstrated a high degree of self-efficacy. However, Yusof et al. (2011) found that the teacher's self efficacy significantly related to the location factor, the size of the large class as well as the attitude and awareness of the teacher and it can affect the school.

VI. School Improvement Challenges

In the era of modernization, the change in education is a necessity. Improvements need to be made in line with current needs and in accordance with new leadership views and cultural change. Every school organization needs to have ongoing efforts towards organizational change and change of practice of teachers so as to improve school performance (Wynder Ii, 2013). In this regard, the school leadership should review the intricacies of the school, including its history being implimented, achievements and the contemporary aspects of culture before the improvement being implemented (Peterson, 2002). Sammons, Gu, Day, and Ko, (2011) found that a sound dimension of leadership base can demonstrate effective strategies and actions and thereby create a conducive school and classroom environment to enhance student's achievement. Hinde (2004) in his study revealed that the challenge of improvement was the problem of managing the power of leadership in the effort to make the school's culture in line with the goals and processes of change and to create the trust of teachers as well as to express their sense of belonging. Nevertheless, Bell and Kent (2010) found that the change in society poses a challenge to school culture. This is also in line with the findings of Clark (2005) which states that the challenges of school improvement are sensitive to the background of local communities such as poverty. He further added that the improvement of schools in high-poverty schools depends on various factors (eg, school size, teacher quality and teaching quality).

VII. Findings

The data were analyzed using min score, mod, minimum and maximum to identify the level of cultural practice domestic schoolsin Kedah.

Table 1 shows the mean score of the whole school culture is 61.95, mod 61.00, while the minimum score is 45.00 and the maximum score is 78.00. Generally, the mean score of school culture is within the range of between 60 and 75. Wagner (2006) stated that this indicates that the school studied needs to be controlled and positive changes should be made.

Table1 : Mean, Mod, Maximum and Minimum Score of Schools Culture for Secondary Schools in Kedah

Variable	Mean	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
School Culture	61.95	61.00	45.00	78.00

Descriptive analysis of school culture variables is further subdivided according to the local districts of Kedah.

Table 2 shows data findings indicate that District D area recorded the highest mean score of 64.86, while District F district recorded the lowest mean of 60.33. The highest minimum score is District C of 51.00 while the lowest minimum score is District A of 45.00. The highest maximum score is District B and District C of 78.00 while the lowest maximum score is District F area of 71.00. Based on the mean score of each district, it is found that all schools surveyed by districts need to be controlled and given positive changes. However, there is a minimum score below 41 to 59. This suggests that the school is in dire need of modifications and improvements as well as a more in-depth assessment needs to be done to identify the element of school culture that needs improvement.

Table2: Mean, Mod, Minimum and Maximum Score of School Culture for Secondary School by District in Kedah.

District in Kedah	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
District A	60.81	45.00	76.00
District B	61.51	47.00	78.00
District C	63.77	51.00	78.00
District D	64.86	50.00	77.00
District E	62.56	47.00	74.00
District F	60.33	49.00	71.00
District G	61.20	46.00	72.00
District H	60.34	51.00	72.00

Table 3 shows data findings for the dimensions of Professional Collaboration, Affiliative and Collegial Relationship and Efficacy or Self-determination. Based on Table 3, the highest Professional Collaboration score was District E of mean 18.16 (72.64%). While the lowest Professional Collaboration score is District G with 16.66 (66.64%). For the dimensions of Affiliative and Collegial Relationship, the highest score was District C with mean 24.00 (80.00%), while the lowest score was District Area with mean 21.34 (71.13%). For the Efficacy and Self-determination, the highest score was District D with mean 23.22 (77.40%), while the lowest score was District A with mean 21.54 (71.80%)

In general, all three dimensions for districts in Kedah are in moderation. Improvements need to be made so that there is an increase in the cultural dimensions of the school.

Table 3 :Mean and percentage of Professional Collaboration Scores, Affiliative and Collegial Relationship and Efficacy or Self-determination of Secondary Schools by District in Kedah

District in Kedah	PC		ACR		ESD	
	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%
District A	16.79	67.16	22.48	74.93	21.54	71.80
District B	17.34	69.36	22.47	74.90	21.70	72.33
District C	17.60	70.40	24.00	80.00	22.17	73.90
District D	17.80	71.20	23.84	79.47	23.22	77.40
District E	18.16	72.64	22.71	75.70	21.69	72.30
District F	16.72	66.88	21.59	71.97	22.03	73.43
District G	16.66	66.64	22.56	75.20	21.98	73.27
District H	16.80	67.20	21.34	71.13	22.20	74.00

Keywords:

PC : Professional Collaboration

ACR : Affiliative and Collegial Relationship

ESD : Efficacy or Self-determination

In order to identify the challenges of school improvement, interview sessions were conducted. The findings of the interview showed that each respondent stated some of the challenges faced in performing improvements in schools. It was found that all five respondents explained that teachers' attitude was their main challenge. While 2 out of 5 respondents also stated that curriculum changes, lack of facilities and classification of student achievement levels affected the challenges of improvement as students in their schools comprised of those who did not get excellent results in public examinations. While one out of five respondents noted that the lack of financial resources and the excessiveness of students are among the challenges of improvement in their schools.

VIII. Conclusion

This study was conducted to identify the level of culture domestic schools in Kedah. The results of the study showed that the school culture of domestic schools in Kedah was in a moderate level of mean score between 60 to 70. The findings show that domestic schools in Kedah need to be controlled and positive changes should be given. This is because a healthy school culture can help produce the generation of students, families and educators that work together to achieve every school vision, mission and aspiration (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013).

Based on which is the three dimensions of the school culture, the dimensions of Professional Co-operation have scored low between 66% - 73%. The school management needs to re-evaluate whether teachers and all staffs work together in solving professional issues that arise in schools. Teamwork in schools should be fostered so that all established visions, missions and goals are achieved.

While the dimensions of Relationships and Consanguities score is between 71% - 80% and Self-reflection or Reflection score is 71% - 78%, the school management should constantly monitor and update the activities and programs conducted at school to form work culture such as family in a school that allows all

school community to enjoy working, always support each other and always feel needed and appreciated in their school. In addition, school management should also continuously improve the professional skills of teachers and avoid too much bureaucracy in schools that can cause teachers to be demotivated.

In doing improvements, school management faces many challenges. Among the factors that contribute to the challenge of school improvement are: i) teacher's attitude; ii) excessive number of students; iii) curriculum change; iv) lack of financial resources; v) classification of student's achievement level and; vi) lack of facilities. To overcome the problem of teacher's attitude, the diversity of leadership traits must be practised in accordance with the situation. School management needs to have skills in influencing its subordinates. In terms of the excessive number of students who are overweight, the school management needs to be wise in addressing this problem by limiting the student's capacity for a class so as to not burden the teachers. Apart from that, the collaboration of school management with the District Education Office and State Education Department can be established so that the problem can be rectified. In addition, this collaboration also needs to be done to improve the skills of teachers to address the issue of curriculum change. This is consistent with Owen(2010) that stated to address the shortage of financial resources and facilities, the relationship with outsiders need to be practiced. This is because if good relationships are created, they can provide cooperation and assistance if needed. The issue of student's admission based on the classification of achievement is a difficult matter for regular daily high schools. This is because usually all excellent students are placed in selected schools such as high-performance schools, cluster schools, boarding schools and so on. However, what can be done by the school is to classify the schools so that students can be placed in the classroom with friends whose level of intelligence is similar.

School management needs to take appropriate actions to counteract all forms of improvement challenges that exist to generate student's performance excellence as well as enhance the school culture to create a conducive school environment. This in turn allows the teaching and learning process to be conducted smoothly.

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