

Teacher Professionalisation and Career Commitment

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Abstract—Overall, the findings of the present study suggest that teachers have low to moderate levels of professionalisation, high level of career identity and moderate levels of career resilience, and career planning. From the T-tests and F-tests conducted, it was found that gender has a significant impact on career identity whereas age and marital status have significant impact on career planning and also on career identity. The results indicate that there is a higher possibility of male teachers to leave the teaching profession than the female teachers. The result of the T-test on career identity in relation to gender supports this deduction in which female teachers have significantly higher career identity than their male counterparts. Marital status was also found to have a significant impact on career identity.

Keywords—Professionalisation, career identity, career resilience, career planning

I. INTRODUCTION

EDUCATION is a very serious business because the economy and the political status of a nation, indeed the very fabric of a society, depends upon it. In Malaysia, education is ongoing efforts towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonic, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. This effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large [1]. To do so requires an adequate supply of competent individuals who are willing and to serve as teachers and at the same time committed to their careers as teachers. In the current situation of the growing school-age population, schools and the Ministry of Education must struggle to maintain standards for teaching quality while continuously recruiting bright new teachers and seeking to retain their most effective existing teachers. These two issues of recruiting and retaining effective teachers are easier said than done because of the insufficient and sometimes dwindling resources. What does it take to retain good teachers and attract the brightest young people to the teaching profession?

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According to a survey conducted in 1991 by Metropolitan Life, most teachers (53%) say greater respect for their profession and that more involvement in decision-making (51%) would exert a major impact on keeping them in teaching. These findings together with other reports {for e.g., [2]; [3]; [4]; [5]; [6] [7]} have given rise to the study of teacher professionalisation.

II. TEACHER PROFESSIONALISATION AND CAREER COMMITMENT

Teacher professionalisation is referred to as the movement to upgrade the status, training, and working conditions of teachers. According to NCES [8], 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 and achievement {e.g., [9]; [10]; [11]; [12]; [13]; [14]; [15]; [16]; [17]; [18]; [19]}.

Blau, [20] defines career commitment as one's attitude towards one's profession or vocation whereas Carson and Bedeian [21] refer to career commitment as one's motivation to work in a chosen vocation. In general, career commitment involves the development of personal career goals and an identification with and involvement in those goals [22]. In 1994, Carson and Bedeian developed and validated a three-dimensional measure of affective career commitment. The measure which they labelled Career Commitment Measure (CCM) was developed with three underlying dimensions. The first dimension is career identity which deals with an emotional attachment to the vocation [23], followed by career

planning which considers the energising component of career commitment. The final dimension is career resilience which taps steadfastness in the face of adversity [24]. Carson and Bedeian [25] stress that one of the benefits of their three-dimensional definition of career commitment is that it makes it possible to examine theoretically relevant relations that might otherwise be masked and, therefore, makes it a more useful tool in conducting research on career commitment.

Careers are said to be important not only to individuals, but also to organisations, and society and this has led to increased attention being devoted to career commitment {for example, [26]; [27]; [28]; [29]; [30]}. It is argued that changing employee loyalties and higher education levels [31] have furthered this interest. Furthermore, with an increase in mergers, acquisitions, and layoffs [32], many individuals are unable to depend on a single organisation to sustain an entire career [33]. To cope with such uncertainty, better educated employees have become increasingly committed to their own careers. As Colarelli and Bishop [34, p.159] explain, "commitment to an internally defined career has become an important source of occupational meaning as organisations become more fluid and less able to guarantee employment security." In addition, Mueller, Wallace, and Price [35] consider that career commitment is becoming increasingly recognised as integral to the study of all aspects of employment relationship, which they broadly define to include everything that happens between initial entry and exit. Recently, in his study Goulet and Singh [36] found that job involvement appears to be an antecedent of career commitment.

Organisational commitment and job satisfaction are also found to be correlated to career commitment. It is postulated that as with job involvement, employees who are more committed to their organisations, and who are more satisfied with their jobs, are also committed to their careers. There is also a considerable support for the contention that employee would be more committed to their careers if their current jobs were in line with career aspirations. Currently, compared to the other forms of work-related commitment, there appears to be a paucity of research on career commitment especially in Malaysia.

Hence, the main aim of this study is to examine the level of teacher professionalisation and career commitment of primary teachers in Malaysia. As primary school teachers will continue to play a vital role in educating the young people, their perception on teacher professionalisation and of teaching as a career will undoubtedly provide important and valuable information concerning their chosen career and their commitment to that career. These information is essential to relevant agencies and authorities to enable appropriate plans, strategies and policies to be established to upgrade teaching profession and to make teachers more committed to teaching.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Based on the above discussion, this research mainly seeks to achieve the following objectives: (1) To assess the level of professionalisation of teachers; (2) To examine the level of career commitment of teachers; (3) To examine the relationship between professionalisation and career commitment of teachers.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on survey research using self-administered questionnaires. Respondents consist of primary school teachers. A total of 3400 questionnaires were distributed to selected around the peninsular Malaysia and out of that only 3037 fully completed questionnaires were found to be usable for this study. To reduce the problem of getting back enough usable responses, the "Total Design Method" of mail survey [37] was utilised.

A. Assessment Instruments

Two assessment instruments and a set of items on demographic variables were used in this study.

1. Teacher Professionalisation

Professionalisation was measured using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) [38] which consists of credentials, inductions, professional development, authority, and compensation. For the purpose of the present study, only the authority component of the measure is used. Authority in this case includes perceived authority, involvement in decision making, perceived problems, job environment. Since the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) [39] is an American-developed instruments, 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's scale ranges from 1 to 5 was used (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

2. Career Commitment

Career commitment was measured using a twelve-item scale developed by Carson and Bedeian [40]. The scale measures three components of career: career identity (three items), career resilience (four items) and career planning (three items). Carson and Bedeian report that the coefficient alpha reliabilities for the three dimensions ranged from .79 to .85. Pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted prior to the main study. A Likert's scale ranges from 1 to 5 was used (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

3. Demographic variables

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

V. ANALYSIS

In seeking answers to the research questions, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations of the construct, SPSS software was used. A Spearman's Rank Coefficient Correlation between variables was computed for all respondents. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient [41] was used to test the internal consistency of the scales. To test the effect of demographic variables on the constructs used in the study, a series of two-tailed independent group t-tests and one-way between groups ANOVA with post-hoc comparison.

A. Teachers: Profile

A total of 3037 teachers (respondents) around the peninsular Malaysia were involved in this study. 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 age are mainly between the range of 31-44 (62.4%), followed by the age group of less than 31 and over 44 years old with the percentage of (18.8%). The statistics also show that (90.2%) of the individuals are married. Majority of the respondents (75.1%) were in the range of RM1000 - RM1999 salary bracket.

B. Teachers: Analysis

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

1. 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 I
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	66.6	3.00	2.74

Authority	staff			
	Overall	-	3.00	2.97
	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

More than ninety per cent 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 the 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 have 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 to be adopted.

2. Perceived Problems Related to Students and the School

The overall mean for 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 the least serious to the most serious. The percentage of

respondents who responded with a scale of 4 or more indicates the proportion that 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, 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 II
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

A large proportion among them is also concern 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 skill (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 fourteen 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 towards learning as the most serious.

3. Job Environment

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

TABLE III
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 misbehaviour 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

A high majority (more than sixty per cent) 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 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 (55.7%); (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 explain the low level of satisfaction towards the materials provided.

4. Career Commitment

The perception of the teachers on career identity, career resilience, and career planning are presented in Tables 4 – 6. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the career identity, career resilient, and career planning commitment of the respondents. It appears that the respondents have higher level of career identity commitment (mean = 4.16) compared to both career resilient (mean = 3.91), and career planning commitment (mean = 3.97).

TABLE IV
TEACHERS - INDIVIDUAL MEANS OF THE MEASURES (CAREER IDENTITY)

Items		Mean
1	My career as a teacher is an important part of who I am	4.02
2	Being a teacher has a great deal of personal meaning to me	4.28
3	I strongly identify with my career as a teacher	4.19
Total Mean		4.163

TABLE V
TEACHERS - INDIVIDUAL MEANS OF THE MEASURES (CAREER RESILIENCE)

Items		Mean
1	The cost associated being a teacher sometimes seems too great*	4.55
2	Given the problems I encounter as a teacher, I sometimes wonder if I get enough reward*	3.69
3	Given the problems as a teacher, I sometimes wonder if the personal burden is worth it*	3.49
4	The discomforts associated with being a teacher sometimes seem too great*	3.93
Total Mean		3.915

*Reverse-scored items

TABLE VI
TEACHERS - INDIVIDUAL MEANS OF THE MEASURES (CAREER PLANNING)

Items		Mean
1	I do not have a strategy for achieving my goals in this line of work*	3.99
2	I do not identify specific goals for my development in this line of work*	3.92
3	I seldom think about my personal development in this line of work*	4.00
Total Mean		3.970

*Reverse-scored items

In order to identify which of the statements in the career commitment instrument have the lowest means, individual means for each of the statements in the career identity, career resilient, and career planning commitment were conducted. Tables IV- VI indicate that all the statements in the career identity commitment showed higher means ranging from 3.69 to 4.55 .

TABLE VII
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CAREER IDENTITY WITH LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

Var	Involve ment	Authority	Perceived Problems	Job Enviro nment
Identity	.039*	.175**	.116**	.183**
Resilience	.005	.053*	.143**	-.015
Planning	.036*	.217**	.071**	.225**

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level;

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level;

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table VII indicates that there exist positive but weak correlations between career identity with level of involvement ($r = .039$), with authority ($r = 0.175$), perceived problems ($r = .116$), and job environment ($r = .183$). In addition, there exist positive but weak correlation between career resilience with authority ($r = 0.053$). Table 7 also shows that there exist positive but weak correlation between career planning with level of involvement ($r = .036$), authority ($r = 0.217$), perceived problems ($r = .071$), and job environment ($r = .225$). It should be noted that the relationships depicted and discussed between the variables, commitment, and job satisfaction do not imply causality but indicate association.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Overall, the findings of the present study have provided answers to the research questions. The findings suggest that teachers have low to moderate levels of professionalisation, high level of career identity and have moderate levels of career resilience, and career planning. The impact of demographic variables on professionalisation and career commitment were analysed using Independent Group T-tests and One-Way between Groups ANOVA with Post-Hoc Comparison. The results of the T-test on career identity in relation to gender indicate that female teachers have significantly higher career identity than their male counterparts. In addition, age and marital status have significant impact on career planning and also on career identity.

The results of this study are important for a number of reasons. Firstly, they provide empirical corroboration of the theoretical perspectives NCES (1997) on teacher professionalisation and Carson and Bedeian (1994) on career commitment. Secondly, they may be of interest and assistance to management of schools, policy-makers, and 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 details may provide some insights to management in terms of how management may approach career commitment, and to improve the level of teacher professionalisation in Malaysia.

Teacher professionalisation is still at a low level. This is supported by the low to moderate level of professionalisation as perceived by the teachers. More efforts on the part of the relevant authorities are needed. The study's findings contribute to a growing body of research that illustrates the need to take a multidimensional approach to the study of teacher professionalisation and career commitment. Management needs to determine how their schools can inspire and nurture teachers' career commitment. Management they must try to craft management strategies around the most valuable assets of the schools, i.e., the 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.

Future studies on teacher professionalisation and career commitment should also include the study on relationship between parent's perception and role with the schooling community roles and how these factors may relate in helping to determine better future teacher professionalisation and career over school performance.

Society will always continue to rely on teachers to educate the new generation and in return society must give due support, respect, and recognition. Effective and efficient teachers are the "vehicle" that determines the success of educational system. It is time teaching should be made more rewarding as a career with prospect of professional development and financial rewards. 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 and 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 career commitment of the teachers, and to reduce the number of teachers that are leaving the profession.

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