Attitudes of Malaysian Teachers Toward a
Performance-Appraisal System

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This study investigated the attitudes of teachers of different ethnic origins in Malaysia toward an outcome-oriented performance appraisal, the New Performance Appraisal System (NPAS). It also investigated the relationship between teachers' attitudes toward the system and their job satisfaction and professional commitment. Teachers of the major ethnic origins in Malaysia—Malays, Chinese, and Indians—were selected randomly from 6 public high schools in the state of Kedah. The study found that teachers of all ethnic origins reported less favorable attitudes toward the NPAS, and that their cultural dimension had no bearing on attitudes toward the NPAS. Teachers who received appropriate explanation and supervision of their performance, despite low performance-appraisal results, reported high levels of job satisfaction and professional commitment.

The present study investigates the attitudes of teachers of different ethnic origins in Malaysia toward an outcome-oriented performance appraisal, the New Performance Appraisal (NPAS). Lately, there has been an increase in the grievances against appraisal systems used in Malaysian government sectors. The grievances that reflect teachers' perceptions of the NPAS may lead to some implications on their work-related attitudes (Ong, 1997).

Appraisal is an assessment of the worth or quality of a person or thing (Angus & Robertson, 1986). Muchinsky (2000) defined performance as behaviors that people actually do and that can be observed. In organizations, performance can be defined as the actions that are relevant to the organization’s goals.

Performance appraisal is used to evaluate employees’ strengths and weaknesses against the criteria that are set upon the organization’s goals. While good performance-appraisal systems must take into account the nature of organizations, it is also imperative to give due consideration to the...
role the local culture in which the organization functions. Otherwise, bringing and implementing a performance-appraisal system that originates from a different culture might cause antagonistic attitudes and depressed reactions among the appraisees. In this case, the NPAS, which was adapted from a foreign culture, has received criticism from appraisees of different ethnic origins, reflecting their unfavorable attitudes toward the system, causing negative attitudes toward the organization and their profession as well.

In this paper, the indexes by Hofstede (1991) are used to indicate the cultural dimension of the three ethnic groups in Malaysia: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Hong Kong was chosen to represent the cultural indexes of the Chinese in Malaysia because its major population is Chinese, while India was chosen to represent Indians’ cultural indexes because its major population is Indians. Although they have migrated, it is expected that Chinese and Indians in Malaysia are of common characteristics with those who are of the same ethnic groups. Thus, the individualism index for Hong Kong (25), India (48), and Malaysia (26) is used to indicate Chinese, Indian, and Malay cultural dimensions, respectively. Generally, the indexes indicate that Malaysians are low in the individualist index and high in the collectivist index. As for power distance, Hofstede’s (1991) index indicates that the score was 77 in India, which is less than in Malaysia (104), but more than in Hong Kong (68), indicating that the Malays had the highest power distance index.

New Performance Appraisal System

In 1993, the Government of Malaysia implemented the Sistem Saran Baru (SSB) or New Remuneration System (NRS). This system introduced a new appraisal system, the NPAS, which has its roots in outcome-oriented performance-appraisal systems, such as management by objective (MBO) and work planning and review (WP&R). The implementation witnessed the beginning of a formal system, which exposes both appraisers and appraisees to new practices in their organization, yielding new organizational culture, such as continuous objective assessment on employees’ actual work, requiring high personal commitment to the set objectives. Superiors appraise the progress and make reviews throughout the year, as well as give feedback to subordinates (Rodgers & Hunter, 1991).

These appraisal exercises are new to many Malaysian employees, including teachers. Hofstede (1991) said that an outcome-oriented appraisal such as MBO may not be suitable in a collectivistic culture, especially when it involves open discussion pertaining to a person’s performance. Such an exercise likely leads to a “clash head-on with the society’s harmonious norm and may be felt by the subordinate as an unacceptable loss of face” (p. 66).
Besides, setting mutual goals that involve negotiation between superiors and subordinates will not work well in a large power-distance culture. This may cause both the supervisor and the subordinate to feel uncomfortable.

In the NPAS, teachers are appraised against the agreed-upon goals, set between them and their superiors. While they must discharge the goals, which are set at the beginning of every year, teachers also must carry out other ad hoc duties throughout the year. However, most of the accomplished ad hoc tasks were not included in their appraisal because they were not part of the agreed-upon goals set earlier. This leads to their feeling of dissatisfaction toward the appraisal system, especially when their performance appraisal result is low, which, in turn, leads to lack of interest in the teaching profession. According to the National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP), since the implementation of the NPAS in 1992, 15,000 teachers have left teaching (Ong, 1997).

Ong (1997) also reported that many teachers were not satisfied with the performance-appraisal results, although they have begun to accept the process of conducting performance appraisals. This leads to the point that teachers are satisfied with the tasks that are expected of them as teachers (i.e., motivator factor), but are dissatisfied with the appraisal results (i.e., hygiene factor). Appraisal result explains the presence of the hygiene factor, or the factor that causes an employee to feel dissatisfied (Berry, 1998). The major source of dissatisfaction was the salary increments and job promotions, especially those that resulted from the NPAS. The appraisal system is perceived to have brought little good to them. On the contrary, it has created some difficulties and unfavorable attitudes among some teachers toward the teaching profession.

The implementation of the NPAS has had numerous effects on appraisees' work-related attitudes, such as appraisees' job satisfaction and work commitment. Thus, it is of interest to study whether employees or appraisees of different ethnic groups would have different attitudes toward any of the administrative processes that are used in an organization.

The present research focuses on a cross-cultural issue involving work and its appraisal system. The variables in this research are ethnic group and attitude. Ethnic group refers to cultural background, nationality, traditions, religion, language, geographic territory, and experiences shared by an individual and other people who have a common ancestral origin (Feldman, 2001; Shiraev & Levy, 2001). Attitude refers to one's evaluation of almost all aspects of the social world, which may lead to the formation of favorable or unfavorable reactions to issues, ideas, persons, social groups, objects, or any other aspect of the social world. This research will study the effect that the cultural dimension of an ethnic origin has on teachers' attitudes toward the NPAS.
The main objective of the present study is to examine attitudes toward the NPAS in Malaysia among teachers of different ethnic origins, effects of performance-appraisal results and supervision on job satisfaction, and effects of performance-appraisal results on professional commitment. Based on the literature review, the study hypothesizes the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** Teachers of all ethnic origins will report unfavorable attitudes toward the NPAS.

**Hypothesis 2.** Ethnic origin will have no bearing on teachers’ attitudes toward the NPAS.

**Hypothesis 3.** Teachers who receive low performance appraisals and who receive appropriate explanations of their performance feedback, as well as proper supervision from the appraiser, will report high job satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 4.** Teachers who are most favorable toward the NPAS will have a high commitment to their profession.

**Method**

**Participants**

The research sample was 232 (91 male, 141 female) secondary school teachers. The research was conducted in the state of Kedah, which is located in the northern region of Malaysia. Study participants were Chinese (68), Indians (29), and Malays (135). Participants were male and female graduate as well as nongraduate teachers who had served between 1 and 20 years in the teaching profession.

**Instrument**

Items in the questionnaire were classified into six sections. The questions were derived from a number of sources, such as the NPAS literature (Government of Malaysia, 1993; Malaysian Public Services Department, 1992).

The Teacher Perception of the NPAS questionnaire consists of a number of demographic items (Section 1). Items in Section 2 (understanding the system) were derived from the questionnaire developed by Williams and Levy (1992). The items measured teachers’ understanding of the performance appraisal being used to evaluate their performance.

Items in Section 3 (appraisal process) were derived from Landy, Barnes, and Murphy (1978) and from Dipboye and Pontbriand (1981). This section
measured teachers’ participation in the appraisal process and their appraisers’ style of appraising their performance. Items in Section 4 (i.e., attitudes toward the evaluation of my teaching performance) were derived from the work of Dorfman, Stephan, and Loveland (1986); Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979); and Rosenholtz (1989). Section 4 measured teachers’ knowledge of the appraisal system, and their evaluation of the fairness of the appraisal.

Most of the items in Section 5 (i.e., outcomes of appraisal) were derived from the work of Russell and Goode (1988). This section measured the impact of performance appraisal results on teachers.

Finally, items in Section 6 (i.e., factual information on appraisal) were developed from Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor’s (1979) work. This section measured teachers’ factual information about their appraisal results and their overall acceptance of the NPAS. Altogether, there questionnaire consisted of 90 items.

**Design**

This research used the cross-sectional technique by studying respondents of different ethnic origins. The study examines the effects of being the most collectivistic or having the largest power-distance dimensions on attitudes toward the NPAS. It uses the etic approach to look at the cultural impact on the attitudes of teachers of different ethnic origins toward the NPAS. The study is quantitative in nature as it uses questionnaires to solicit responses from respondents. Unlike the emic approach, the study does not employ interactions or participants’ observations to interpret the meaning, feelings, and emotions of study participants (Abdullah, 1996).

**Procedure**

To ensure confidentiality, the schools’ principals were not allowed to handle questionnaire distribution to 240 teachers in the public schools. Upon their completion of the questionnaires, each teacher sealed his or her questionnaire in the envelopes provided by the researcher. This was to ensure confidentiality, as they had been assured that their appraisers could not obtain any information regarding their responses.

**Results**

The data were analyzed by comparing the different groups’ scores with $3 \times 2$ ANOVAs for ethnicity and type of attitude toward the NPAS. Only
30% of respondents, regardless of their ethnic origin, showed a favorable attitude toward the NPAS. The means of each sample score were examined by computing a one-way ANOVA in which the value of nonsignificant F ratios was obtained in teachers’ attitudes toward the NPAS. Thus, since it was indicated statistically that the means were all equal, Hypothesis 1 is rejected in that the difference in the degree of collectivism did not necessarily determine teachers’ least favorable attitudes toward the NPAS.

The chi-square test was calculated to determine if differences in frequency existed across response categories, leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2 in that ethnic origin has no bearing on teacher attitudes toward the NPAS. Statistically, it was indicated that the difference between the observed and expected frequencies was not significant. This suggests that the items were not associated with the independent variable; that is, respondents’ ethnic origins. Thus, it was found that when a group had a larger power distance, it did not necessarily lead the group to have a less favorable attitude toward the NPAS. In fact, in this research, the Chinese participants—who had the lowest power-distance score—reported the least favorable attitudes toward the NPAS. Table 1 compares the power distance index (PDI) score of the three ethnic groups with the percentage of respondents with a favorable attitude toward the NPAS.

Hypothesis 3 was accepted because it was established by an independent-group t test. The null hypothesis was rejected to indicate that the samples are of different groups, suggesting that there was an effect of individual variable (i.e., ethnic groups) on teachers. The statistically significant t-test result shows that superiors’ supervision and explanation of the performance appraisal influenced teachers’ tendency to improve their performance. Furthermore the chi square also was a significant value, $\chi^2(2, N = 74) = 3.96, p = .05$. Refer to Table 2.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>PDI</th>
<th>fo</th>
<th>fe</th>
<th>% of fo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. NPAS = New Performance Appraisal System; fo = observed frequency; fe = expected frequency. Chi-square result is nonsignificant ($p > .05$).
The mean of commitment among teachers with the most favorable attitudes toward NPAS was higher than the mean for those with the least favorable attitudes (see Table 3). More importantly, the significant chi square indicates that teacher commitment was affected by attitudes toward the NPAS. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was accepted, establishing that teachers who were most favorable toward the NPAS had the highest commitment to teaching.

There were significant differences in chi-square values of the five items (see Table 4). This suggests that a decision to quit the teaching profession, teachers’ level of enthusiasm, their wish to transfer to another school, their

Table 2

Effects of NPAS on Teachers’ Subsequent Reporting on Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low performance appraisal, proper supervision, appropriate feedback explanation</th>
<th>Low performance appraisal, proper supervision, inappropriate feedback explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fo</td>
<td>fe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report not to improve performance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report to improve performance</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 3

Level of Commitment Versus Attitudes Toward the NPAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher commitment</th>
<th>Teacher with most favorable attitude</th>
<th>Teacher with least favorable attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fo</td>
<td>fe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. NPAS = New Performance Appraisal System; fo = observed frequency; fe = expected frequency. $\chi^2(2, N = 189) = 9.14, p = .002$. 
Table 4

Respondents' Favorable or Unfavorable Attitudes Toward the NPAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Favorable toward NPAS</th>
<th>Unfavorable toward NPAS</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$fo$</td>
<td>$fe$</td>
<td>$fo$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Leave teaching if they are offered a higher paying job</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Not having as much enthusiasm now as when they began teaching</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23.74</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Thinking about transferring to another school</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Feel good about their own teaching style and strategies, and that these are successful</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Work for the full working hours per day</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. NPAS = New Performance Appraisal System; $fo$ = observed frequency; $fe$ = expected frequency.*
confidence in their teaching style, and their dedication toward teaching were influenced by their attitudes toward the NPAS.

Discussion

The results indicate that the attitudes of all teachers toward the NPAS were not positive. The study established that ethnic origin had no bearing on teachers’ attitudes toward the performance appraisal. The collectivistic and power-distance cultural dimensions of the three ethnic groups did not influence the attitudes of teachers toward the NPAS.

The most collectivistic ethnic group (i.e., the Chinese) reported the least favorable attitudes toward the NPAS, while the least collectivistic group (i.e., the Indians) reported the most favorable attitudes toward the NPAS. Thus, although it was discovered that the most collectivistic group reported the least favorable attitudes and the least collectivistic ethnic group reported the most favorable attitudes, statistical analyses did not show strongly that ethnic origin had a bearing on teachers’ perceptions of the NPAS. It could be established that the most collectivistic cultural group does not necessarily have the least favorable attitudes toward the NPAS.

The present study established that the larger a group’s power distance, the less favorable will be the group’s attitudes toward the NPAS. This indicates that in a society of large power distance, the relationship between teachers and supervisors is minimal. A dependent teacher is more likely to listen to instructions, rather than work on his or her own; while a teacher who behaves counterdependently will avoid interaction with his or her appraiser. If interactions took place, the appraisers could give feedback to the teachers. In this case, if feedback were to be conveyed, it could be perceived as either a source of social facilitation, which would help to improve teachers’ performance, or social interference that could adversely affect their performance.

Respondents indicated that appropriate feedback explanations to appraisees (even if they obtain low performance appraisals) will result in appraisees’ intention to improve their performance. This behavioral intention reflects the behavioral component of their attitudes toward the job (Greenberg & Baron, 2000). Behavioral component of attitude refers to one’s predisposition to behave in a way consistent with his or her beliefs about an attitude object. This suggests that the degree of the appraisees’ job satisfaction did not decrease, despite receiving low performance appraisals.

Proper supervision and an appropriate explanation of the performance appraisal have been identified as determinants of teachers’ job satisfaction, as reflected by their tendency to improve their performance. This also
suggests that teachers will listen to their appraisers because they are motivated to improve their performance. In this case, the feedback becomes a positive reinforcement, which provides feedback about their performance and motivates teachers to upgrade their performance, which consequently will lead them to demonstrate significant performance.

The NPAS, which involves direct interaction between superiors and subordinates during the goal-setting session, could enhance the productivity of teachers, as the session helps promote teachers’ understanding of organizational goals and objectives. In effect, teachers could regulate and focus on their work. As for management, they can gain useful feedback and information from subordinates, which is essential for the organization to achieve its goals. In fact, this promotes collaborative effort between the two parties.

On a positive note, the implementation of the NPAS also has marked the beginning of the utilitarian value orientation, emphasizing the materialistic or monetary aspects of organizational control, in Malaysian schools. The NPAS puts emphasis on scheduling and written policies to regulate teacher workload, teaching assignments, and extra-duty assignments. It is expected that teachers will become more organized and have higher levels of job clarity, thus becoming more committed to or involved in the school.

The present study found that teachers’ attitudes toward the NPAS determine their level of commitment to teaching. Thus, it could be concluded that attitudes toward the NPAS, as well as the performance-appraisal results that were obtained, are among the significant sources of teachers’ professional commitment. This supports the finding by Briggs (1991), who said that the result of high commitment is indicated not only by high productivity, but also by the contribution of valuable suggestions from employees to improve the organization. This research thus established that extrinsic rewards are not the only factor in organizational and occupational commitment.

A decline in a teacher’s commitment to his or her school organization may moderate his or her commitment to the teaching profession. The study also identified some important sources of commitment, such as students, colleagues, and supervisors. There are other significant factors that contribute to the development of teachers’ professional commitment, particularly Malaysian teachers. Based on this, it is important to conduct another study to discover other sources of teachers’ work commitment.

References

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