

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Schools as formal social organizations are established for the purpose of providing formal education. Their universal goals are to provide children the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, equip them with the skills for pursuing further knowledge independently, as well as to prepare them for adult roles and democratic citizenry in democratic countries. The teaching of religious and social values has always been an integral part of formal education in most countries. Therefore, education has to be viewed in terms of the creation of products for the use of the learners themselves, and for employers to use in the provision of services and generating wealth to support the economy.

1.2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

The National Education Philosophy of Malaysia defines education as a life-long process of developing the potentials of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, to create well-balanced and harmonious human beings - physically, emotionally,

spiritually, and intellectually- based on beliefs and obedience to God. The effort is to produce citizens who are intellectuals, resilient, possess good moral values, responsible, and capable of internal peace as well as capable of contributing towards the harmony and prosperity of the community and the nation (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1990: hal. 37).

Vision 2020 of Malaysia aims to create a society that is united, peaceful, psychologically liberated, science and technology based, and possesses high moral values. Hence, the ultimate goal of the Malaysian National Philosophy of Education is the development of the individual to meet the challenges of Vision 2020 (Mehander, Ng, & NorHashimah, 1995).

The Ministry of Education in Malaysia clarifies the goals of schools to include schooling with character. Among the values are character building, religious awareness, intellectualism, physical endurance, sportsmanship, outdoor life and self-discipline (Abdul Shukor Abdullah, 1998).

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

All schools have goals to achieve for its students. Its goals may be academic or non-academic. But what a school actually achieves may not be its predetermined goals. The question is how do we define school success? If the success of school is the accomplishment of its predetermined goals, how do schools operationalize the

goals of schools as defined in the National Education Philosophy of Malaysia? What criteria can schools use to measure a well-balanced human being? What is the measure of schooling with character? Does the performance of school teams in co-curricular activities, such as sports and games, accurately measure character development of each individual student? What is school effectiveness? Given that school effectiveness is the ability of the school to achieve its predetermined goals, can school success be the equivalent of school effectiveness? What criteria should be used to determine school success? If the only goal of school is success in examination, then the measure of school success is the quantity and quality of its students' achievement in public examination. But success in public examination is only one of the goals of schools and on a yearly basis. Therefore, what is the time dimension of the effectiveness? What does school effectiveness do to the pupils and the school as a whole? What is an effective school? Is an effective school a quality school? What are the theories and concepts regarding school effectiveness?

Researchers of the Effective Schools Movement have for years used different variables and school outcomes such as high test scores, good discipline, positive school climate, and good attendance, as measures of school effectiveness (Reynolds, 1976; Rutter et al., 1979; Mortimore et al., 1988; Teddlie and Stringfield, 1993). But they are unable to concur which variable among these variables is the most important variable. To these researchers, a school is effective if the school achieves high performance in public examinations, has students with good discipline and regularly attend classes.

According to Houlihan G.T. (1988), effectiveness is a noun related to the ability to produce a desired or decisive effect. Thus, the outcome is very specific and factual. But success is a noun related to the degree or measure of an outcome. As such, it is relative. Therefore, the use of student performance on standardized test scores will not explain the success of the school as a social institution which has served its clientele well.

Quality is conforming to customers' requirements, and the total of all those things that combine to satisfy the needs of the marketplace (Fletcher, 1993; Birch,1988). In education, quality has been used as synonymous with effectiveness, efficiency and economy. Birch (1988) notes that effectiveness is concerned with outcomes. A school is effective to the extent that it produces outcomes which are relevant to the needs and demands of its clients. Therefore, a quality school is one that has been able to achieve outcomes which are relevant to the needs and demands of its clients within a constrained resource base.

The various research on school effectiveness have established that there are many definitions for effective schools and different variables can be used as measures of school effectiveness. The adoption of any particular definition will depend on the focus and values of the researcher and the society in which the research has been conducted. In Malaysia, definitions include Effective Schools, Smart Schools, Intelligent Schools, Exemplary Schools, Visionary Schools, and Quality Schools. Each definition differs in its focus (Rahimah Haji Ahmad, 1998).

It has been established that all effective schools possess certain common effective

schools correlates that are not present in less effective schools. It has also been established that all effective schools achieve common outcomes in terms of good results in public examinations, low rate of absenteeism and good discipline. Thus, this study is concerned with the problem of establishing the status of the school as an effective school. More specifically, it will investigate the status of presence of seven effective schools correlates in the school, the relationships among the seven effective schools correlates, and the influence of independent variables such as sex, age, and occupation. It will also investigate whether there is any predominant correlate that can be identified as contributing to its current status of effectiveness.

1.4. DEVELOPMENT OF THEORIES

According to Hoy and Miskel (1991), school effectiveness is multi-facet and a one-dimension definition for effectiveness is inadequate. Georgopoulos and Tannenbaum in Reynolds et al., (1996) define school effectiveness as:

the extent to which any (educational) organization as a social system, given certain resources and means, fulfils its objectives without incapacitating its means and resources and without placing undue strain upon its members.

Generally, the definition for effectiveness will depend on the model that is used for conducting a research.

The Goal model defines effectiveness as achieving outcomes which meet or exceed the goals set for school activities.

According to the Goal model, schools have two types of goals. On the one hand, the official goals are formal statements of purposes regarding the mission of the school. They are abstract, aspiring in nature, and timeless. On the other hand, the operative goals are the actual tasks and activities performed in schools. As the core business of schools is teaching and learning, the goals of schools are to be closely related to the goals of teaching and learning (Hoy and Ferguson, 1985).

The System Resource model defines effectiveness as the school ability to acquire valued resources. The criteria for effectiveness is the school ability to achieve effective operations of its organization components, the ability to adapt, effective leadership, decision-making, and communication processes (Hoy and Ferguson, 1985).

The two approaches can be combined to form the Integrated model which includes the additional dimensions of time, multiple constituencies, and multiple criteria.

Indicators of short-term effectiveness include student achievement, morale, job satisfaction, and loyalty. Intermediate effectiveness encompasses adaptation and development of school organization and instructional programs, career advancement of the teachers, and success of former students. The long-term indicator is the survival of the school.

Multiple constituencies refer to the different demands and criteria of effectiveness of the different school stakeholders - pupils, parents, educators, and politicians. By

multiple criteria, effectiveness indicators must be derived for each phase of the open-system circle of input, transformation, and output.

Parsons(1960) postulates that schools performed the functions of adaptation, goal achievement, integration, and latency. Therefore, indicators of effectiveness include innovation, development, and growth for adaptation; academic achievement, resource acquisition, quality of students and services for goal achievement; the process of organizing, coordinating, and unifying social relations into a single unity for integration; loyalty, a central life interest in school work, a sense of identity with the institution, individual motivation to work, commitment to the school, and role-norm congruence for latency.

Using the three fundamental models, researchers on school effectiveness have formulated various frameworks for their research. Each framework emphasizes different measures and use different criteria and indicators of effectiveness. The input-output framework links economic and policy-oriented resource variables to output variables which include differences in schooling outcomes between individual pupils. The organizational framework links resource distribution decisions to the production processes of schooling (Gray, Mcpherson and Raffe,1983; Rutter, 1979). The institutional framework refers to the role of the students and their degree of commitment to the pupil role, and pupil outcomes are expressed in terms of participation/non-participation, what and how much they choose to learn. In the exemplary schools framework, a measure of the effectiveness of schools is usually calculated as the difference between the actual and the predicted outcome for pupils in

a school (Peter Cuttance in Reynolds et al.,1985).

Outcomes, according to Janet Ousten and Barbara Maughan in Reynolds et al. (1985), refer to any effect which schooling might have, or assumed to have, on children development. Factors selected as indicators of outcome must relate to the aims of schooling.

Hargreaves (1967) is of the opinion that disaffection, disruptive behavior, and truancy are also outcomes of the school process. He adds that the hidden curriculum - the assumptions, values, attitudes and behavior of pupils and teachers - which are not evident in the formal curriculum and are difficult to measure, play an important role in explaining why some schools were more successful than others.

However, Levine and Lezotte (1990) define effectiveness as the production of a desired result or outcome.

Mortimore (1991) defines an effective school as 'one in which pupils progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake'(p.9).

Harber (1992) contends the effectiveness of a school could only really be judged in terms of the extent to which it has achieved its expected goals. Since goals differ between school and societies according to differing ideologies, it is important to recognize that effectiveness is not a technically neutral term or factual term.

Thus, Stoll and Fink (1996) conclude that educators have to identify precisely the range of outcomes they hope to achieve with their pupils.

Gaziel (1997) states that although there is no consensus on the definition of

effective schools, researchers prefer to define school effectiveness as referring either to student academic achievements or to their retention within the school system. The most often used measure is standardized tests of student achievement because virtually everyone agrees that the mastery of basic skills is an important component of effective schools (Uline et al. 1998).

School effectiveness is also related to many other outcomes such as socio-emotional growth of students, satisfaction of teachers, efficient use of resources, the ability to innovate, adaptability, and goal accomplishment. But when school effectiveness is reduced to a single variable, it is generally student achievement because if students are not performing at a high level it will be difficult to make a convincing case that the school is a high-performing organization (Cameron & Whetten, 1983, 1995; Hoy & Miskel, 1991, 1996).

Therefore, the operational definition for an effective school in this study is a school which has succeeded in achieving the school's goals and objectives. As the core business of schools is teaching and learning, the indicators used will be the school productivity, which is measured in terms of the school's achievement in the Lower Secondary School Assessment (PMR) and the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), and the school holding power, which is measured in terms of student attendance rate.

1.5. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the perceptions of the staff and students regarding the status of seven effective schools correlates in their school.

The seven correlates are clear school mission, frequent monitoring, safe and orderly environment, high expectations, opportunity to learn and time on task, instructional leadership, and home-school relationships.

The study will also attempt to construct a continuum of effectiveness and determine the status of the school effectiveness along the continuum.

Lastly, the study will examine the differences in perceptions between male and female respondents, between teachers and students, and among the different age-groups.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS.

So the study undertakes to provide answers for the following research questions:

1. What is the status of the school in relation to the effective schools correlates?
2. What is the ranking of the seven effective schools correlates?
3. What are the relationships among the seven effective schools correlates?

4. Are there significant differences between the perceptions of the teachers and students regarding the seven effective schools correlates?
5. Are there significant differences among the perceptions of the different age-groups regarding the seven effective schools correlates?
6. Are there significant differences between the perceptions of the male and female respondents regarding the seven effective schools correlates?

1.7.ASSUMPTIONS.

The first assumption is school effectiveness has increased if the school performance in the PMR and SPM has shown improvement from year to year and the cut-off point is the district's average pass percentage. The school is effective if the school's average pass percentage is above the district's average pass percentage and this is due to the presence of effective schools' correlates which can be categorized into three broad categories - a common school mission, emphasis on learning, and a climate conducive to learning.

The second assumption is high rate of student attendance is a result of positive social development and the presence of good disciplinary policies. Regular attendance optimizes the opportunity for learning which leads to accomplishment of intended learning objectives.

1.8.LIMITATION OF THE STUDY.

The study is conducted in a rural secondary school and the perceptions are those of the teachers and students in this particular school. While there is commonality in the effective school factors as evidenced by the various effective schools and school effectiveness research, the findings of this study may not be applicable to other schools which have different contexts and use different criteria and measures of indicators.

1.9.SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.

It is hoped that this study will be an eye-opener for the administrators and staff of the school concerned about the status of their school in relation to the factors that comprise an effective school. It is also hoped that this study will help them see the need for change, gain their consensus on school improvement strategies by taking into consideration the findings' suggestions. As schools are either getting better or they are getting worse, this study will serve as a tool to help the school administrators to identify the school with a particular type of school culture and analyze its implications for school development. Lastly, it is also hoped that this study would add to the literature on effective school research in Malaysia, and encourage more local studies to be conducted.

1.10. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

a) SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

The operational definition for school effectiveness is the ability of the school to improve the learning outcomes of its students (Reynolds, 1976; Rutter et al., 1979). The indices of effectiveness will be improvement in terms of school productivity and school holding power. School productivity is measured in terms of the school's average pass rate in the Lower Secondary School Assessment (PMR) and the Malaysian Certificate of Examination (SPM). School holding power is measured in terms of the average annual attendance of students.

b) PERCEPTION

Perception refers to a sense of understanding and insight regarding the presence of an element.

c) CLEAR SCHOOL MISSION

Clear school mission refers to shared and communicated vision of school goals and priorities which are implemented through detailed objectives and expectancies for each subject, and include the necessary instructional materials and process for curriculum alignment.

d) FREQUENT MONITORING

Frequent monitoring refers to the act of frequently assessing, informing students and their parents about student progress in achieving school objectives and mastery of subject content. It also include the act of using assessment information to improve and modify teaching strategies, and ensuring there is congruence between the objectives of the school curriculum, the actual instruction, and assessment of homework, class assignment, or tests.

e) SAFE AND ORDERLY ENVIRONMENT

Safe and orderly learning environment refers to a productive learning school climate which is characterized by the presence of an accepted school discipline code, consistent and fair enforcement by all parties. Recognition for good discipline and support for improving behavior are regularly given. In addition, the school buildings and compound are attractive and well-maintained by staff and students.

f) HIGH EXPECTATIONS

High expectations refer to staff's belief of their ability to teach and the students' ability to master the skills taught within the curriculum. Staff uses effective teaching-learning strategies and regularly celebrate learning and achievement.

g) OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN

Opportunity to learn refers to adequate time for basic skills instruction, a

variety of learning styles to meet the needs of students, and the assignment of homework to extend learning.

h) INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Instructional leadership refers to the actions taken by the principal in setting high expectations for the students and staff, protecting the time for instruction, engaging staff in regular discussions of teaching and learning, as well as providing for staff growth and development.

i) HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

Home-school relations refer to actions taken by the school to provide opportunity for parents to support children learning at home and at school, as well as to participate in school activities.

j) STATUS

The degree of presence of an effective schools correlate in the school perceived by the staff and students.

k) PMR

Lower Secondary School Assessment.

l) SPM

Malaysian Certificate of Examination.