

Conceptualising Positive School Attributes from the Teachers' Perspective: A Study in Penang

Avinash Auliah^a, Dr. Thien Lei Mee^b, Dr. Murugan Rajoo^c

^a Postgraduate student, School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, avi106573@gmail.com
(corresponding author)

^b Senior lecturer, School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, thienleimee@usm.my

^c Senior lecturer, Faculty of science and Mathematics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris,
murugan@fsmt.upsi.edu.my

Abstract

Exploring Positive School Attributes (PSA) is an effort to bridge the gap in the literature concerning Malaysian School Effectiveness Research. This research aims to explore Positive School Attributes from the teachers' perspectives. To better understand PSA in the local setting, the qualitative method was employed to understand the phenomenon. The samples of 16 teachers from regular secondary schools were selected as the participants for the qualitative method. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. Qualitative findings revealed four themes: Stimulating Positive Emotion, Fostering Positive Relationship, Nurturing Positive Accomplishment, and Nurturing Positive Leadership. The discussion also stressed the importance of the results in proposing additional insight into Malaysian schools. The study also crucially implies a need for both practitioners and policymakers to emphasise the PSA.

Keywords: positive education, positive school attributes, qualitative study

1. Introduction

Education plays a central role in enhancing economic growth and national development worldwide. In the current scenario, a country's success centrally depends on the people's skills, knowledge, and competencies (Ministry of Education, 2013). In this regard, the role of schools in shaping a good society is crucial (United Nations International Children's Education Fund [UNICEF], 2014). Schools are the central place for today's and future society. Schools provide a platform for the students to acquire knowledge, recognise talents, learn higher-order thinking skills, and become successful in society (Alzahrani, 2016). The role of schools is missioned to deliver knowledge to the learners and responsible for the practice of well-being through practising positive emotions and positive traits (Zhang, 2016). It will enable the learners to become critical thinkers, innovators, and self-sustainable members of society (Rose & Rose, 2009; Tew 2007). Therefore, schools are the training institution of a country to have human capital formation with knowledgeable, good attitudes, good analytical, and interpersonal skills to fit the needs of a country's economic changes. 'What makes a good school?' and

'What works for schools?' are two essential questions associated with school effectiveness research (Reynolds et al., 2014). In this regard, the enforcement of school effectiveness research that emphasis Positive School Attributes (PSA) is derived from positive education and positive psychology (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkin, 2009).

Similarly, positive education, which is defined as education for traditional skills and happiness, acts as a science of Positive Psychology (Seligman et al., 2009). Inspecting the Malaysian National Philosophy of Education, enhancement of non-academic components such as spiritual, emotional, physical, social balance, harmonic, during and after formal classes is another aim apart from focusing on academic achievement. Indeed, positive education is the proper way to attain this aim (Seligman et al., 2009). The concept of positive education is highlighted in the National Philosophy of Education and Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, shift 3- Develop Values-Driven Malaysians (MoE, 2013, E-15). Positive education is derived from the Positive Psychology study (Seligman et al., 2009). Positive psychology is described as the development of an individual by focusing on three main pillars: positive emotions, positive character traits, and positive institution. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) defined positive institutions as institutions that help nations uplift with better 'citizenship, responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic.' Yates (2007), Seligman et al. (2009), and Waters (2011) note that a school can be a positive institution if the school is ready to move the nations into the development of character strength and socio-emotional learning.

The development of a positive school as a positive institution is based on a mixture of positive emotions and positive character traits (Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & Mcknight, 2004). The thrive of Positive School by incorporating positive education from positive psychology can eventually shape a new generation with a high level of wellbeing and happiness (Kristjansson, 2012). Research on PSA in Malaysia is considered limited due to insufficient literature review in the local context. As a fundamental attempt, this study addresses to explore the PSA based on teachers' perspectives from the Malaysian regular secondary schools.

2. Significance of the Study

Schools are considered the cornerstone of present society as it acts as a platform where students gain knowledge, adventure talents, develops skills, grow cognitively and eventually become a whole-rounded person in the community (Alzahrani, 2016). Considering the above Alzahrani's (2016) statement, PSA plays an essential role in the new paradigm of 21st-century education if the schools promote PSA. When the school emphasises and practices the explored attributes of positive school, a positive generation is expected to develop with the aspects of well-being, happiness, and socio-emotional stability.

3. Review of Related Studies

The attributes such as stimulating positive emotions, promoting positive engagement, fostering positive relationships, nurturing positive accomplishment, and nurturing positive leadership, are the major attributes of the positive school in this study being conceptualised. Using the theoretical framework in this study which is wellbeing theory, the PERMA, a conceptual framework is formed with the review of positive psychology and the practice of positive education in schools from the global context.

Concept of Stimulating Positive Emotions

In the school context, **Norrish et al. (2013)** defined positive emotion as the ability of the students to predict, initiate, observe, expand, and develop positive emotional experiences. It is a worthwhile goal in itself to help young people live their lives where they feel positive emotions, including happiness, gratitude, hope and inspiration (**Norrish, Williams, O'Connor & Robinson, 2013**). Similar to **Seligman's (2011)** concept, the initial idea proposed by **Russell's (2009)** is the activation of joy, excitement or low activation of contentment. Hence, in this study, positive emotion is conceptualised as the extent to which a school; (a) stimulates positive emotion by feeling happy, joyful, appreciated with the taken care welfare (**Norrish et al. 2013**); affection (**Diener, 2000**); satisfied with teaching and learning in this school, feeling of being trusted with the responsibility, feeling of pride being in this school, cheerful, safe, and excited to learn in school.

Concept of Fostering Positive Relationship

According to **Noble and McGrath (2015)**, a positive relationship is conceptualised as the experience of learning and practice of opportunities utilising prosocial values emphasising peace and concern for others, including commitment, cooperation, compassion, fairness, friendliness and inclusion. **Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson. (2013)** discovered that a positive relationship promotes strong social and emotional skills between the individuals in the school. Positive school relationships that include teacher-student relationships greatly benefit students' well-being and resilience (**Stewart, Sun, Patterson, Lemerle, & Hardie, 2004**). According to **Myers (2000)**, wellbeing can make a better social relationship. By practising positive relationships, healthy mental health is one of the advantages that is undeniable. Apart from that, the relationship in school can develop students' physical health (**Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996**).

Concept of Nurturing Positive Accomplishment

According to **Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson (2013)**, nurturing positive accomplishment is interpreted as enhancing individual capacity by working for and achieving meaningful results, which includes the ability to work for desired goals, the encouragement to succeed through difficulties and failures, and the achievement of competency in important parts of life. **UNESCO (2016)** revealed that learner attempts to achieve goals should be praised, even if it is small. Traditionally, schools view students' achievement and progress in terms of results such as adequate accomplishment of assignments, skills, academic achievement, and competence and advancement of co-curricular activities such as sports. The outcomes obtained by students at school make a significant contribution to their sense of competence, capability and accomplishment, a fundamental psychological necessity for wellbeing (**Niemiec & Ryan, 2009**).

Concept of Nurturing Positive leadership Nurturing Positive leadership includes obvious points of overlap with a variety of styles of leadership being researched. Based on the collaborated work with **Quinn (2015)**, **Cameron et al. (2012)** and **Murphy, Louis and Smylie (2017)**, positive leadership described as a moral activity involving empathy, kindness, love and service to others as part of the work of creating opportunities for all to work together well for common goals, and often with a higher purpose of contributing to the development of society within the organisation and through the impact of the organisation within cultures and societies. As defined by positive leadership scholars YoussefMorgan and Luthans, positive leadership is:

"the systematic and integrated manifestation of leadership traits, processes, intentional behaviours and performance outcomes that are elevating, exceptional and affirming of the strengths, capabilities and developmental potential of leaders, their followers and their organisations over time and across context." (YoussefMorgan & Luthans, 2013, p. 201)

Positive leadership would include efforts by leaders to develop the abilities to organise workers skills and self-referential work on harmony, flow and leadership as learning. However, positive leadership behaviour maintains traditional leadership attributes, such as power and authority. Positive leaders use power to inspire or enhance the institution and its people's performance, qualities, and virtues. The positive leader puts the focus on building performance capacity in others. Similarly, positive leaders seek to influence others through motivated reasoning and careful consideration, not through intimidation. For instance, in small and large communities, often in a natural work setting, positive leaders do offer guidance by engaged relationships (**Spreitzer 1995**).

Third, positive leaders try to inspire others as well as build products or services that create value. Positive leadership practices seek to create places that give employees the sense that they are productive and involved work life. Another method for doing this is to facilitate engagement between school leaders and teachers to feel pleasure with the guidance or working by the teacher. Another approach is to develop positive behaviours such as confidence, optimism, resilience and self-reliance.

Fourth, positive school leaders in the school community and its activities pursue diversity and inclusion. Teachers and leaders from various viewpoints and values are invited to voice concerns that hopefully, positive leaders strive to integrate into their identity and decision making.

Fifth, positive behaviour in leadership involves creating clear objectives and priorities for teachers and students. It involves designing individual success structures that allow teachers to progress within the school or even modify their goals to fulfil individual learning and development desires.

4. Objective of the Study

- This research aims to explore Positive School Attributes from the perspective of teachers.

5. Population and Samples

This study employed a purposive sampling procedure for the qualitative stage. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the participants were based on the availability and accessibility of the interview (**Black, 2010**). Purposive sampling is applicable if the group represents the population members (**Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990**). In this research, the selection of participants was based on teachers who have teaching experience with at least five years in secondary school to enhance coherence and allow sampling to become engaged from the practicalities of the process (**Robinson, 2014**). The teachers were also selected based on who is spontaneous, provide richly-textured information, relevant to the phenomenon under investigation, expressive, and concern about the situation (**Kvale, 2007**).

By following these criteria, the teacher was expected to represent the school selected. According to **Reeve (1998)**, teachers or school leaders with more than five years were chosen as experienced teachers are likely to have a more stable motivating style to express positive school attributes context.

Besides a stable motivating style, every Malaysian regular secondary school follows a centralised structured syllabus and plans that lead to a similar mindset of achieving the goal following the National philosophy of education. In this study, four Malaysian regular secondary schools were selected. In every school selected, four teachers were purposively selected. Thus, 16 teachers participated as a representative to explore positive school attributes context in this study. The following table 1 illustrates the demographic information of the participants in this study.

Table 1. Participants’ demographic characteristics

School	Teacher	codes	Age	Gender
School A	Teacher 1	[T1]	42 years old	Male
	Teacher 2	[T2]	35 years old	Male
	Teacher 3	[T3]	32years old	Female
	Teacher 4	[T4]	46 years old	Female
School B	Teacher 5	[T5]	45 years old	Male
	Teacher 6	[T6]	42years old	Male
	Teacher 7	[T7]	38 years old	Female
	Teacher 8	[T8]	40 years old	Female
School C	Teacher 9	[T9]	39 years old	Male
	Teacher 10	[T10]	36 years old	Male
	Teacher 11	[T11]	33 years old	Female
	Teacher 12	[T12]	38 years old	Female
School D	Teacher 13	[T13]	47 years old	Male
	Teacher 14	[T14]	46years old	Male
	Teacher 15	[T15]	44 years old	Female
	Teacher 16	[T16]	47 years old	Female

Teachers coded as T3, T5, T6, T14, T16 are those who have a master's degree in education. Three teachers in this study have a doctorate in educational management and leadership coded as T1, T2, and T4. All the teachers in this study have more than five years of teaching experience.

5.1. Statistical Techniques Used in the Present Study

This study used a semi-structured interview question as an instrument that acts as a guide for qualitative data collection. This instrument was used as a guide and was not followed rigidly. The questions in the instrument are important to elicit information from the participants. There are several themes obtained from the literature in the field of school effectiveness research. These themes were considered as the scaffolding semi-structured interview questions. Table 2 illustrated the themes and the validated semi-structured interview questions by six professors in school effectiveness research from the local university.

Table 2. Themes and the validated semi-structured interview questions

No	Themes	Questions
1	Positive emotions	How positive emotion influence the school teachers to practice positive schooling?
2	Positive relationship	How positive relationship facilitates a positive school?
3	Positive accomplishment	How do teachers accomplish teaching or learning tasks positively?
4	Positive leadership	How do positive leadership influence the school teachers to practice positive schooling?

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

These findings are based on the interview data analysis of 16 regular secondary school teachers in Penang, Malaysia. The participants were coded as T1 to T16. The main themes and the sub-themes are the findings from the interview data.

Stimulating Positive Emotions

Individuals in school can experience negative and positive emotions (Butler & Kern, 2016). Stimulating positive emotions is one of the attributes of a positive school from the teachers' perspective. Within a positive school, the school community that includes school leaders, teachers, students, and other working staff are expected to experience positive emotions such as happiness, enjoyment, joy, excitement, and interest. In this aspect, T1 expressed that the teachers feel enjoyable when being in the school. Teachers are also experiencing positive emotions such as appreciation when the school is concerned about teachers' needs [T1]. A school can be positive when a teacher feels satisfied and enjoyable in his or her teaching, as responded by T2. T5 declared that a teacher could stimulate positive emotions such as affection towards teaching when the teachers are being trusted. T6 also notes that the most joyful emotion would stimulate when teachers satisfied with the matter they are carrying out.

"I feel enjoyable while in school...when the school take care of our (teachers) need, we feel appreciated" [T1]

"I feel satisfied with what I have, and I enjoy teaching in this school" [T2]

"I like teaching here because I have been trusted with a certain responsibility and I can perform my work well..." [T5]

"What makes the job really enjoyable would be your outlook...you feel fine that with what you are doing..." [T6]

T9 also responded that if the students experience positive emotions in school, they would miss the school when the students graduate from secondary school. Additional to T9's point of view, students also would experience a feeling of pride when studying in the school. T9 also suggested that the teachers need to trigger the positive emotion of affection towards the school. On the other hand, T16 detailed that the sports teacher will always plan for joyful activities to experience positive emotions. T7 also expressed that the students in school are happy and stress-free.

"For students who have sweet memories in school they will miss the school, they will come back to school as alumni...students have the feeling of pride being in this school" [T9]

"Feeling of affection towards the school exists... So we want to create more students with this kind of feeling...more positive" [T9]

"The teacher who teaches sport will plan for interesting sport activity" [T16]

"So I can feel that nowadays the students are happy here and they don't feel stressed compared to last time... they feel happy, positive, they feel free... They don't feel any tension at all." [T7]

Fostering Positive Relationship

Fostering Positive Relationship is one of the attributes of a Positive School from the teachers' perspective. Fostering Positive Relationship was presented in four types of relationship which are (a) Teacher-Student Relationship, (b) Teacher-Parent Relationship, (c) Teacher-Teacher Relationship, and (d) Student-Student Relationship.

(a) Teacher-student relationship

From the teachers' view, fostering a positive teachers-students relationship is one of the subthemes of Fostering Positive relationships. Teachers mostly expressed that the relationship between teachers and students are close to each other like 'friends', but there should be a limit to maintain respect. In terms of the teacher-student relationship, T13 pointed out that the relationship between students and teachers is good and expressed that the students and teachers are like 'family'. This is evident when T1 responded that teachers and students have a social application such as WhatsApp group to always concern each other. Besides, a close relationship between the teachers and students are revealed when T7 mentioned that teachers would approach the underperforming students personally. In line with this concept, T14 also commented that teachers could be friends with the students. However, the teachers should still maintain a distance.

"The relationship between students and teacher are like family..." [T13]

"Class teachers will have a WhatsApp group with students... so we always keep in touch with s students..." [T1]

"We need to be friends with the students who have discipline problems" [T4]

"Teachers can guide the underperforming students personally" [T7]

"Teacher can be their friends, but normally there still should be a gap" [T14]

(b) Teacher-Parent relationship

Apart from teachers- students' relationship, teachers with parents' relationship is also crucial within a positive school context as it is one of the subthemes under Fostering Positive Relationship. As a whole, teachers expressed that the relationship between teachers and parents should be good as teachers can share information easily. T4 stresses that the relationship between the teachers and parents must be good. T15 also added that the teachers and the students' parents should be in a close relationship, such as friends. It is easier for the teachers to express and give feedback on the students' performance or other students' problems brazenly. T1 also added that the relationship between teachers and parents is important to make a school event successful.

"Relationship between the teachers and parents must be good" [T4]

"Teachers with the students' parents are like friends, and we can share everything... about the kids openly..." [T15]

"A good relationship between a teacher and parent is important in a school...actually is easier to make events successful when we have a good relationship with them" [T1]

(c) Teacher-teacher relationship

The relationship between peers is very important within the school community as it is one of the sub-domains of Fostering Positive relationships. Substantially teachers expressed that the relationship between teachers should be helpful, feeling the love between the school members, know each other closely, and creates a sense of a family among all the teachers. In particular, T16 expressed that the teachers are very convenient and 'friendly'. Besides this description, the teachers maintain a good relationship by sharing new teaching methodology [T5] and having a social application such as *WhatsApp group* that involves teachers sharing and discussing important matters related to the profession.

"What's fun about this school is that the teachers are very helpful, friendly, positive, feeling love between the school members, and know each other closely" [T16]

"We will share news ideas of teaching in the classroom, and we will be like a family" [T5]

"We have a WhatsApp group to share all the important issues regarding work..." [T2]

T6 said that respect is essential in peer relationship so that the teacher feel appreciated. To thrive positive relationships through communication, programs for the teachers were conducted to communicate and express themselves to have an awareness of maintaining a good relationship. Teachers should be in one group, as experienced by T5, to promote Positive School.

"Teachers here...if you treat others well, they will treat you with respect...So the relationship among the teachers here is pretty much neutral from my perspective... so for me personally... I treat my fellow colleagues with respect. There are programs for teachers to communicate with each other and have the understanding to maintain a positive relationship" [T6]

"The relationship among teachers is quite good ...We don't really find a few groups of teachers in this school. We all in one group" [T5]

(d) Students-students relationship

The Student-student relationship is one of the subthemes of Fostering Positive relationships. From the teachers' point of view, the student-student relationship is like the friendship between the students in school, as pointed out by T3. T1 declared that the relationships between the students are good. As a whole, T7 added that students in school still maintain a distance between the performing students and underperforming students.

"The students are like close friends" [T3]

"The relationship between the students are good in this school, but they're still remains a gap between the students between the first class and the last class students" [T7]

"Relationship between the students are close" [T1]

Nurturing Positive Accomplishment

Nurturing Positive Accomplishment is one of the emerging themes of positive school attributes. T3 addressed that committed teachers would be aware of the task that needs to be accomplished to attain the school's vision and mission. Besides teachers, the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) also has the intention to build a hall for the school students [T4]. The capacity to work together is seen as a positive accomplishment which T4 supports. T5 described that the individual from the school community should strive to attain the vision and mission of the school. Furthermore, the motivation to persist despite challenges and setbacks is transparent from the T6's responses. Identical to this emerging theme, T6 also pointed out that many programs are being carried out as the school leaders are also aware of the school vision and mission.

"Committed teachers know the vision and mission of the school and carry out the necessary task...has a mission and vision for the school" [T3]

"We need to work together on the same goal." [T2]

"PIBG discuss to create one hall... that's their goal..." [T2]

"A good school... involves all the members in the school community that include students, parents, and teachers, even cleaner...we need to work together on the same goal..." [T4]

"This teacher will be the head for stage decoration when there is another great occasion...another teacher will switch assignments. Together, we strive to achieve our vision and mission of the school". [T5]

"That teachers need to have the kind of mindset...Given a task...It should be accomplished well. (The) admin staff are already well known about the vision and mission...if you ask whether they facilitate to attain such goals...Yes, they do...because they have the programs" [T6]

Nurturing Positive Leadership

Teachers do express their point of view on positive school attributes that lead to the formation of the theme of Nurturing Positive Leadership and subthemes such as (a) Facilitating Opportunity, (b) Practising Participative Decision Making, (c) Developing Partnership, (d) Practising Welfare, and (e) Enabling Recognition. In this aspect, T1 addressed moral excellence by addressing that the principal practising tolerance when dealing with school matters. Besides moral excellence, T1 added that the teachers feel comfortable approaching the principal.

"I think the principal now is firm, and he can be tolerant with anything...I personally feel comfortable talking to the principal, approachable at the same time we still respect him as a principal...but still in any situation, the principal is easy to be approach..."
[T1]

T2 affirmed that there would be job segregation for all the teachers when a program needs to carry out. Even the teachers would possess positive teachers' leadership when a responsible teacher is encouraged to structure work specifications for teachers [T3]. Furthermore, T4 described that the principal practices positive leadership by encouraging the teachers' potential by organising many programs for the teachers. Moreover, T5 viewed positive leadership by giving motivation to the school community as the teachers' potential would be considered and motivate the teachers in school. A positive leader also should be able to observe and solve the problem by communicating with the person involved to build a good relationship between the peers.

"Indeed, all the teachers are given the opportunity to have a job specification. There will be an analysis of the number of tasks for each teacher, whereby they will be given an equal number of tasks." [T2]

"In terms of work delegation, the responsible teachers will make a schedule for teachers." [T3]

"The principal will organise many programs for the teachers to increase their professionalism" [T4]

"The school will take into account the teachers' excellences that will make them motivated" [T5]

"Good leaders are supposed to detect the conflict between the teachers and communicate to overcome the conflict... I see that my principal can observe and able to understand whenever there is some kind of conflict" [T6]

(a) Facilitating Opportunity

According to the local context, the Facilitating Opportunity is one of the subthemes of Nurturing Positive Leadership. The opportunity seems to an important element for teachers as it provides a chance for teachers to structure and present the paperwork to carry out a school program, as described by T1. Additionally, T1 and T14 mentioned that the teachers would be allowed to innovate a program and conduct many activities in the school.

"This school give teachers a chance to get involved in the program, but before we have the program, we will have a meeting to present the paperwork for the budget, and yes, the school really give the opportunity for the teachers...The principal will set up a committee for all the school activities and give the opportunity for teachers to create various activities and programs" [T1]

"This school provide opportunities for teachers to handle or carry out activities" [T14]

Besides conducting programs, T3 addressed that the teachers are also allowed to participate in all the school programs. T14 proposed to facilitate opportunities from the lens of leadership. It is detailed that teachers should be allowed to be a leader such as the department head or hold higher authority positions. A positive school should allow teachers to improve the teachers' teaching strategies, as pointed out by T14. In terms of teaching materials, T5 responded that the teachers can print and give the material to the students without any obstacles. This is transparent when T2 expressed that the teachers should give the students equal opportunity to participate in activities prepared by the school.

"Teachers will be given the opportunity to join for all the program" [T3]

"This school always give an opportunity to be a leader by holding a position like the head of the department" [T1]

"Each person shall be given the opportunity to be a higher authority person to direct the teachers under him to perform the duties." [T14]

"The school provides capacity and opportunities for other teachers to improve their selves as we used to evaluate and give marks on their teaching" [T14]

"The school will provide the opportunity for us to print and distribute worksheets to students" [T5]

"A program that students able to participate and teachers can prepare the need of the program, but sometimes the same student is given a chance" [T2]

(b) Practising Participative decision making

Practising Participative Decision Making is considered as the second subtheme of Nurturing Positive Leadership. In this aspect, T5 addressed that the chairperson will facilitate communication by encouraging collaboration with other teachers during the meeting. This confirmed that the teachers' point of view would be considered for a program (T5). Similarly, T14 also described that teachers would participate in a meeting by communicating their ideas with the chairperson. T3 stressed every teacher would be participated during the meeting by giving their feedback towards the matter being discussed.

"We (teachers) will consult with all the chairpersons of the committee in school during the meeting. At the end of the meeting, he or she will be allowed to express his / her views or any suggestions on a program" [T5]

"All these teachers will express ad discuss their ideas to the chairperson." [T14]

"The principal will always be asked to voice out and talk during the meeting... every teacher will give their opinion." [T3]

(c) Developing Partnership

Developing partnership is the third subtheme of Nurturing Positive Leadership from the teachers' perspectives. Developing partnership with government organisations with schools is very important,

as emphasised by T7. Not only government organisation, but the non-government organisation is also beneficial for a school to flourish added T7. Developing partnership with the local leaders is important for a school's success explained T2. T5 also added that the school is actively collaborating with the external organisation from the school. Furthermore, T13 responded that the school leaders would arrange motivational programs by having a partnership with the external speaker to motivate the students.

"Government agents with the involvement of NGOs are crucial for the success of schools" [T7]

"We call the students' parents and local leaders to make the school even successful" [T2]

"We are more involved or collaborating with external parties" [T5]

"The school administrators will organise motivation program and invite outsiders to come to school or bring students out of the school for motivation programs" [T13]

(d) Practising Welfare

Practising welfare is the fourth subtheme of Nurturing Positive Leadership from teachers' perspectives. In terms of Practising Welfare, T1 emphasised that the teachers' welfare is taken care of by giving help in manpower or monetary rewards. Besides, T3 also expressed that the teacher would conduct many activities in the welfare club. For instance, teachers do have a staff club to have celebrations such as teachers' birthday parties or gatherings, responded T6.

"We had Welfare for teachers when the teacher's house was destroyed by natural disasters...the teachers' team will help...the school will also give donation" [T1]

"We have the Welfare Club for teachers and staff ... they will do many activities, they will even give a gift for birthdays..." [T3]

"We have a club staff... celebrate farewell, teachers' birthday... and organise lunch annually" [T6]

"We can organise our annual dinner every year very successfully" [T6]

(e) Enabling Recognition

Enabling recognition is the fifth subtheme of nurturing positive leadership based on the interview with the teachers. From the teachers' point of view, Enabling Recognition can be categorised into two: for teachers and students. Firstly, T1 addressed that the principal would recognise the teachers by giving awards according to various categories such as 'full attendance award'. T1 also added that the teachers would be recognised during the meeting or in the mobile application such as 'WhatsApp' by praising the teacher when they complete their postgraduate academic studies or courses.

"Principal will give Awards to the teacher, and we have various categories of awards like full attendance awards...If there are teachers' achievement in Academic, the

principal will praise the teachers in the Meeting or school WhatsApp group... same goes to students..." [T1]

T2 also affirmed that all the teachers in the school would be recognised. Under the roof of teachers' recognition, T3 described that the teacher would organise awards giving ceremony at the end of the year to feel satisfied and acknowledged. Recognition given during teamwork activities is important. As mentioned by T14, 'there are teachers who will appreciate and give positive feedback during the teamwork'. T5 pointed out that all the teachers in school would be recognised by credits such as 'merit points' given by the school leaders based on the teachers' performance.

"Every teacher will be acknowledged..." [T2]

"For teachers, we have end-of-year awards to be given according to the category, and I have received an excellent service award for myself, and I feel very satisfied." [T3]

"There are teachers who will appreciate and give positive feedback during the teamwork" [T14]

"Every teacher should be involved directly in the school activities because each one has the merit points for teachers... he or she will get the merit points that are managed by the school leaders" [T5]

Concerning the recognition for students, T1 responded that the academically well-performed students would be recognised by giving a certificate during the school award day. Similar to T1, T3 also stressed that the students would be recognised by giving prizes. During the instructional hours, teachers are supposed to use positive reinforcement so that the student would engage with the lesson. In line with this, T1 responded that the teachers would praise such as 'very good to the students in the classroom. T6 detailed the advantage of recognition for the students whereby the students would get motivated to study if the teachers recognise the students by praising them. The act of recognition for the students can be an extra step for the teachers when T7 mentioned that the teachers need to key in the good deeds into the system so that it is easier to find the best student with a more good deed and acknowledge the students by giving vouchers.

"When there is academic achievement, usually the principal will give a reward with a certificate during the prize giving day, and in the classroom, the teachers will praise like very good..." [T1]

"In terms of students, if the student excels in Academics, we will give a prize after the exam." [T3]

"If we praise, they will get motivated... Reward them" [T6]

"Whatever the students do, we will key in into our system... So ours is the highest with good deeds...So that is actually very helpful to students with the best deeds they will be getting something...A token of appreciation...Normally it will be given ten ringgit vouchers...to eat at the canteen..." [T7]

7. Discussions

This section discusses the findings in line with the five emerged themes from teachers' perspectives. The discussion begins with the positive school attributes; (a) stimulating positive emotions, (b) fostering positive relationships, (c) nurturing positive accomplishment, and (d) nurturing positive leadership.

Stimulating Positive Emotions

Stimulating positive emotions is one of the emerging themes of positive school attributes from the teachers' perspectives. The interview conducted with teachers revealed that a positive school should stimulate positive emotions through the spirit of equality among the school community. Besides, individuals in schools should stimulate the feeling of being happy, joyful, assuming teaching and learning is a joyful activity, and create a sense of making others happy in school.

Emotional control, feeling peaceful and feeling surrounded by positive people is a new norm in the local context. This is in line with the findings from **Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, and Robinson (2013)**, who stated positive emotion is the ability of the students to predict, initiate, observe, expand, and develop positive emotional experiences such as happiness and gratitude.

This means that the participants in this study emphasised stimulating positive emotion as one of the attributes of a positive school through expressing "happiness", joyfulness, and excitement. Most teachers expressed that "happiness" is important among the school stakeholders and specified that a school could be positive by stimulating positive emotions. Consequently, this would be a new way to reduce the social and mental health problems among the teachers and students in school in the sense of emotion.

Fostering positive relationship

From the expression of the participants in this study, it is noted that fostering positive relationships is one of the attributes of a positive school in the local context. It was fostering positive relationships either between teacher-teacher, teacher-student and student-student, contributing to positive school attributes. Teachers expressed that fostering a positive relationship should be between teacher-student, teacher-teacher, student-student, and teacher-parent. Teachers mentioned that the relationship between the teachers and students should be like a 'family' and foster the relationship through communication. One participant also mentioned that the relationship between the teachers and students should be like 'friends'. From the teachers' point of view, the relationship between teacher and teacher should be helpful and friendly. In a similar path, **Sandstrom and Dunn (2014)** pointed out that the enhancement of positive relationships by practising strong bond with friends and family lead to a sense of connection or belonging and predict emotional wellbeing and growth (**Diener & Seligman, 2002; Catalino & Fredrickson, 2011**).

Nurturing positive accomplishment

Nurturing positive accomplishment is one of the emerging themes of positive school attributes from the teachers' perspectives. According to the teachers in this study, a positive school should nurture positive accomplishment by being aware of the school vision and mission (**Norrish et al., 2013**), work

together to accomplish the same goals, and having the mindset of accomplishing the task well (Norrish et al., 2013). Similarly, in a general way, Seligman (2011) conceptualised positive accomplishment as a sense of working toward and reaching goals, mastery, and efficacy to complete tasks by the individual through initiative, goal-setting, preparation and organisational and research skills (McGrath & Noble 2010, 2011).

The result of the interview findings means that positive accomplishment is likely to improve human potential through striving towards and achieving positive benefits, including the opportunity to strive for desirable goals, promoting progress through obstacles and setbacks, and achieving expertise in essential areas of life (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013). The possible factor that leads towards this result is the sharing mindset of the school stakeholders to nurture positive accomplishment in a positive school. Consequently, school leaders, teachers and students are likely to nurture the sense of competence, capability and accomplishment, a fundamental psychological necessity for wellbeing.

Nurturing positive leadership

Nurturing positive leadership is one of the emerging themes of positive school attributes from the teachers' perspectives. From the voice of teachers, nurturing positive leadership is also one of the themes that emerged from the interview findings. Nurturing positive leadership consist of six subthemes which are facilitating opportunity, participative decision making, developing partnership, practising welfare, enabling recognition and enabling motivation. School leaders and teachers expressed one point that is both identical, which is work segregation. From the teacher point of view, they expressed more towards the attitude of the leaders such as firm leader, tolerant leader, and approachable.

Viewing into the first subtheme, teachers mainly expressed that a positive school should facilitate the opportunity for teachers to get involved in a program organised at the school level or ministry level or even conduct programs. Besides programs, teachers emphasised that a positive school should facilitate the opportunity for teachers to be a leader. However, school leaders only mentioned facilitating the opportunity for the students and teachers to participate in activities inside and outside of the school.

Viewing into the second subtheme, which is practising participative decision making, teachers claimed that there is a need to consult with all the committee members before deciding the meeting. It provides an opportunity for teachers to express themselves during the meeting. A similar idea was expressed by the school leaders and highlighted that the school should execute the ideas from the teachers during the meeting.

Developing partnership is also one of the subthemes for nurturing positive leadership from the teachers' perspective. Teachers informed that a positive school should develop partnerships with the ministry of education and non-government agencies. In addition, teachers also stressed that the school should collaborate with people from Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah (PPD). Hence, school leaders' idea was also the same as the teachers.

The fourth subtheme for nurturing positive leadership is practising welfare which is slightly similar to the school leaders' perspective that highlights welfare activities such as celebrate teachers' farewells, teachers birthday parties, and organise annual lunches. Fifthly, teachers also highlighted the point of enabling recognition. Teachers give more importance to this aspect than school leaders by appreciating and giving positive feedback during the teamwork, merit point, certificate, and even rewards for those

teachers who are involved directly in school activities compared to school leaders. Nevertheless, school leaders mentioned the Eco-walk program for the teachers every week.

Murphy, Louis, & Smylie (2017) with the description of a moral activity by involving empathy, kindness, love and service to other employees. Generally, these findings are in line with the previous findings by **Quinn (2015)**; **Cameron & Winn (2013)**. The previous works by Cameron and Winn (2013) were common with PSA findings that positive leadership acts as a part of the work of creating opportunities for all individuals to work together for common goals, and often with a higher purpose of contributing to the development of a society or within the school.

8. Recommendations

- One of the issues that could be researched further is the involvement of primary school leaders, teachers, students and other educational professionals to express their perspective on the attributes of a positive school.
- This study should be carried out further with both primary and secondary school leaders, teachers and students in other Malaysia states.
- Besides government schools, this study is also recommended to replicate in Malaysia's private primary and secondary schools. This is because private schools usually have fewer students in class, and the teachers' pay more individual attention to students and employ different teaching styles in their schools compared to government schools.

9. Conclusion

From the result of the present study, the exploration of PSA from school teachers' perspectives has gone a step further in showing the universality of these themes in the Malaysian context. Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn. The qualitative findings of this study revealed that school teachers pointed out four emerging themes of positive school attributes, which are stimulating positive emotions, fostering positive relationships, nurturing positive accomplishment, and nurturing positive leadership.

10. Acknowledgment

The authors would like to extend their appreciation to Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education for the FRGS Grant (FRGS/1/2018/SS109/USM/02/6) that make this paper possible.

References

- [1] Alzahrani, S. M. (2016). Identifying Characteristics of a "Good School" in the British and Saudi Arabian Education Systems. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(27), 2-6.
- [2] Black, G. L. (2010). Correlational analysis of servant leadership and school climate. *Catholic education. A journal of inquiry and practices*, 13(4), 437-466.
- [3] Butler, J., & Kern, M. L. (2016). The PERMA-profiler: a brief multidimensional measure of flourishing. *International Journal of Wellbeing* 6(2), 1–48.
- [4] Cameron, K. S., Spreitzer, G. M., Edmondson, A. E., Ramarajan, L., Thomas, D. A., & Tushman, M. L. (2012). *The oxford handbook of positive organisational scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [5] Cameron, K., & Winn, B. (2013). Virtuousness in organisations. In K. S. Cameron & G. M. Spreitzer (Eds.). *The oxford handbook of positive organisational scholarship* (pp. 231–243). New York: Oxford University Press.

Conceptualising Positive School Attributes from the Teachers Perspective: A Study in Penang

- [6] Catalino, L. I., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2011). Tuesdays in the lives of flourishers: The role of positive emotional reactivity in optimal mental health. *Emotion*, 11(2), 938-950. doi:10.1037/a0024889.
- [7] Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. London: SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- [8] Diener, E. (2000). Subjective wellbeing: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 34-43. doi:10.1037/0003066X.55.1.34.
- [9] Diener, E., & Seligman, M. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13(1), 81-84. doi: 10.1111/ 1467-9280.00415.
- [10] Huebner, E.S., Suldo, S.M., Smith, L.C. & McKnight, C.G. (2004). Life Satisfaction in Children and Youth: Empirical Foundation and Implication for School Psychologists. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41 (1), 81-93.
- [11] Kristjánsson, K. (2012). Positive psychology and Positive Education: Old wine in new bottles? *Educational Psychologist*, 47(2), 86-105. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2011.610678>.
- [12] Kvale, S. (2007) *Doing Interviews*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.
- [13] McGrath, H. & Noble, T. (2011). *BOUNCE BACK! Wellbeing and Resilience. Program. Lower Primary K-2; Middle Primary: Year 3-4; Upper Primary/Junior Secondary: Yrs 5-8*. Melbourne: Pearson Education.
- [14] McGrath, H., & Noble, T. (2010). *HITS & HOTS. Teaching + Thinking + Social Skills*. Pearson Education: Melbourne.
- [15] Ministry of Education Malaysia [M.O.E.]. (2013). *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Preschool to Post-secondary education)*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Education.
- [16] Murphy, J., Louis, K. S., & Smylie, M. (2017). Positive school leadership: How the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders can be brought to life. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(1), 21-24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721717728273>.
- [17] Myers, D. G. (2000). The funds, friends, and faith of happy people. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 55-67.
- [18] Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom. *Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. Theory and Research in Education*, 7(2), 133-144.
- [19] Noble, T., & McGrath, H. (2015). PROSPER: A New Framework for Positive Education. *Psych. Well-Being*, 5(2), 2-17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13612-015-0030-2>.
- [20] Norrish, J. M., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for Positive Education. *International Journal of Well-being*, 3(2), 147-161. doi:10.5502/ijw.v3i2.2.
- [21] Quinn, S. (2015). Collaborative Learning Design in the Middle School: Sculpting 21st Century Learners. *International Journal of Learning: Annual Review*, 22(0), 23-56.
- [22] Reeve, J. (1998). Autonomy support as an interpersonal motivating style: Is it teachable? *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 23(3), 312-330.
- [23] Reynolds, D., Sammons, P., De Fraine, B., Van Damme, J., Townsend, T., Teddle, C., & Stringfield, S. (2014). Educational effectiveness research (E.E.R.): a state-of-the-art review. *School Effectiveness Research*, 25(2), 197-230. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2014.885450>.
- [24] Robinson (2014). *Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11 (1), 25-41.
- [25] Rose, M. & Rose, M. (2009). *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us*. New York: New Press.
- [26] Russell, D. (2009). *Practical intelligence and the virtues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [27] Sandstrom, G. M., & Dunn, E. W. (2014). Social interactions and wellbeing: The surprising power of weak ties. *Personality and Social Psychology*, 40(1), 910-922. doi:10.1177/0146167214529799.
- [28] Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish A Visionary new understanding of happiness and wellbeing*. New York: Free Press.
- [29] Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-14. doi:10.1037/0003-066x.55.1.5.
- [30] Seligman, M., Ernst, R., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkin, M. (2009). Positive Education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(1), 293-311.
- [31] Spreitzer, G. (1995). Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace: Dimensions, Measurement, and Validation. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 38(5), 1442-1465. doi:10.2307/256865
- [32] Stewart, D. W., & Shamdasani, P.N. (1990). *Focus groups: theory and practice*. Newbury Park: Sage.

- [33] Stewart, D., Sun, J., Patterson, C., Lemerle, K., & Hardie, M. (2004). Promoting and building resilience in primary school communities: evidence from a comprehensive 'health-promoting school' approach. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 6(3), 26-33.
- [34] Tew, M. (2007). *School effectiveness: Supporting student success through emotional literacy*. California: SAGE.
- [35] Uchino, B. N., Cacioppo, J. T., & Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K. (1996). The relationship between social support and physiological processes: A review with emphasis on underlying mechanisms and implications for health. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119(3), 488–531. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.119.3.488>
- [36] UNESCO (2016). *Happy schools! A framework for learner wellbeing in the Asia Pacific*. Bangkok: UNESCO.
- [37] United Nations International Children's Education Fund [UNICEF]. (2014). *An introduction to Effective School Principles for secondary schools: Ministries of Education in the Eastern Caribbean Region*.
- [38] Waters, L. (2011). A Review of School-Based Positive Psychology Interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 28(2), 75-90.
- [39] Yates, L. (2007). Learning to 'become somebody well': Challenges for educational policy. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 34(1), 35–52.
- [40] Youssef-Morgan, C.M. & Luthans, F. (2013), "Psychological Capital Theory: Toward a Positive Holistic Model", Bakker, A.B. (Ed.) *Advances in Positive Organizational Psychology (Advances in Positive Organizational Psychology, Vol. 1)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 145-166. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S2046-410X\(2013\)0000001009](https://doi.org/10.1108/S2046-410X(2013)0000001009)
- [41] Zhang, Y. (2016). Making Students Happy with Well-being-Oriented Education Case Study of a Secondary School in China. *Asia-Pacific Educational Research*, 25(3), 463–471. doi:10.1007/s40299-016-0275-4.