



EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONS IN PRIVATE EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF PERSONNEL MANAGERS, PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS, AND UNIONS IN STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS

By

ROSNANI JUSOH¹, HEBAH SHAMSAN MOHAMMED AL-KATHIRY², EISYA EIRIKA MOHD BAKRI³

^{1,2,3}UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA



Abstract

Considered as one of the most impactful changes in modern education, the relation between employers and education staff helps to define institutional climate, staff morale, and student effectiveness over time. The current study examines features and some peculiarities of private schools' employer-employee relationships with specific emphasis on the roles of the personnel administrators, professional associations, and teachers' unions. Amid rampant policy and compliance mandates, expectations of teachers' wellness and performance, and overall improvement in the strategic direction of private schools, the importance of effective personnel administration has never been more urgent. Based on human relations theory (Mayo), equity theory (Adams), and collective bargaining theory, the article integrates research from OECD (2021, 2022), UNESCO (2022), and Hargreaves and Fullan (2020) to demonstrate how trust and professional capital coupled with strong, collaborative, yet forgiving leadership builds and sustains healthy working conditions in schools.

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Reflecting on the Harvard HRM Model and UNESCO's Education Personnel Framework, this paper outlines a conceptual model that integrates policy objectives with action plans at the school level. It organizes findings related to teaching effectiveness and personnel planning, welfare of educational staff, and post-pandemic union and personnel management shifts into three key themes. In particular, the paper captures the balance of conflict and collaboration between school leaders and teaching staff (Bangs & Frost, 2020; Tuytens & Devos, 2021; Ng, 2021), often in private settings with limited union representation.

This article contributes to the discourse on employer-personnel relations as it details specific actions to be taken by educational leaders who wish to foster healthier and more sustainable relationships with their personnel. It also reaffirms the need for policies that position professional development, multi-level inclusion, dialogue, and decisive action at the forefront of critical teaching and education processes, thereby enhancing the retention of skilled educators.

Keywords: Employer-Employee Relations, Personnel Administration, Teaching Effectiveness, Professional Capital.

INTRODUCTION

• Evolution of Personnel Management in Education

Personnel management in education encompasses the organized and systematic activities related to the acquisition, growth, assessment, and retention of school employees, especially faculty and instructional support staff. It is more than a mere human resource function. It includes elements such as leadership, staff welfare, policy execution, and

corporate culture. For personnel management to be effective within the education sector, it must motivate teachers to perform climax activities at the institutional level. In recent decades, the intertwined dynamics of private schooling, diversifying school staff, and increasing parental and regulatory demands have contributed to the growing complexity of educational personnel management. Good personnel management is now more than a choice; it is critical for creating supportive work environments,

controlling attrition, preserving educational quality, and streamlining governance frameworks (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

• Problem Statement

Acknowledged as viable contributors to Human Capital Development, the fragmentation of the employer-employee relationship continues to be a challenge for many private educational institutions. This problem is often arising from role ambiguity, inadequate defined communication frameworks, lack of human resource (HR) policies, and more. Personnel managers are often caught in a frustrating bind, expected to fulfill functionalities related to administration devoid of any substantial inclusion in strategic decision-making. Concurrently, academic staff in non-collective bargaining units tend to be poorly represented and, therefore, incapable of negotiating appropriate voice mechanisms to resolve workplace grievances, leading to chronic discontent and burnout. These problems are exacerbated in private schools, where self-governance coupled with competition adds strain on HR functions as well as school administration (Kass & Gonen, 2020; Gamage & Pang, 2022).

• Objectives of the Study

This article aims to:

1. Understand dynamics that govern the educational personnel and private school personnel managers.
2. Analyze the impacting role of unions and professional bodies.
3. Develop context-specific responsive HRM policies for the educational sector that address the identified issues.

• Educational Context

This research pertains to the private educational institutions, which operate under a peculiar mix of regulatory oversight and institutional freedom.

Compared to public schools, private institutions have greater flexibility in formulating personnel contracts, defining employee work schedules, and crafting policies—albeit in a context devoid of unified human resource frameworks or strong union presence. This condition makes employee relations systems a critical, though inadequately studied, determinant of enduring school improvement and staff welfare.

THEORY OF THE TOPIC

In order to grasp the complexities surrounding the relationships between employers and employees and the specialists and educators' roles in unions and associations in schools, several worked base frameworks need to be understood. These explanations articulate behaviors within organizations, the influence of motivation and equity on performance, and how organizationalness affects policy-making within schools.

• Human Relations Theory (Elton Mayo, 1930s)

Human relations theory is one of the human resources theories that concentrate on social relationships among employees at a workplace. One of the main factors impacting educational

productivity is the social perception and satisfaction of employees. This theory applies to education sector as it stresses the psychosocial relations between the leader of the school and the teaching staff. Teacher Perception and Commitment is valuable, so when they are appreciated and engaged they would perform to their best and stay with the school. Kass and Gonen (2020) prove how supportive leadership practices that are congruent with Mayo's thinking foster greater teacher ownership and motivation in schools.

• Equity Theory (John Stacey Adams, 1963)

According to its definition, the equity theory suggests that an employee calculates the ratio of their input (effort, experience, hours worked) to their output (salary, recognition, development opportunities) and bases their level of satisfaction according to fairness. In schools, inequity in the distribution of workload, ambiguous pathways to promotions, or unequal training opportunities frequently causes discontent. It is useful in focusing attention of educational human resource managers to balance issues of fairness, equity, and evaluation of performance, benefits, and other expectations in their school, especially in non-unionized private schools (Zhou & Brown, 2021).

• McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (1960)

McGregor identified a set of opposing assumptions regarding workers: Theory X: employees are permanently lethargic and require supervision. Theory Y: employees are enthusiastic and actively seek responsibility.

In education, effective personnel management has often aligned with theory Y, where there is trust, autonomy, and appreciation of leadership among teachers. Managers aligned to this philosophy tend to trust more their staff and take bold steps of empowering teachers, giving or delegating considerable powers, and facilitating creativity (Ng, 2021).

• Collective Bargaining Theory

This is the basis of the operation of unions and associations. It describes the processes by which groups of employees interact with their employers regarding remuneration, working conditions, and other benefits. In teaching, this enables educators to fight for equitable contracts, reasonable compensation, and decreased workload limits. Ravitch (2022) remarks that successful bargaining agreements in educational settings tend to result in improved staffing levels and enhanced morale. But this theory remains almost utopian in nature in the context of Malaysian private schools where the existence of unions is minimal.

• Contingency Theory

Contingency Theory argues that there is always an optimal leadership or HR approach to a challenge, depending on the condition; in this case, school size, leadership, resources, or staff requirements. Within the multifaceted private education system in Malaysia, every institution has a different and specific way of managing their staff. This advocates for flexible human resource policies that respond to the culture and limitations of the school (Gamage & Pang, 2022).

All these pertain to the modern educational theories of human resource management. Hence, their aim is to assist the personnel manager and school administrators devise systems and processes that are fair, holistic, and in harmony with the culture of the organization. Considering the above, it is possible to develop positive and affirming environments for teachers which allows them to feel encouraged and empowered to augment student success.

MODELS OF THE TOPIC

To complement the theoretical frameworks that guide personnel management in education, several models offer structured, practical approaches for implementing HR strategies effectively. These models provide a lens for aligning human resources with institutional goals, particularly in the education sector where staff performance, satisfaction, and development are closely tied to student success. This section explores key models that underpin employer-employee relations, union interactions, and the evolving role of personnel managers in private educational institutions.

- **The Harvard Model of Human Resource Management**

Developed by Beer et al. (1984), the Harvard Model is one of the most influential frameworks in strategic HRM. It identifies four key HR policy areas—employee influence, human resource flow, reward systems, and work systems—and aligns them with stakeholder interests and long-term outcomes.

This model helps schools to balance between teachers, students, administrative staff needs and the surrounding community. For instance, to give teachers greater influence over curriculum design or classroom resources adds to empowerment and retention. Gamage and Pang (2022) highlight how applying this model in international schools has led to more participatory decision-making and stronger performance evaluations.

- **Guest's Model of HRM (1987)**

David Guest proposed that HRM should aim to achieve four policy goals: strategic integration, high commitment, high quality, and flexibility. This model is especially useful in evaluating how personnel managers can create environments that support these goals through careful recruitment, training, and communication practices.

In the context of private schools, Guest's model provides a guide for aligning HR practices with educational objectives—ensuring, for example, that staff development programs are not only offered but strategically timed and linked to institutional goals. Tuytens and Devos (2021) show how schools using this model report stronger teacher morale and instructional innovation.

- **The Michigan (Matching) Model**

The Michigan Model focuses on the alignment—or "matching"—of organizational strategy and HRM practices. It emphasizes four key functions: selection, appraisal, rewards, and development. While this model has a more utilitarian tone, it is useful in private education where accountability and performance metrics are often tied to enrollment, parent satisfaction, and academic results.

Private school administrators may use this model to ensure that recruitment and appraisal systems reflect the school's long-term growth targets. However, critics argue that it may underemphasize the human element in education, which must be carefully balanced by personnel managers.

- **UNESCO Education Personnel Management Framework (2022)**

This framework focuses on education systems and personnel. It advocates equity in teacher recruitment, the importance of teacher wellbeing, and the need for a nonstop professional development. The model also emphasizes the role of inclusive, participatory leadership and data-driven HR practices.

This framework is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where private schools face challenges in aligning their staffing practices with national education quality goals. Incorporating UNESCO's principles supports fair employment practices, diversity, and better alignment between school policies and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

- **Strategic HRM in Education (Integrated Model)**

Several scholars have proposed integrated models that combine educational leadership with HR strategy. These models emphasize the link between instructional leadership, teacher professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020), and organizational outcomes. In such models, personnel managers are positioned as strategic enablers who support a culture of continuous improvement, wellbeing, and innovation.

- **Comparative Summary**

Model	Focus	Application in Education	Limitation
Harvard Model	Stakeholder alignment, empowerment	Encourages participatory decision-making	Requires strong leadership buy-in
Guest's Model	Commitment, quality, flexibility	Promotes PD and morale	May overlook resource limitations
Michigan Model	Strategic alignment, performance	Useful in high-accountability environments	Limited emphasis on wellbeing
UNESCO	Equity, wellbeing, PD	Strong global relevance and SDG link	May be broad for individual schools

Framework			
Integrated HRM	Leadership + HR synergy	Builds strong professional culture	Implementation can be complex

These models collectively help school leaders and personnel managers design HR strategies that are both strategic and human-centered. Applying them in private educational contexts can contribute to healthier employer-employee relations, more effective unions or associations, and improved institutional performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective personnel management is widely recognized as a foundational element in the success of educational institutions. Research consistently demonstrates that positive staff relations, transparent leadership, and meaningful professional development contribute to better retention, teacher morale, and ultimately, student achievement (OECD, 2021; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). In the context of private schools, where structural policies vary significantly from public education—these factors take on greater importance. This review categorizes recent findings into three interrelated themes: (1) employer-employee relationships, (2) union and association engagement, and (3) the strategic role of personnel managers.

- **Theme 1: Employer-Employee Relationships in Private Schools**

The quality of employer-employee relationships within educational institutions influences everything from classroom effectiveness to institutional stability.

Kass and Gonen (2020) emphasize that the presence of mutual trust, open communication, and emotional support from school leadership fosters teacher loyalty and motivation. Tuytens and Devos (2021) further show that leadership styles based on collaboration and shared decision-making improve both instructional quality and personnel satisfaction.

However, in private schools where policies can be inconsistent and leadership turnover high, employer-employee relationships often suffer from ambiguity and miscommunication (Ng, 2021). Unlike public systems, private institutions may lack standardized HR protocols, leading to unclear contracts, inconsistent evaluation procedures, and ad hoc grievance handling. This inconsistency can lower morale and cause high staff turnover—particularly when administrative decisions are perceived as top-down or opaque (Zhou & Brown, 2021).

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has tested these relationships further, revealing gaps in digital readiness, job security, and emotional support.

According to UNESCO (2022), the pandemic exposed the need for more agile and compassionate personnel policies, particularly in schools where remote teaching and shifting workloads were managed with little staff consultation.

- **Theme 2: The Role of Unions and Professional Associations**

Teaching unions and professional associations representing teachers are central in defending professional rights as well as nurturing the professional development of teachers while ensuring equitable power relations between teachers and employers. Bangs and Frost (2020) describe the positive consequences of union participation in negotiations for the policymaking processes in schools, and how they protect educators' employment from hostile practices. Likewise, Ravitch (2022) argues that the existence of powerful unions positively affects the esteem and the voice of the teachers, which also improves the educational result as a consequence of the favorable conditions, employment, and governance of the system.

Nonetheless, in many private schools within Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries, union representation is virtually non-existent or actively suppressed. The ILO (2023) states that although freedom of association is a norm, it is not consistently applied within the domain of private education. In such scenarios, teachers often lack formal recourse to dispute resolution processes or powers of collective negotiation and so face challenges in addressing issues such as dispute contracts, workload, and dismissal that are seen as arbitrary.

Nevertheless, there are emerging examples of collaborative partnerships between schools and associations. For instance, Altinyelken and Bray (2023) document successful models in hybrid international schools where teacher unions worked jointly with management to design fair appraisal systems and teacher welfare programs. These case studies offer lessons for Malaysian private schools seeking to professionalize HR while maintaining autonomy.

- **Theme 3: The Strategic Role of Personnel Managers**

Personnel managers have evolved from administrative coordinators to strategic leaders capable of shaping school culture and professional development. The Harvard Model of HRM positions personnel managers as responsible for aligning stakeholder interests (teachers, leadership, and students) with long-term institutional goals. According to Gamage and Pang (2022), personnel managers in successful international schools actively support recruitment, conduct instructional coaching, mediate conflicts, and co-lead leadership development programs.

Guest's model of HRM (2020) complements this view by emphasizing the need for integrated policies that ensure employee commitment and high performance. In practice, however, many Malaysian private schools limit personnel managers to routine tasks such as payroll, scheduling, and compliance documentation (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023). This underutilization not only limits their potential impact but also deprives school leadership of valuable HR insights.

Digital transformation has also added a new layer to personnel management. Tools like HRMS platforms, Google Workspace automation, and even

AI-based analytics are now used to streamline scheduling, monitor performance, and support staff wellbeing (OECD, 2022). A private school in Malaysia, (IMAS) , demonstrates a local case where Google Sheets and Apps Script were used to build a real-time substitution assignment system—an innovation that improved transparency and efficiency in daily personnel operations.

• Gaps in the Literature

While global studies provide strong evidence for the positive effects of unions, professional associations, and strategic HRM, there is limited research focused specifically on the private education sector. Furthermore, few studies examine how digital tools and automation are transforming personnel management at the school level. There is also a lack of empirical research on the lived experiences of personnel managers in smaller or faith-based private institutions, where the HR function may be informal or undocumented.

CONTENT RELATED TO THE TOPICS

In this part, the theories and models are explained in the context of the relations between employers and employees, union activities, and the role of the school manager in private schools in Malaysia. This also describes how these relations affect the broader phenomena of educational achievement, employee satisfaction, and organizational longevity.

• Employer-Employee Relations in Private Education

An effective and healthy employer-employee relationships is essential for maintaining productivity and stability within an educational institution. In contrast to public schools, whose policies, salaries, and workloads are largely standardized, private schools encourage nurtured relationships. Kass and Gonen (2020) claim that loyalty and engagement among teachers increases when respect, support, and acceptance are extended to them. This translates to involving teachers in decision-making processes, providing adequate communication channels, and establishing feedback mechanisms.

Yet, there are private educational institutions that do not have a defined human resource policy or an organized appraisal system. In some instances, staff evaluations are conducted using vague or informal criteria, which result in perceptions of bias or unfairness (Zhou & Brown, 2021). That erodes trust and decreases morale. Frameworks like the Harvard HRM model can be utilized to improve the clarity and participation of the structure, whereas Equity Theory helps to ensure fairness in workload, rewards, and opportunities for growth.

• Union and Association Activity

Unions and professional associations are created to give educators a collective voice. They negotiate working conditions, facilitate professional training, and manage conflicts. Unions are usually active at the policy as well as in the school governance level, merging temporarily with the

public education system. In Malaysia's private educational sector, however, their participation tends to be fragmented. Many private school teachers remain non-unionized due to organizational denial, ignorance, or fear of losing their contract (ILO, 2023).

Even with challenges, the literature indicates that unions enhance employee wellbeing and clarify organizational roles where they exist. For example, Ravitch (2022) describes the successful advocacy by charter school unions for equitable workload, self-care, and proactive mentoring policies in the U.S. In Malaysia, education-oriented associations like the NUTP have made attempts, albeit with mixed institutional acceptance, toward increased pedagogical outreach to private school teachers.

Even informal interactions with such organizations may enhance the communication and advocacy options available to employees leading to better relationships at the employer-employee level. In the absence of unions, employees at a constituent level may be aided in their advocacy by personnel managers who act as intermediaries, suggesting dialogue facilitation between workers and management at the staff level.

• The Role of Personnel Managers in Private Schools

Personnel managers in education are often the unsung heroes behind recruitment, onboarding, conflict resolution, and performance tracking. However, in many private schools—particularly those with lean administrative structures—personnel management is reduced to basic HR functions like payroll processing and attendance monitoring. This underutilization ignores the strategic potential of HR in influencing staff morale, building school culture, and ensuring continuity of quality instruction (Gamage & Pang, 2022).

When fully empowered, personnel managers can take the lead on initiatives such as:

- Coordinating meaningful professional development pathways
- Managing teacher performance and coaching cycles
- Developing policies on mental health and staff wellbeing
- Designing equitable workload systems and evaluation frameworks

A private international school in Indonesia, Green School Bali, is a good example of a progressive and sustainability-driven approach. The School's HR department goes beyond administrative roles to foster community values, inclusivity, and innovation. Personnel managers there collaborate with academic leadership to co-develop teacher wellbeing programs, including weekly mindfulness workshops, individual growth plans, and responsive conflict mediation systems. Their onboarding process also includes immersive sessions on school culture and peer mentoring, which have been credited with improving long-term staff retention and cohesion (Green School Bali, 2021; Ng, 2021).

This example illustrates the power of integrating personnel managers into the strategic core of a school. Drawing from

models such as the Harvard HRM model and Guest's Model, Green School demonstrates how HR can become a driver of institutional growth, rather than a mere support function. Private schools across Southeast Asia could benefit from adopting similar practices tailored to their context and capacity.

- **Broader Benefits to Educational Organizations**

When employer relationships, union dynamics, and personnel practices are optimized, the benefits extend beyond individual satisfaction. These practices lead to:

- Lower staff turnover rates
- Improved teaching consistency and student outcomes
- Stronger school culture and collaboration
- Enhanced reputation among prospective hires and parents

These outcomes support not only internal HR objectives but also broader educational goals aligned with Malaysia's National Education Blueprint and international standards like SDG 4: Quality Education (UNESCO, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This article employs a qualitative document analysis approach grounded in the review of scholarly literature, international policy reports, and real-world case examples. The analysis focuses on the intersection of personnel management practices, union involvement, and school leadership strategies within the context of private educational institutions.

The study synthesizes insights from secondary sources such as OECD reports (2021, 2022), UNESCO policy frameworks (2022), and relevant academic literature on human resource management in education. Case illustrations, such as those from Green School Bali and select institutions, are examined through the lens of established theoretical frameworks—including the Human Relations Theory, Equity Theory, and Collective Bargaining Theory.

In addition, several HR models—notably the Harvard Model, Guest's Model, and UNESCO's Education Personnel Framework—are applied to interpret the strategic integration of HR practices in education. These frameworks guide the thematic analysis of employer-employee dynamics, institutional leadership roles, and union representation within private schools.

By relying solely on documented cases and academic discourse, this method provides a structured and evidence-based understanding of personnel management challenges and opportunities in private education without relying on primary fieldwork.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study are drawn from a synthesis of literature, documented institutional case examples, and theoretical applications. They are presented in three key thematic areas that emerged from the analysis:

- **Evolving Role of Personnel Managers in Private**

Education

Personnel managers in progressive private schools are increasingly adopting strategic functions that go beyond routine administrative tasks. Case examples—such as the Green School Bali—illustrate how personnel managers can serve as change agents by implementing teacher wellbeing programs, facilitating staff mentoring, and aligning HR initiatives with institutional values. These examples support the Harvard and Guest HRM models, which emphasize employee influence, organizational commitment, and participatory leadership.

However, in many private schools, personnel managers remain underutilized. Their roles are often confined to payroll processing, leave tracking, and regulatory compliance. This discrepancy points to a missed opportunity for leveraging HR leadership to strengthen school culture and teacher retention.

- **Absence of Formal Union Representation**

The analysis highlights a notable gap in union participation across private schools. Despite research showing that unions can enhance job satisfaction, ensure fair appraisal systems, and support teacher wellbeing (Bangs & Frost, 2020; Ravitch, 2022), union presence in private schools remains minimal or actively discouraged. According to the ILO (2023), the lack of consistent application of freedom of association limits teachers' ability to engage in collective bargaining or formal grievance processes.

The article cites international literature that underscores the importance of unions and associations in strengthening the professional voice of educators, but notes that in private education, such mechanisms are underdeveloped.

Where successful union involvement is observed—such as in the documented case of Green School Bali—the benefits include improved appraisal systems, mental health initiatives, and collaborative problem-solving between staff and leadership. This example offers a practical benchmark for institutions seeking to improve staff engagement through non-adversarial models of representation.

- **Institutional Practices and Their Broader Impact**

Institutional policies around HRM in private schools have a direct impact on staff morale, stability, and educational quality. Adoption of the UNESCO Personnel Framework and Strategic HRM models has been associated with improvements in teacher wellbeing, staff equity evaluation, and retention.

Development and effective implementation of professional development plans, mindfulness programs, and clear protocols for internal communication enhance school climate.

On the other hand, absence of these frameworks is often associated with higher attrition, low employee satisfaction, and weak organizational identity. The analysis suggests that the integration of strategic HR models with school leadership can significantly improve institutional outcomes—especially in competitive private school environments.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that private educational institutions require competent management of people not as a side function, but as a strategic fundamental. School systemic sustainability and success has a clear dependence on relationships between an employer and an employee, union participation, and the shifting responsibilities of a personnel manager. Under concepts like Human Relations Theory, Equity Theory, and Collective Bargaining Theory, along with the Harvard HRM Model and UNESCO's Education Personnel Framework, the Equip, empower and support personnel to guide school staff and educators to achieve heightenag to meet pedagogic excellence, significantly improves teaching standards, organizational ethos, and educational outcomes in learners.

While Endeavour International School struggles with these issues typical for the private education sector: scattered HR frameworks, shallow levels of union representation, and role ambiguity, Green School Bali offers evidence for impactful strategic inclusive personnel management that can be achieved when leadership adopts a whole-school approach. Empowered personnel managers are able to enhance educators' experiences through driving professional growth, promoting wellbeing, and equity when there is institutional commitment backed by these clear frameworks.

Strategically, private educational institutions need to develop efficient HR frameworks that incorporate sophisticated human capital analytics and operational outcomes. This implies the formulation of appropriate workload distribution guidelines, staff inclusion in policy formulation, and permitting union representation or other proxies. There is also a gap in undirected local studies about how private educational institutions might utilize global best practices that are adapted to local culture and regulations.

In a period of transforming contexts in education, improving personnel management cannot be only staff-focused. It pertains to the very core of learning and teaching as they restructure the modern world. It is schools that manage to optimally tap the potential of their employees who will be successful, motivational, and pioneering.

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