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Title	Book review [Review of the report <i>A study on factors contributing to high teacher motivation and morale in Singapore primary schools, 1988</i> , by Singapore Teachers' Union (STU)]
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## **Singapore Teachers' Union (STU) Report on a Study on Factors Contributing to High Teacher Motivation and Morale in Singapore Primary Schools, 1988**

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**Reviewed by Agnes Chang Shook Cheong, Institute of Education**

The study starts on a promising note with an indication of encouraging results from its title "High Teacher Motivation and Morale in Singapore Primary Schools". It is indeed reassuring to know that our primary teachers who are entrusted with the vital task of nurturing our impressionable young citizens are highly motivated and have high morale.

It is not uncommon for us to hear rumbles of dissatisfaction from some jaded teachers now and then. This may give rise to the misconception by the general public that our primary teachers are unhappy with their lot. Hence this study is a timely document to squelch any speculations about the working conditions in the primary schools and assuage the fears and concerns of parents and would-be primary teachers.

The research design was fairly rigorous, with participants drawn from 90 out of 222 primary schools. It is interesting to note the choice of two samples for the survey. Sample A comprised of teachers identified by their principals as having high morale and Sample B of randomly selected teachers. With a total of 523 subjects in the two samples, the small number (21) of teachers interviewed was a surprise. Nevertheless, the importance of having qualitative support from interviews is given due recognition.

The items in the Questionnaire reflect cognizance of the thorough research into the morale factors. The overall analysis is meticulous and the discussion tight and searching. The findings are neatly delineated into different chapters based on the selected morale factors — personal beliefs and attitudes, school principal, the

human and social environment, workload and bureaucracy, school facilities and physical environment, and teacher status and salary. Though the study is a serious piece of research, the writing is by no means esoteric and technical. The deceptively simple but graphic presentation of the data speaks of careful consideration given to the readership. It is a very readable document.

The teachers from both samples (A and B) gave affirmative responses to the questions in the Questionnaire. As predicated, the teachers who have been identified as having high morale were found to display more positive attitudes towards their work, school, superiors, pupils and colleagues. There was also a demonstration of confidence by these teachers in decision-making on school matters and in voicing their views to their seniors.

Though the respondents expressed concern over the burden of non-teaching chores such as ECAs, fee collection and paper work, most of them were able to cope with their workload. Good interpersonal relationship within a school outweighed the importance of school physical environment in boosting teachers' morale. The teachers deplored vehemently the practice of using a "spy system" by some principals to keep tab on staff activities and behaviour.

A few key questions have emerged from the findings and answers should be found for them. They are:

1. Do some principals have the tendency to palm off extra duties on those who are competent, willing or uncomplaining? If so, why? Is it to tap/develop the potentials of the

- younger teachers or to pacify the more senior teachers? Will this practice erode the morale of the more promising teachers?
2. There was some expressed unhappiness by older teachers over the appointment of young principals and vice-principals in their schools. What can be done to bridge the "generation gap" in these schools?
  3. A number of able teachers have shown reluctance in accepting a higher position of responsibility. Reasons given included dislike for administrative work, family commitments, loss of school holiday and stress. A basic question asked here is: Does a good classroom teacher necessarily make a good administrator? Does a teacher really handle less responsibilities than a principal or a vice-principal? Some of the reasons cited do not seem to be insurmountable obstacles. Maybe solutions can be found to resolve their problems and more able teachers will

be prepared to come forward to assume the positions of vice-principal and head of department. Though the lack of financial incentives was not considered a deciding factor by many respondents, a person's salary is nevertheless perceived as indicative of a person's status and success. Will a monetary incentive scheme attract more people to accept higher positions of responsibility?

The study has attempted to answer two questions through its data analysis. The first question posed on high morale factors is fully answered in the study. The second question on "Can we create these conditions in our schools so as to increase the number of teachers with high motivation and morale," is seeking for respondents from among the teachers, principals and educationist reading this study.