

# Exploring the Relationship Between Instructors' Attitudes with The Occupational Health and Safety Practices at Vocational Colleges

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## Abstract

Accidents and injuries at the workplace mainly occur due to the internal and external factors of the working environment. There is an early awareness among educational institutions to emphasise on occupational health and safety practices within the school areas. However, it raises a question whether there is a relationship between teachers' attitudes and involvement in improving the practice of "occupational health and safety" in the school area. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the relationship between teachers' attitudes with occupational health and safety practices in vocational colleges. This study involved a quantitative research via a survey design. A total of 213 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents who were selected using stratified random sampling. The data were analysed using inferential statistical analysis to test the relationship between the independent (teachers' attitudes) and dependent (health and safety practices) variables. The results showed a significant relationship between the two variables ( $r = 0.464$ ,  $p \leq 0.000$ ), hence indicating that the attitudes of the teaching staff are indeed a key factor to the successful implementation of occupational health and safety practices in vocational colleges. Thus, it is important for the atmosphere of occupational health and safety practices in vocational colleges to be improved for it to be at par with the industry's standard by fostering a safety culture at the workplace.

**Keywords:** Safety, Attitude, Practice, Teaching Staff, Vocational Colleges.

## Introduction

The safety culture is one of the key pillars in determining a company's excellence. Occupational safety and health is an area that is closely related to the measures of minimising losses through the preservation and protection of human, assets, and physical at the workplace (Friend & Kohn, 2018). In general, the disciplinary foundation in the field of occupational safety and health is far beyond both scope and practice. This is especially true in processes that involve workplace monitoring as well as advising employers or the management on the best way to prevent and minimise losses. It is because the responsibility to implement further actions in minimizing losses often falls on the management.

Furthermore, the management of a company is fully responsible for all behaviours happening at the workplace. They will also be held accountable by the shareholders or owners of the company, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, or the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) along with the general view to minimise losses. Hence, it is the occupational safety and health committee's duty to assist the management by observing the workplace environment and providing guidance on an ongoing basis.

Generally, accidents and injuries at the workplace often occur due to two main factors, namely the internal and external factors of the working environment. The former involves any internal problems faced by the respective organisations as well as individuals. Whereas, workplace environment issues have commonly been noted as a major external factor to workplace accidents (Khdaif, 2013). In addition, carelessness and individual attitudes have also been propounded as among the prominent cause of workplace accidents and injuries (Vinodkumar & Bhasi, 2010). This includes individuals' negligence and careless attitude in attempting to complete their daily tasks without adhering to the rules and procedures.

### **Problem Statement**

Past studies have reported that among the less focused segment in human resource development is related to occupational health and safety (Moon & McCluskey, 2016). In this regard, one of the factors that halts vocational schools from obtaining the Building Safety Certification is the lack of safety features in the workshops. However, such monitoring report suggests that there is an early awareness among educational institutions to emphasise occupational health and safety practices within their respective compounds. This raises a question whether there is a relationship between the teaching instructors' attitudes and involvement in improving the practice of "occupational safety and health" within the institutions' compounds.

According to the Chairman of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, Thye (2016), the Ministry of Education (MOE) should urge schools to conduct annual safety audits to ensure all assets and facilities are in a good condition and conducive to facilitate learning. He also hopes that awareness on occupational health and safety practices can encourage school teachers, students, and staff in cultivating the health and safety aspects to avoid unwanted workplace accidents and injuries. He further asserts that teachers' involvement in schools will increase the awareness on the existence of AKKP 1994. This will make schools safer by combining the current curriculum with the requirements of the act, thus creating a conducive environment for all parties.

The statement of problem above thus necessitates for a study on the relationship between teachers' attitudes with the occupational health and safety practices in vocational colleges. This study aims to address such gap by exploring whether teachers' attitudes and involvement have an impact on occupational health and safety.

### **Literature Review**

Sociologists define attitudes as a person's habits and unconscious behaviours that are instilled in their mind and executed repeatedly (Gharibi et al., 2016). In the context of workplace, attitudes refer to an employee's perception to the aspects of individual

assessment of safety procedures, commitment, and attitudes in order to measure the level of occupational safety awareness at the workplace. In this regard, employees' attitudes have been propounded as a difficult thing to be changed especially by the management. According to Morel, Amalberti, and Chauvin (2008), there are five steps that can be implemented to eliminate employees' bad attitudes, namely by replacing any negative behaviours with new attitudes, repeating the new attitudes until it becomes a pleasant habit, isolating employees with the stimulus to commit negative attitudes, habituation, and punishing employees who commit undesirable attitudes (Makhbul & Kaliannan, 2019).

Haynes et al (2011) believe that attitudes affect one's actions and responses. Meanwhile, Gharibi et al (2016) argue that unsafe certification commonly arises as a result of being negative, lack of knowledge and skills, along with less conducive workplace areas. Attitudes also refer to beliefs, independent views, emotions, and values associated with safety policies, rules, and practices including a commitment that demands a person's sense of responsibility for occupational health and safety practices (Neal & Griffin, 2004). Typically, individuals who are prone to be involved in workplace accidents often illustrate negative attitudes (Rundmo & Hale, 2003).

In theory, Sean, Nick, and Sandy (1998) believe that employees often take workplace safety for granted, subsequently leading to a high number of accidents within an organisation. The management will then be pointing fingers at the employees' fault without first investigating the cause of the accident. Therefore, the first thing that managers need to pay attention to when hiring employees is their level of knowledge to the assigned field and their attitude towards workplace safety (Morel et al., 2008).

Moreover, superiors' attitudes and behaviours will also affect the attitudes and behaviours of their subordinates. Therefore, it is important for the superiors of an organisation to demonstrate a positive attitude particularly in the implementation of new laws and regulations within the respective organisation. This is because a positive attitude by the superiors will cause their subordinates and employees to react positively and give full commitment in implementing the new laws and regulations (Rundmo & Hale, 2003). Furthermore, Makhbul and Kaliannan (2019) stated that accidents are often caused by the employees' negligence, and such negligent attitude needs to be eliminated by doubling their knowledge on occupational health and safety at the workplace. This is further supported by Herber (1995) who reported that among the leading causes to accidents include the failure of adhering to rules that begins with a lack of discipline at work such as negligence, stubborn attitude, and carelessness while performing tasks. The study also found that increased knowledge on occupational health and safety practices will eliminate any risk of accidents.

Additionally, the study by Bell and Grushecky (2006) indicates that workplace injuries commonly occur due to unsafe work culture. This can be controlled by focusing on employees' behaviours and raising their awareness towards occupational health and safety. One concept that can be used to increase such awareness is by developing a safe work culture that will describe the desired attitudes for establishing safety practices in organisations (Choudhry et al., 2009). Based on the views of Makhbul and Kaliannan (2019), it seems plausible that there is a relationship between attitudes and awareness on occupational health and safety. This

prompts the present study to identify the possibility of a significant relationship between instructors' attitudes and involvement with occupational health and safety practices in vocational colleges.

### Research Methodology

This study involves a quantitative research method through a survey design. The population was selected using stratified random sampling involving Sungai Buloh Vocational College and Shah Alam Vocational College. Guided by Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a total of 201 respondents were selected from the Zone 1 population via stratified random sampling as there was an unbalanced sub-population division for each zone for vocational colleges. The relationship between instructors' attitudes and involvement with occupational health and safety was measured using a questionnaire with a Likert scale rating. A total of 213 questionnaires were distributed randomly to obtain a high level of confidence in this study.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure involved an inferential statistical analysis via a bivariate correlation test. For this purpose, a hypothesis was formed as follows:

H01: There is no significant relationship between instructors' attitudes with the occupational health and safety practices at the workplace.

As shown in Table 1, there are two variables used in this study. The independent variable is represented by the attitude construct of the instructors while the dependent variable is from the health and safety practices construct.

Table 1 –  
*Correlational Relationship Between Instructors' Attitudes with Occupational Health and Safety Practices at the Workplace.*

Variables	n	Min	SP	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Attitudes	213	3.58	0.50	0.464**	0.000
Practices	213	3.98	0.56		

Note: \*\* Significant at 0.01 level

Results on the bivariate correlation analysis indicate that there is a significant relationship between teaching instructors' attitudes and health and safety practices ( $r = 0.464$ ,  $p \leq 0.000$ ). Based on the table of strength for Pearson correlation coefficient, it was found that the relationship between the independent variable (i.e., teaching instructors' attitude) with the dependent variable (i.e., health and safety practices) is moderately related.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H01) was rejected as the Pearson correlation analysis has shown a significant value between the independent and dependent variables ( $p = 0.003$ ). This posits that the attitudes of teaching instructors serve as a significant variable to health and safety practices at the workplace.

**Conclusion**

Through the results of the study, there is a significant relationship between the attitudes of teachers with occupational safety and health practices in Vocational Colleges. The attitude of the teaching staff is a key factor in the success of occupational safety and health practices in Vocational Colleges. It was found that the majority of respondents have a positive attitude towards improving the quality of occupational safety and health practices in the workplace. However, there are only a small number of respondents who have a less encouraging level of attitude when at work.

The findings also suggest that an effort to improve the performance of employees' attitudes towards occupational safety and health practices is through continuous training. In an organization, one of the proven ways to be effective for all employees to update safety-related skills and knowledge is by undergoing systematic training (Sheal et al., 2016). Furthermore, the level of training effectiveness has a high relationship to employee attitudes regarding compliance with occupational safety and health practices (Mashi et al., 2017). Therefore, ongoing safety training is an important element for the retention and change of employees' attitudes towards safety.

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