

Teachers' Attitudes in the the Workplace : Myth and/ or Reality ?

Ahmed Bashar
Université de Biskra

Abstract :

The central line of argument is that *if teachers are trained to handle their emotions ; and hence, their attitudes toward their constituencies¹ and workplaces, they will be more efficient and satisfied job-wise.* The current paper starts with surveying the nature of attitudes and seeks to link attitudes to other constructs such as affect, beliefs, behavior, cognition, and values. It is also within the scope of this paper to investigate the structure of attitudes and the extent whereto it can affect teachers' perceptions of and responsiveness to their socio-professional environment. Finally, the analysis of the investigation on teachers' attitudes toward their socio-professional environment is laid out.

المخّص:

إن مسار حجتنا الأساسي هو كما يلي إذا_درب الأساتذة على التحكم في عواطفهم، و بالتالي في إتجاهاتهم/ مواقفهم تجاه دوائرهم¹ و أماكن عملهم، فإنهم سوف يصبحون أكثر نجاعة و رضا في عملهم. تعمل هذه الورقة على سبر أغوار الإتجاهات/المواقف و تسعى إلى ربط هذا المفهوم بمفاهيم ذات الصلة (الوجدان، الإعتقاد، السلوك، الإدراك، و القيم). تدخل في نطاق هذا البحث أيضا هياكل الإتجاهات/ المواقف و مدى تأثيرها في مدارك الأساتذة و إستجابتهم لبيئتهم الإجتماعية-المهنية. في الأخير، نقدم تحليلا للإستبيان الخاص بإتجاهات/مواقف أساتذة التعليم المتوسط تجاه بيئتهم الإجتماعية-المهنية.

Introduction

Social psychologists deem “attitudes” a powerful theme. Pioneer scholars such as Allport and Watson consider this field of socio-psychological effects on inter-personal interactions (viz, social psychology) primarily concerned with attitudes. This view, therefore, perceives attitudes and social psychology as inseparable head-and-tail sides of the coin. The cherished position of attitudes in this field of study proves that humans *are* what their attitudes *are*. In fact, our favorable perceptions of both the inner and outworld considerably define our affect, beliefs, intellect, thoughts, and personality. We have every reason to maximize the importance of investigating teachers’ attitudes because (1) they have been ignored for so long, (2) they shape considerably teachers’ approaches to their classroom practices, (3) they indicate the degree of commitment to their profession and constituencies, and (4) they are warning signs of potential challenging problems.

Nature of Attitudes :

Attitudes are impressively mentioned in the social psychology literature. Albarracin, Johnson, and Zanna (2005 : vii) corroborate “A recent search for the term attitude in the American Psychological Association comprehensive index .. yielded 180,910 references. This impressive number certainly suggests that attitude research defined social psychology has come a long way since 1918 ..”. In their influential book *The Psychology of Attitudes and Attitude Change*, Forgas, Cooper, and Crano (2010 :6) report that according to a 2007 study by Vesser and Cooper, a social psychology literature search using the term attitude as a search term yielded approximately 50, 000 articles, chapters, books, and dissertations. A diligent review of relevant literature reveals that pioneer scholars developed one set of definitions that differ substantially from present-day scholars. Allport (1935) collected some definitions that were offered by pioneer researchers.

1. (An attitude is) *readiness for attention or action* of a definite sort (Baldwin, 1901 :11).

2. An attitude is a *complex of feelings, desires, fears, convictions, prejudices or other tendencies that have given a set or readiness to act* (Chave, 1928 :365).
3. An attitude is a *tendency to act toward or against something in the environment which becomes thereby a positive or negative value* (Bogardus, 1931 :62).
4. Attitudes are literally *mental postures, guides to conduct* to which each new experience is referred before a response is made (Morgan 1934 : 34). (Re-arranged and emphasized from *ibid.*).

As it can be noticed, only Morgan uses the plural form of “attitude”, and all the other scholars tend to perceive this construct as a single entity. What is more, it is sensed that all these definitions believe an attitude to be engendered by the interactions in the social environment to evolve into a value judgment of the latter. Albarracín *et al.* conclude that “.. the idea that attitudes are dispositions to behave in certain ways” (*op.cit.*). Attitudes refer, therefore, to covert behavior.

Modern definitions deliberately attribute emotional and cognitive features beside the behavioral aspects to attitudes.

1. An attitude is *an idea charged with emotion which predisposes a class of actions* to a particular class of social situations (Triandis, 1971 : 2).
2. An attitude is a *learned disposition to respond to an object* in consistently favorable way (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975 :6).
3. An attitude is a *disposition to react with characteristic judgments and with characteristic goals* across a variety of institutions (Anderson, 1981 :93).
4. An attitude is a *mediating process grouping a set of objects of thought* in a conceptual category that evokes a significant pattern of responses (McGuire, 1985 :126) (re-arrangement and emphasis mine).

Albarracin *et al.* note that all these definitions appear to faithfully adhere to behavioral tendency of attitudes (op.cit.). A priori, both pioneer and modern social psychologists seem to rely on the etymology of attitude in defining the construct. According to the authors of *etymology.com*, attitudes came into English usage in :

The 1660s, via Fr. attitude (17c.), from It. attitudine "disposition, posture," also "aptness, promptitude," from L.L. aptitudinem (nom. aptitudo; see [aptitude](#)). Originally 17c. a technical term in art for the posture of a figure in a statue or painting; later generalized to "a posture of the body supposed to imply some mental state" (1725). Sense of "settled behavior reflecting feeling or opinion" is first recorded 1837.

Recent research in child psychology ascerts that new born babies seem to favor certain colors, and to react positively to certain voices and places rather than to others. Chamberlain (1998 :xiv) echoes “Now science confirms that infants are social beings who can form close relationships, express themselves forcefully, exhibit preferences, and begin influencing people from the start”. In the same vein, Jacob (2009 :111) explains that

.. babies pay attention to location of sound. They respond to all elements of sound, including pitch, volume, timbre, and rhythm. They can even stop sucking to pay attention to something else. After prolonged exposure, babies stop reacting to irritating stimuli. This helps them shut out disturbing sights or sounds.

Clearly, the great bulk of attitudes appears to be acquired from socio-cultural environment. Still, the raw bulk of attitudes may be claimed to be inborn, at least in the early years of infancy, in order to defend those helpless creatures from the potential harm that may be induced by intruders.

More recent identifications of the construct in question put forward the evaluative, judgmental aspect all while preserving the focus on behavioral aspects.

1. The concept of attitude has an interesting history as a broadly defined construct *combining affect, conation, and belief intervening between stimulus and responses* (Katz, 1989 : xi).
2. Attitudes are tendencies to evaluate an entity with some degree of favor or disfavor, ordinarily expressed in cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses (Eagle and Chaiken ; 1993 :155).
3. We define an attitude as a summary *evaluation of an object of thought*. An object of thought can be anything a person discriminates or holds in mind. Attitude objects may be concrete (e.g., pizza) or abstract (e.g., freedom of speech, may be inanimate things(e.g., sports cars), persons (eg., Slobodan Milosovic, oneself), or groups (eg., conservative politicians, foreigners) (Böhner and Wänke, 2002 :5).
4. Attitude is a *disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event* (Ajzen, 2005 :3). (re-arrangement and emphasis, mine).

Individuals appear to follow a pattern : First, they *evaluate* objects and people in the surroundings, then they *adopt a verdict or judgment*, which they later *act upon*. According to Hewstone and Stroebe (ibid., 240) “Attitudes are assumed to guide behavior”. Attitudes, therefore, precede behavior, and the latter reflects –though implicitly-the former, and eventually reshapes it in turn.

Attitude Formation

Feral children, although having lived in the nature far from any human contact or possible socialization, developed attitudes toward their surroundings and later kinspeople. Laming (2004 :153) notes that “.. there may be, and probably, more profound developmental changes during childhood which, though common to all cultures, are still dependent on social interactions”. Nguyen (2005 :6) explains “Feral children have a choice of expressive behaviour restricted to anger, shyness, depression, impatience, and joy”. Attitudes appear

inevitable in humans' lives whether socialized or not. Attitudes are constantly formed and re-formed.

According to Oskamp (1991), the term *attitude formation* refers to the movement we make from having no attitude toward an object to having some positive or negative attitude toward that object (quoted in Bordens and Horowitz, 2002 :167). For the sake of convenience, I shall adopt this definition henceforth in my discussion of attitude formation. In their introductory book *Social Psychology* (2002), Bordens and Horowitz acknowledge four mechanisms of attitude formation.

1. **Mere Exposure** : By being exposed to an object increases feelings, usually positive, toward that object, repeated exposure can lead to attitudes.
2. **Direct Experience** : Attitudes acquired through direct experience are likely to be strongly held and to affect behavior. People are also more likely to search for information to support such attitudes.
3. **Operant & Classical Conditioning** : Most social psychologists would agree that the bulk of the attitudes are learned. That is, attitudes result from experience not genetic inheritance.

3.1 Operant conditioning (is) a method by which attitudes are acquired by rewarding a person for a given attitude in the hopes it will be maintained or strengthened.

3.2 Classical Conditioning (is) a form of learning that occurs when a stimulus comes to summon a response that it is previously did not evoke to form an attitude.

4. Observational Learning : Attitude-formation through watching what people do and whether they are rewarded or punished. Then, imitating that behavior. When there are discrepancies between what people say and do, children tend to imitate the behavior (ibid., 169-170).

As a natural process, the formation of attitudes is inevitable. Coon and Mitterer (2008 :535) point out “Attitudes are intimately woven into our actions and views of the world”. Whether consciously or unconsciously formed, attitudes are considerably beneficial for social and psychological survival. Smith and Mackie (2000 :250) recognize that “.. we develop attitudes because they are useful to us”. Social psychologists widely acknowledge that attitudes are invisible but express themselves in beliefs and emotions. Coon and Mitterer state that “.. attitudes are expressed through beliefs and emotions” (op.cit.). And eventually, “they predict or direct future actions” (ibid.). Differently stated, attitudes are the instigators as well as compass of behavior. Phillips and Gully (2011 :136) conceptualize that *beliefs* lead to feelings ; *feelings* lead to attitudes ; *attitudes* lead to intentions, and *intentions* culminate into *behavior*.

Types of Attitudes

Social psychologists have identified two types of attitudes : *implicit* and *explicit* attitudes. The seeming disparity and/ ambivalence in attitudes requires two types of measurements : implicit and explicit measurements. Hewstone and Stroebe (op.cit. : 240) claim “In a broad sense, the study of attitudes is important because attitudes are important for our social lives”, and equally important to our socio-psychological well-being.

1. **Explicit Attitudes** : Bordens and Horowitz (op.cit. 181) identify explicit attitudes in the following terms “An attitude operating in a controlled processing about which are aware of its existence, its cognitive underpinnings, and how it relates to behavior”. People feel in harmony with and live up to their nursed attitudes because they seem to be convinced by the justifications of their existence.

2. **Implicit Attitudes** : According to Breckler, Olson and Wiggins (2006 :202), An implicit attitude is “ an individual’s automatic evaluative response to a target, which can occur without awareness. An implicit attitude is a spontaneous, immediate, good-bad response to the target that cannot be consciously controlled. It reflects how the

individual evaluates the target at a subconscious level”. Implicit attitudes refer therefore to totally disguised attitudes to target objects without the individual’s least suspicion.

Breckler *et al.* note that “The distinction between implicit and explicit attitudes will not always be important” (ibid.). Again, Breckler *et al.* assert “Inconsistency between explicit and implicit attitudes can occur, however” (ibid.). The discrepancy between the types of attitude leads to what social psychologists call *cognitive dissonance*.

2. **Cognitive Dissonance** : Fischer, Frei, Peus, and Kastenmüller (2008 :189) provide the following definition “Cognitive Dissonance is defined as the subjective perception of incompatibility between two self-related cognitions”. Inconsistency comes to be termed dissonance by Leon Festinger. The latter, being the leading figure in advancement of cognitive dissonance for the first time (1957), defends his choice of terms “First, I will replace the word ‘inconsistency’ with a term which has less of a logical connotation, namely, *dissonance*” (p.2). Furthermore, he provides his understanding of cognition in this much : “By cognition .. I mean any knowledge, opinion, or belief about they environment, about oneself, about one’s behavior” (ibid., 3). According to Festinger, cognitive dissonance precedes behavior “Cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent condition which leads to activity toward dissonance reduction, just as hunger leads to activity oriented toward hunger reduction” (ibid.).

Structure of Attitudes

Attitudes are only *inferred*. It is as simply and complex as this much. Semin and Fiedler (op.cit., 4) state “An attitude is .. a hypothetical construct in the sense that we cannot directly sense or measure it”. In the same breadth, they note “Its existence is inferred from certain classes of *evaluative responses* to attitude object” (ibid.). Emotions can be another yardstick to measure an attitude “Another

way in which we might infer somebody's attitude is on the basis of their emotional responses'' (ibid.). Measuring attitudes is a complex undertaking as it requires a great deal of effort and energy to obtain trustworthy outcomes.

Böhner and Wänke (op.cit., 5) indicate that "Attitudes may encompass affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses". These three dimensions need not be considered mutually exclusive or symbiotically inclusive. Böhner and Wänke corroborate "These three response classes are not necessarily seperable from each other, and do not necessarily represent three independent factors" (ibid.). They further explain "Moreover, attitude may consist entirely of cognitive or affective components, and it is not necessary all three classes are represented" (ibid.). Ajzen (1988) proposes the following table :

REPOSE		CATEGORY	
Affect		Cognition	
		Behavior	
Verbal	Expression of feelings toward attitude object	Expressions of beliefs about attitude object	Expressions of behavioral intentions toward attitude object
Non Verbal	Physical responses to attitude object	Perceptual responses (e.g., reaction time) to attitude object	Overt behavioral responses to attitude object

Table1. Different types of evaluation responses (drawn upon Semin & Fiedler, 1996 :4)

According to Ajzen (ibid.), attitudes can be inferred from verbal and non verbal responses. Response categories are affect-, cognition-, and behavior-related. When male and female teachers feel that female students are more cooperative and amenable and act accordingly, then their attitude is affect-wise ; when male and female teachers express what they believe about male students (e.g., rowdy and disruptive) and act in accordance with their attitude, then it is cognitive-wise ; and when male and female teachers express their intentions and act on them (e.g., corporal punishment), then their attitude may be evaluated as behavior-wise.

In 1985, Ajzen developed his *theory of planned behavior* (TPB). TPB is an extension of the *theory of reasoned action* (TRA)

developed by Ajzen and Martin Fishbein in the mid-seventies. TPB has proved over the years to be an influential theory in social psychology (**fig.1**). Manfredo (2008 :121) explains “This widely used theory proposes that a person’s behavior is a function of attitude and subject norm”. A subject norm is conceptualized as “a person’s beliefs about what important others want one to do and one’s motivation to comply with those others” (ibid.) Differently stated, teachers’ attitudes toward class size (e.g., overcrowdedness frustrates teachers’ efficiency) and subject norm (e.g., inspectors’ and headteachers’ pressure for more teachers’ engagement in in-class groupwork) help define behavioral intentions and eventually teachers’ readiness to meet those standards.

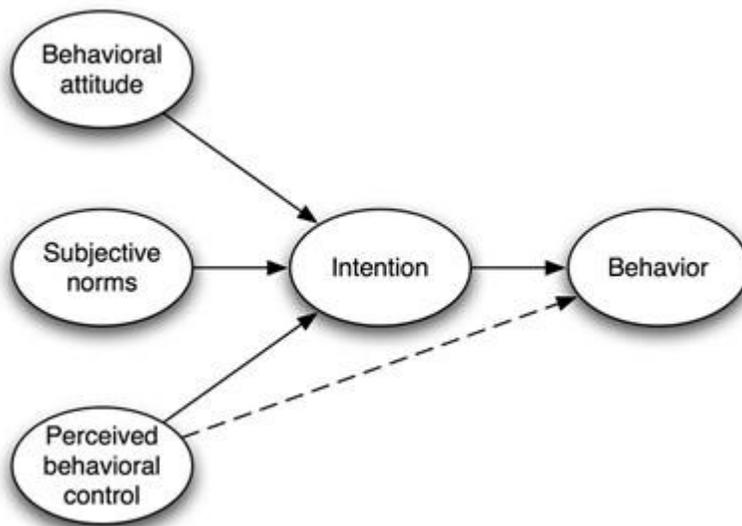


Fig. 1 Representation of TPB¹

Functions of Attitudes

People utilize attitudes in a variety of ways to accommodate different personal and social functions. Hewstone and Stroebe (op.cit.240) echo :

At a personal level attitude influence perceptions, thinking, and behavior .. . At the interpersonal level, information about attitudes is routinely requested and disclosed. If we know others' attitudes, the world's

¹ <http://publichealthnerds.blogspot.com/2011/06/theory-of-planned-behavior.html>

becomes more predictable. Our own thinking may be shaped by this knowledge, and we may try to control others' behavior by changing their attitudes. At the intergroup level, attitudes towards one's groups and other groups are at the core of intergroup cooperation and conflict.

Teachers' attitudes point out to the influence these can have on teachers' personal, interpersonal, and intergroup connections.

Social psychologists have identified five functions of attitudes of the teachers and others for that matter :

1. **Knowledge Function** : According to Hewstone and Stroebe (ibid., 242), an attitude's function of guiding, organizing, and simplifying information process.
2. **Utilitarian Function** : An attitude's function of maximizing rewards and minimizing punishments in guiding behavior (ibid.).
3. **Social Identity Function** : An attitude's function of expressing an individual's values and of establishing identification with particular reference groups (ibid.).
4. **Self-Esteem Maintenance Function** : An attitude's function of setting the self apart from negative objects and aligning it with positive objects (ibid.).
5. **Self-Monitoring Function** : Individuals high in self-monitoring tailor their behaviour to fit situational cues and reactions of others (ibid.).

Buzzan (2001) states that the "US Bureau of Labor Statistics did some research and estimated that negative beliefs and attitudes in the workplace cost the US industry approximately \$ 3 billion per year" (quoted in Neale, Spencer-Arnell, and Wilson, 2011 :70). As Algerian

academics, the question that comes to mind : How much money do the negative attitudes of the Algerian workforce cost the Nation's economy ? Attitudes appear to be under-explored by academics, and even if there were some, they are *classified* on library shelves (*double entendre intended*).

Methodology

We relied upon a questionnaire, which has been deemed an appropriate form of data collection. The questionnaire in question has been constructed with the view of collecting the attitudes of the middle school teachers of English toward their socio-professional environment. For the sake of convenience, the questionnaire is made short and contains 12 items that purport to identify teachers' attitudes. The respondents were asked to circle the items that corresponded to their view of the agents in their socio-professional environment.

Respondents

The target of the questionnaire has been the middle school teachers of English in the region of Biskra. The demographics of the surveyed teachers such as gender, seniority, training period, favorite skill to teach, favorite readings, variety of English used have been collected, classified, and analyzed in the process. The response rate is 68%.

Significant Results of the Study

Both female and male teachers seem to nurse negative attitudes toward male students. 85.29% of the respondents believe that male students are noisy, rude, disruptive, careless, restless, untidy, rebellious, lazy, and selfish. 23.52% of the respondents think that male students are hardworking, intelligent, perseverant, energetic, cooperative, helpful, and caring. Whereas, only 11.76% of the surveyed teachers believe male students to be quiet, polite, obedient, thoughtful, calm, tidy, law-abiding, and kind. Unlike male student population, female students population enjoys favorable attitudes according to the results of this study. 79.41% of the middle school teachers of English perceive that female students as quite, polite, obedient, thoughtful, calm, tidy, law-abiding, and kind. Yet another 11.77% consider female students to be hardworking, intelligent, perseverant, energetic, cooperative, helpful, and caring. Only 8.82% of the surveyed teacher nurse negative attitudes toward female students who are qualified as noisy, rude, disruptive, careless, restless, untidy, rebellious, lazy, and selfish.

Surprisingly, teachers' gender does not appear to affect the middle school teachers of English. Both female and teachers nourish positive attitudes toward one another. 70.58% of female teachers say that male teachers are dedicated, helpful, caring, responsible, skillful, understanding, supportive, and fair against 29.42% who perceive male teachers as authoritarian, firm, selfish, reluctant to help, pompous, always behind schedule, and sexist. As for male teachers, 64.70% believe that female teachers are devoted to their job, helpful, caring, motivated, skillful, updated, resourceful, and tidy. This attitude is not shared only by 29.30 % who think that female teachers are lax, lazy, careless, uncooperative, selfish, always behind schedule, and demotivated.

The surveyed teachers (64.70%), regardless of gender differences, think that their professional context is accepting, comfortable, inducing, involving, understanding, encouraging, supportive, caring, secure, trusting, warm, non-judgmental, and non-threatening. Some 32.35% of the respondents do not appear that optimism, especially as they perceive their school context to be stressful, disheartening, hostile, biased, lax, demotivating, preferential (sexist), judgmental, threatening, undemocratic, and overbearing. Dissatisfaction with the socio-professional context need not be under-estimated all the more as one third of the middle school teachers of English feel working in extreme professional, psychological, and social conditions. Yet another attitude that we collected in other questionnaire, and which seems to cause most of the teachers' concern, is the teachers' negative view of large classes that seem to characterize the typical Algerian classes from primary to post-secondary education.

Conclusion

Teachers' attitudes play key roles in shaping teachers' in-class behavior. Oftentimes, teachers themselves ignore the effects of attitudes on the way they perceive themselves, their roles as educators, their teaching practices, the way they manage their classes, and the way they instore discipline. A plethora of research on attitudes has widely reported in recent years an alarming rise in teachers' dissatisfaction about and decrease in their commitment to their job.

Références :

Ajzen, I. (2005). *Attitudes, Personality, and Behavior*. London : Open University Press.

Albarracin, D., Johnson, B. T. & Zanna, M. P. (2005). *The Handbook of Attitudes*. Mahwah, NJ : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Böhner, G. & Wänke, M. (2002). *Attitudes and Attitude Change*. East Sussex : Psychology Press Limited.

Bordens, K. S. and Horowitz, I. A. (2002). *Social Psychology*. Lawrence Erlbaum Mahwah, NJ : Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Breckler, S. J., Olson, J. M., and Wiggins, E. C. (2006). *Social Psychology Alive*. Belmont, CA : Thomas Higher Education.

Chamberlain, D. B. (1998). *Mind of Your Newborn Baby*. Berkeley, CA : North Atlantic Books.

Coon, D. and Litterer, J. O. (2008). *Intoduction to psychology : Gateaway to Mind and Behavior*. California : Wadsworth.

Ebert II, E. S. and Cuyler III, R. C. (2011). *School : An Introduction*. California : Wadsworth.

Festinger, L. (1957). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. California : Stanford University Press.

Fischer, P., Frei, D., Peus, C., and Kantenmüller, A. (2008). Theory of Cognitive Dissonance : State of the Science and Directions for Future Research in Meusburger, P., Welker, M., and Wunder, E. *Clashes of Knowledge*. Springer Science and Business Media, B.V. (pp. 189-196).

Forgas, J. P., Cooper, J., and Crano, W. D. (2010). *The Psychology of Attitudes and Attitude Change*. NY : Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis.

Hewstone, M. and Stroebe, W. (2004). *Introduction to Social Psychology : A European Perspective*. MA : Blackwell Publishing.

Jacob, S. H. (2009). *Your Baby's Mind*. Bloomington, IN : AuthorHouse.

Katz, D. (1989). *Forward* in Pratkanis, A, Breckler, S. J. & Greenwald, A. G. *Attitude Structure and Function*. Hillsdale, NJ : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Laming, D. (2004). *Understanding Human Motivation : What Makes People Tick*. Malden, MA : Wiley-Blackwell.

Manfredo, M. J. (2008). *Who Cares About Wildlife ? : Social Science Concepts of Exploring Human-Wildlife Relationships and Conservation Issues*. NY : Springer+Business Media, LLC.

Neale, S., Spencer-Arnell, L. and Wilson, L. (2011). *Emotional Intelligence Coaching : Improving Performance for Leaders, Coaches and the Individual*. London : Kogan Page Publications Ltd.

Nguyen, T. (2005). *Universals in Facial Expression*. Norderstedt, Germany : Druck and Bindung : Book on Demand GmbH.

Phillips, J. and Gully, S. M. (2011). *Organizational Behavior : Tools for Success*. California : Wadsworth.

Smith, E. R. and Mackie, D. M. (2000). *Social Psychology*. Philadelphia, PA : Psychology Press.