A Comparative Study on Self-Actualisation Levels Among Primary School Teachers

Velayudhan P.K.Veeran[1], Maheswary P.K.Veeran[2], Thesnath Velayudhan[3], S. Thanaletchumy Suppiah[4], Lillipuspam Mathivanan[5]

[1]SK Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia
[2]SJK T Behrang River, Perak, Malaysia
[3]Lincon University. Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
[4]SJK T Trolak, Perak, Malaysia
[5]SJK T Ladang Sungai Kruit, Perak, Malaysia

ABSTRACT: This study examines the self-actualization levels of 1,520 primary school teachers in the Batang Padang and Muallim district across three school types: National Schools (SK), Chinese National-Type Schools (SJK(C)), and Tamil National-Type Schools (SJK(T)). Using a quantitative approach, data analysis through ANOVA revealed significant differences in overall self-actualization scores among the groups ($F(2, 1517) = 79.27$, $p < .001$). Tukey's post-hoc tests confirmed that teachers in SJK(T) reported the highest mean score of 79.91 (SD = 7.73), which was significantly greater than SK (M = 75.54, SD = 6.84) and SJK(C) (M = 72.36, SD = 5.78). Analysis of sixteen sub-components consistently showed higher scores for SJK(T) teachers across traits such as self-acceptance, respect for humanity, creativity, empathy, and positive values. These findings highlight the influence of cultural context and school environment on teachers' self-actualization. The results underscore the importance of developing culturally responsive educational policies and tailored professional development programs to promote teachers' well-being and holistic growth in diverse, multicultural settings.

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-actualization, a core concept introduced by Abraham Maslow (1954), refers to the process of realizing personal potential and achieving personal growth. Maslow's hierarchy of needs positions self-actualization at the apex, representing the highest level of psychological development where individuals pursue purpose, creativity, and authenticity (Maslow, 1954). In educational settings, the self-actualization of teachers is vital, as it influences their instructional effectiveness, job satisfaction, and capacity to foster positive student outcomes (Okeke-James et al., 2024). Teachers who are self-actualized tend to exhibit creativity, resilience, empathy, and a commitment to continuous personal development, which are essential qualities in dynamic classroom environments (Staley, 2022).

Malaysia's diverse educational landscape comprises various school types aligned with ethnic and linguistic identities, notably National Schools (SK), Chinese National-Type Schools (SJK(C)), and Tamil National-Type Schools (SJK(T)). These institutions serve different cultural communities, and their teachers often operate within unique socio-cultural contexts that may influence their psychological needs and professional fulfillment. Understanding how self-actualization manifests among teachers in these settings can inform targeted strategies to enhance teacher well-being and educational quality.

Prior research indicates a relationship between self-actualization and professional efficacy across disciplines (Jena & Dorji, 2016; Voitenko et al., 2021). Velayudhan (2013), in his doctoral dissertation, examined job satisfaction and self-actualization among Malaysian primary teachers, laying the groundwork for understanding these constructs locally. More recent studies emphasize the

role of leadership and school climate in promoting teacher well-being (Velayudhan et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2025). Nonetheless, comparative analyses across different school types within Malaysia remain scarce. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring self-actualization levels among primary school teachers across SK, SJK(C), and SJK(T) in the Batang Padang and Muallim District.

The research question guiding this study is: Are there significant differences in the mean self-actualization levels across sixteen components—such as self-acceptance, respect for humanity, creativity, and empathy-among teachers from different primary school types in Batang Padang? The findings are expected to provide insights into contextual factors affecting teacher development and inform policies to support holistic teacher growth.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs remains foundational in understanding human motivation, positioning self-actualization as the realization of one's fullest potential. Self-actualized individuals are characterized by autonomy, authenticity, problem-solving ability, and a profound appreciation for life (Maslow, 1954). In education, this concept extends to teachers, whose self-actualization impacts pedagogical effectiveness and student success (Staley, 2022). Teachers with high self-actualization are more adaptable, innovative, and resilient in facing professional challenges (Voitenko et al., 2021).

Research indicates that teachers' self-actualization correlates positively with job satisfaction, commitment, and instructional quality (Okeke-James et al., 2024). Reflective practices have been identified as critical pathways toward fostering self-actualization, enabling teachers to continuously evaluate and improve their professional identities (Yukawa et al., 2011). Cross-cultural studies, such as Jena and Dorji (2016), highlight that cultural context influences how self-actualization manifests among teachers. In Bhutan, for instance, value orientation and cultural norms shape teachers' perceptions of personal growth.

In Malaysia, Velayudhan's (2013) pioneering study examined the interplay between job satisfaction and self-actualization among primary educators, revealing that supportive school environments and leadership fostered higher levels of teacher well-being. Subsequent research emphasizes the importance of leadership styles and school climate in promoting teacher self-actualization, with studies suggesting that empowering leadership and collaborative cultures are conducive (Velayudhan et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2025).

Methodologically, statistical tools such as ANOVA and MANOVA are frequently employed to examine group differences in psychological constructs. ANOVA compares means across groups, while MANOVA assesses multiple dependent variables simultaneously, offering a comprehensive view of differences in sub-components of complex constructs (Keselman et al., 1998). Post-hoc tests like Tukey's are essential for identifying specific group differences following significant ANOVA or MANOVA results (SixSigma.us, 2025).

2.1 Theoretical Support

Self-actualization, as conceptualized by Maslow (1954), represents the realization of an individual's fullest potential and is a vital component of personal development. In educational contexts, teachers' self-actualization has been linked to increased motivation, job satisfaction, and professional efficacy (Okeke-James et al., 2024; Voitenko et al., 2021). According to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985), fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness—core elements that align with Maslow's higher-level needs—enhances intrinsic motivation and promotes well-being among educators (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Furthermore, research by Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) suggests that a positive school climate, leadership support, and collegial relationships serve as significant antecedents of teachers' self-actualization, ultimately affecting their instructional effectiveness and student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). These theories collectively underscore the importance of contextual factors in fostering teacher self-actualization within diverse school environments.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design to compare self-actualization levels among primary school teachers across three school types in Batang Padang and Muallim district.

3.2 Development and Validation of a Self-Actualization Measurement Instrument for Teachers   Based on Adapted Psychological Scales

The study assesses teachers' self-actualization using a 4-point Likert scale comprising 150 items, which were translated and adapted from psychological tests related to self-actualization. According to Othman Lebar (2006), using an equal number of items across 16 constructs strengthens the study and facilitates more accurate data analysis, a view supported by Chua (2006) and Bhasah (2007). Therefore, items representing these 16 sub-constructs were derived from seven sources to ensure alignment and reinforce the study, with expert validation and a very high reliability coefficient of 0.98, making the instrument highly suitable for this research. The sources include: (i) the Northidge Developmental Scale by Gowan (1974), with 80 culturally adapted items and a reliability ranging from 0.60 to 0.80; (ii) the self-actualization measure by Jones and Crandall (1986), cited in Burger (2004),

translated into 15 culturally relevant items with a reliability of 0.67; (iii) a personality measure by Louis (1996), from which 10 self-assessment questions were adapted with a reliability of 0.98; (iv) the Oxford Happiness Inventory interpreted by Michael (2002), contributing 10 items on personal happiness with a reliability of 0.86; (v) 10 items from various positive personality tests compiled by Shane and Snyder (2004), showing a reliability of 0.98; (vi) five items related to interpersonal effectiveness and self-actualization from David (1997), with a reliability of 0.98; and (vii) the Tennessee Self Concept Scale by Fitts (1965), adapted by Sidek Mohd Noah into the Sidek Personality Inventory, contributing 20 items with reliability between 0.60 and 0.90. The research items were selected from these seven validated sources to measure 16 personality constructs effectively, with each construct assessed through 6 to 12 items to enhance the accuracy of findings. This approach aligns with Bhasah's (2007) recommendation for uniform question distribution across constructs to improve the instrument's reliability. The final instrument, validated by ten experts in psychology and counseling, achieved a strong reliability score of 0.98, deemed sufficient for the study, as supported by Bhasah (2007), Chua (2006), and Mohd Majid (1990).

3.3. Participants
A total of 1,520 teachers participated, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across school types. Participants' demographics included age, gender, tenure, and educational qualification.
Here is the translation and APA-style formatting of the provided data in English:

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents Based on School Type

School Type	Number of Schools	Number of Teachers	Percentage of Teachers (%)
National Schools (SK)	53	990	64.3
National-type (Chinese)	23	320	21.9
National-type (Tamil)	19	210	13.8
Total	95	1,520	100.0

This study involved a total of 1,520 teachers (79%) from all 95 primary schools in the Batang Padang District and Muallim. of these, 990 teachers (64.3%) were from 53 National Schools (SK), 320 teachers (21.9%) from 23 National-type Chinese Schools (SJK(C)), and 210 teachers (13.8%) from 19 National-type Tamil Schools (SJK(T)). (see Table 1).

3.4. Variables
Dependent Variable: Self-actualization, measured through a 16-item scale capturing components such as self-acceptance, respect for humanity, and creativity, rated on a Likert scale.
Independent Variable: School type (categorical: SK, SJK(C), SJK(T)).

3.5. Data Analysis
Data were analyzed via SPSS or similar statistical software. The analysis comprised:
One-way ANOVA to compare overall self-actualization scores across school types.
MANOVA to analyze differences across the 16 sub-components simultaneously.
Post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) following significant ANOVA/MANOVA results to identify specific group differences.
Assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, and linearity were tested and met or addressed through data transformations where necessary.

4. RESULTS
4.1. Overall Self-Actualization
The mean overall self-actualization score was 75.48 (SD = 7.10). Teachers from SJK(T) reported the highest mean score (M = 79.91, SD = 7.73), followed by SK (M = 75.54, SD = 6.84), and SJK(C) (M = 72.36, SD = 5.78). One-way ANOVA confirmed significant differences among the groups, $F(2, 1517) = 79.27$, $p < .001$.
Post-hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD indicated that all pairwise differences were statistically significant, with SJK(T) teachers exhibiting the highest levels of self-actualization.
Overall Self-Actualization, integrating the data from Tables 1, 2, and 3 and elaborating on the statistical and contextual implications:
This study aimed to explore differences in overall self-actualization among teachers based on school type-Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK), Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJK(C)), and Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil (SJK(T))-in the Batang Padang District and Muallim. Self-actualization, measured on a scale from 0 to 100, represents the extent to which individuals realize their potential across personal and professional domains.

As presented in Table 1, the mean self-actualization score for the entire sample (N = 1,520) was 75.48 (SD = 7.10), suggesting that, on average, teachers in the district report relatively high levels of self-actualization. However, when disaggregated by school type, notable differences emerged. Teachers from SJK(T) recorded the highest average self-actualization score (M = 79.91, SD = 7.73), followed by teachers from SK (M = 75.54, SD = 6.84), and finally, those from SJK(C) with the lowest average (M = 72.36, SD = 5.78). The range of scores also showed variation across groups, with SJK(C) having the lowest minimum score (49.50), while SJK(T) showed higher lower-bound scores (60.33), indicating not only higher central tendency but also greater overall consistency in self-actualization among Tamil school teachers.

To determine if these observed differences were statistically significant, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. As shown in Table 2, the ANOVA results revealed a significant effect of school type on self-actualization, $F(2, 1517)$ = 79.27, $p < .001$, indicating that at least one group mean differed significantly from the others.

To further examine where these differences lie, a Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test was performed (see Table 3). The pairwise comparisons showed that:

Teachers from SK scored significantly higher than those from SJK(C), with a mean difference of 3.19 (SE = 0.43, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.17, 4.21]).

Teachers from SJK(T) scored significantly higher than those from SK, with a mean difference of –4.37 (SE = 0.51, $p < .001$, 95% CI [–5.58, –3.17]).

Teachers from SJK(T) also scored significantly higher than those from SJK(C), with a mean difference of –7.56 (SE = 0.60, $p < .001$, 95% CI [–8.97, –6.15]).

These findings indicate a clear pattern: SJK(T) teachers consistently exhibit the highest levels of self-actualization, followed by SK, while SJK(C) teachers report the lowest. This suggests that the school environment and perhaps cultural or institutional factors associated with different school types may influence teachers' self-perception, motivation, and personal growth.

The statistically significant differences observed across all pairwise comparisons reinforce the hypothesis that school type plays an important role in shaping teachers' sense of fulfillment and self-actualization. These differences could be linked to several contextual variables such as leadership style, collegial support, workload, teacher autonomy, and value alignment within the school ecosystem.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Self-Actualization Scores by School Type in Batang Padang District and Muallim

School Type	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of Mean	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK)	990	75.54	6.84	0.22	75.12 – 75.97	50.00	100.00
Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina) (SJK(C))	320	72.36	5.78	0.32	71.72 – 72.99	49.50	96.83
Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Tamil) (SJK(T))	210	79.91	7.73	0.53	78.86 – 80.97	60.33	100.00
Total	1520	75.48	7.10	0.18	75.12 – 75.83	49.50	100.00

Table 3. ANOVA summary for differences in overall self-actualization scores across school types

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	7251.56	2	3625.78	79.27	< .001
Within Groups	69,390.36	1,517	45.74		
Total	76,641.92	1,519			

Note. $F(2, 1517) = 79.27$, $p < .001$.

Table 4. Tukey's HSD post-hoc comparisons of self-actualization means between school types.

Comparison	Mean Difference (I – J)	Standard Error	Significance	95% Confidence Interval
SK vs. SJK(C)	3.19	0.43	$p < .001$	2.17 – 4.21
SK vs. SJK(T)	–4.37	0.51	$p < .001$	–5.58 – –3.17
SJK(C) vs. SJK(T)	–7.56	0.60	$p < .001$	–8.97 – –6.15

Note. All mean differences are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

4.2. Sub-Component Analysis

Descriptive statistics for the 16 sub-components consistently showed that SJK(T) teachers scored higher than their counterparts in SK and SJK(C), across constructs such as self-acceptance, respect for humanity, and creativity. MANOVA results (not detailed here for brevity) supported the conclusion that differences across sub-components were statistically significant.

4.2.1 Self-Actualization Sub-Components by School Type

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for 16 self-actualization sub-components across three school types: Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK), Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJK(C)), and Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil (SJK(T)).

Across all 16 sub-components, teachers from SJK(T) consistently reported the highest mean scores, indicating stronger self-actualization traits compared to SK and SJK(C) teachers. SK teachers generally had moderate scores, while SJK(C) teachers showed the lowest scores across most domains.

Key Findings:

Self-acceptance: SJK(T) teachers scored highest (M = 78.82), with SJK(C) teachers lowest (M = 70.26), reflecting higher self-worth and acceptance among Tamil school teachers.

Respect for humanity: Scores were highest in SJK(T) (M = 88.94), demonstrating a strong emphasis on empathy and social values.

Positive values: Again, SJK(T) teachers scored highest (M = 87.14), followed by SK and SJK(C), indicating a more positive value orientation.

Reality orientation: SJK(T) had the highest scores (M = 80.39), suggesting better coping and realistic appraisal skills.

Broad-mindedness: Highest in SJK(T) (M = 78.68), highlighting openness and tolerance.

Mate selection: SJK(T) (M = 82.32) reported higher scores, possibly indicating better relationship and social decision-making skills.

Autonomy and freedom: The lowest among all sub-components but again highest in SJK(T) (M = 72.21) and lowest in SJK(C) (M = 64.85), suggesting greater perceived professional independence in Tamil schools.

Privacy and security: Highest in SJK(T) (M = 77.38), indicating better feelings of safety and personal boundaries.

Spontaneity and originality: Highest scores in SJK(T) (M = 80.33) suggest a more creative and authentic teaching environment.

Problem-solving: SJK(T) teachers scored highest (M = 73.29), reflecting better critical thinking and coping strategies.

Creativity: Highest in SJK(T) (M = 75.07), consistent with other creativity-related sub-components.

Sincere appreciation: SJK(T) again leads (M = 83.60), reflecting stronger emotional intelligence and gratitude.

Valuable experience: SJK(T) teachers had higher scores (M = 77.51), suggesting greater appreciation of life experiences.

Empathy: Highest in SJK(T) (M = 81.17), reinforcing their interpersonal strengths.

Democracy: SJK(T) scored highest (M = 76.07), suggesting stronger democratic values and collaborative attitudes.

Philosophical and humorous: SJK(T) (M = 78.65) reflected a better capacity for reflection and humor in the workplace.

The consistent pattern across all 16 sub-components highlights that SJK(T) teachers possess higher self-actualization traits, which could be attributed to cultural, organizational, or leadership factors unique to Tamil schools. SK teachers show moderate levels, while SJK(C) teachers have lower self-actualization scores across the board. This nuanced insight into self-actualization domains can help tailor interventions to promote teacher well-being and professional growth across different school types.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Self-Actualization Sub-Components by School Type

Self-Actualization Sub-Component	School Type	N	M	SD
Self-acceptance	SK	990	75.18	9.18
	SJK(C)	320	70.26	7.49
	SJK(T)	210	78.82	10.53
Respect for humanity	SK	990	84.03	9.48
	SJK(C)	320	81.72	9.22
	SJK(T)	210	88.94	9.03
Positive values	SK	990	80.29	8.79
	SJK(C)	320	77.28	8.55
	SJK(T)	210	87.14	9.45
Reality	SK	990	74.71	9.39
	SJK(C)	320	71.61	8.24
	SJK(T)	210	80.39	10.21

Self-Actualization Sub-Component	School Type	N	M	SD
Broad-mindedness	SK	990	74.86	9.67
	SJK(C)	320	71.55	8.41
	SJK(T)	210	78.68	10.45
Mate selection	SK	990	78.98	8.04
	SJK(C)	320	75.69	7.61
	SJK(T)	210	82.32	9.41
Autonomy and freedom	SK	990	68.89	9.50
	SJK(C)	320	64.85	7.77
	SJK(T)	210	72.21	9.91
Privacy and security	SK	990	73.61	9.04
	SJK(C)	320	71.22	8.09
	SJK(T)	210	77.38	9.86
Spontaneity and originality	SK	990	75.21	8.71
	SJK(C)	320	71.69	7.00
	SJK(T)	210	80.33	9.44
Problem-solving	SK	990	68.01	11.66
	SJK(C)	320	65.96	10.61
	SJK(T)	210	73.29	12.61
Creativity	SK	990	70.43	9.53
	SJK(C)	320	66.63	9.01
	SJK(T)	210	75.07	10.62
Sincere appreciation	SK	990	79.51	9.70
	SJK(C)	320	76.08	8.08
	SJK(T)	210	83.60	10.32
Valuable experience	SK	990	73.21	9.26
	SJK(C)	320	70.13	7.17
	SJK(T)	210	77.51	10.95
Empathy	SK	990	77.40	9.25
	SJK(C)	320	74.38	7.79
	SJK(T)	210	81.17	11.00
Democracy	SK	990	73.63	8.70
	SJK(C)	320	71.22	1.68
	SJK(T)	210	76.07	10.21
Philosophical and humorous	SK	990	74.46	8.41
	SJK(C)	320	71.46	7.31
	SJK(T)	210	78.65	10.20

Note. Descriptive statistics for each sub-component are based on the original data. *SK* = Sekolah Kebangsaan, *SJK(C)* = Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina), *SJK(T)* = Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Tamil).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal significant differences in self-actualization levels among primary school teachers across different school types in the Batang Padang District and Muallim. The rejection of the null hypothesis, supported by robust ANOVA results, confirms that school type is a significant factor influencing teachers' overall self-actualization. Specifically, teachers in Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil (SJK(T)) schools reported the highest self-actualization scores, followed by Sekolah

Kebangsaan (SK) and Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJK(C)) teachers. This pattern was consistent not only in the overall self-actualization scores but also across sixteen distinct sub-components of self-actualization.

These disparities suggest that contextual factors related to school type—such as cultural norms, leadership styles, community engagement, and school climate—play a critical role in shaping teachers' psychological growth and well-being. The higher self-actualization levels among SJK(T) teachers may be reflective of supportive environments that emphasize personal growth, autonomy, and positive interpersonal relationships. These findings align with previous research indicating that workplace context and cultural values significantly influence teacher well-being and professional development (Garifullina et al., 2019; Thien & Lee, 2023).

Moreover, the comprehensive analysis of sub-components such as self-acceptance, respect for humanity, creativity, and empathy reinforces the notion that SJK(T) teachers experience a more holistic form of self-actualization. This nuanced perspective adds depth beyond an overall score, highlighting areas where specific interventions may be most beneficial.

From a practical standpoint, these results underscore the need for educational policymakers and school leaders to cultivate inclusive, empowering, and culturally responsive environments across all school types. Tailored professional development, supportive leadership, and fostering a culture that values autonomy and growth could enhance self-actualization and ultimately improve teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Thien & Lee, 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

Despite the study's strengths, limitations include some violations of statistical assumptions and its geographic focus on the Batang Padang District and Muallim, which may affect generalizability. Future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to explore causal pathways and incorporate qualitative insights that elucidate the underlying mechanisms driving these differences.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence that self-actualization among primary school teachers in Batang Padang significantly varies by school type, with SJK(T) teachers demonstrating the highest levels across overall and sub-component measures. These findings highlight the critical influence of school context on teacher psychological well-being and professional growth.

Understanding and addressing the unique environmental and cultural factors inherent to different school types can inform targeted interventions to promote teacher self-actualization. Such efforts have important implications for enhancing teacher well-being and educational quality within diverse multicultural settings.

While the results are region-specific, they contribute valuable insights to the broader discourse on teacher development and school climate. Future investigations should aim to extend these findings beyond Batang Padang, explore qualitative dimensions, and examine causality to support teacher empowerment and holistic growth better better.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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