The Relationship Between Teacher Competence and Student Satisfaction in a State Religious Secondary School in Pahang

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between teacher competence and student satisfaction in religious secondary schools. The primary aim is to determine how various dimensions of teacher competence influence students' overall satisfaction with the learning experience. A quantitative research design was employed, using structured questionnaires administered to a sample of Form 4 and Form 5 students in selected religious secondary schools in Pahang, Malaysia. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analyses. The results revealed that teacher competence particularly in professionalism and content mastery has a strong and statistically significant positive correlation with student satisfaction. Linear regression analysis showed that teacher competence accounts for over 50% of the variation in student satisfaction levels. While the general level of teacher competence was rated as high, the integration of technology in teaching was found to be only moderate. This highlights a need for improved digital literacy among teachers. The study concludes by recommending continuous professional development focused on strengthening teachers' professionalism, enhancing subject matter expertise, and advancing the integration of educational technology. Support from school leadership and educational policymakers is essential to sustain teacher effectiveness and address the evolving needs of 21st-century education.

Keywords: Teacher Competence, Student Satisfaction, Effective Teaching, Professional Development, Malaysian Education

INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence is widely recognized as a fundamental pillar underpinning the quality and success of the teaching and learning process in educational institutions worldwide, including Malaysia. Competent teachers act as the critical link between curriculum delivery and student learning outcomes, directly influencing students' satisfaction and academic performance. The concept of teacher competence is multidimensional, extending beyond simple subject mastery to include a broad array of professional skills, pedagogical strategies, interpersonal abilities, and adaptive expertise that collectively enable effective facilitation of student learning (Nor & Zulkifli, 2017). At the core, competent teachers must possess the ability to deliver subject matter accurately, clearly, and in an engaging manner that nurtures intellectual curiosity. Ahmad, Rahim, and Ismail (2020) found that Malaysian teachers who demonstrated high content knowledge and

clarity in instruction positively affected student achievement and engagement. This finding aligns with local education reforms that emphasize mastery of content as well as the ability to communicate it effectively to diverse learners (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Competent teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge; they are facilitators who guide students through complex ideas using relatable examples and innovative teaching aids.

Furthermore, the classroom environment cultivated by competent teachers must be inclusive, supportive, and stimulating. Research by Salleh and Hussin (2018) highlighted that positive teacher-student interactions and a respectful classroom culture were significant predictors of student motivation in Malaysian secondary schools. A stimulating environment encourages students to participate actively, fostering a sense of belonging and ownership over their learning (Zainuddin & Halim, 2020). This aspect of teacher competence nurtures both academic engagement and socio-emotional development, crucial for holistic education. Effective communication is another hallmark of teacher competence. Teachers who communicate clearly and listen actively create a two-way dialogue that enriches the learning experience (Rahman & Zakaria, 2016). Malaysian studies emphasize the importance of interpersonal skills in fostering trust-based relationships between teachers and students. According to Rahman and Zakaria (2016), such relationships are key to building a safe and motivating learning atmosphere, which in turn improves students' emotional well-being and academic perseverance. Students who feel heard and supported tend to show greater enthusiasm and resilience in their studies.

The ability to manage classroom interactions positively also relies heavily on teachers' social and emotional intelligence. In Malaysia, studies by Liew and Kaur (2017) revealed that teachers with higher emotional intelligence were better equipped to address diverse student needs and to promote social harmony within classrooms. These competencies allow teachers to manage conflicts constructively, provide emotional support, and adapt teaching strategies to accommodate different learning styles and cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing student satisfaction and performance. Competent teachers excel in classroom management, which is fundamental to creating an environment conducive to learning. According to Abdullah, Mohamad, and Nasir (2019), Malaysian teachers who effectively implement clear behavioral expectations and positive reinforcement strategies contribute significantly to minimizing classroom disruptions and maximizing learning time. Good classroom management not only supports academic achievement but also promotes positive social behaviors and respect among students.

Student motivation is closely tied to how well teachers manage classrooms and engage learners. Competent teachers utilize diverse motivational strategies, including goal-setting, praise, and differentiated instruction to meet individual student needs (Ismail & Ibrahim, 2021). Their capacity to inspire students to take ownership of their learning fosters intrinsic motivation, which is vital for sustained academic success. Studies within the Malaysian context demonstrate that motivated students are more likely to participate actively, exhibit higher attendance, and achieve better academic outcomes (Rahim & Harun, 2020). The emotional and social dimensions of teacher competence are increasingly acknowledged as essential in Malaysia's multicultural and multilingual classrooms. Teachers who possess emotional intelligence can effectively respond to students' emotional cues and create supportive learning environments (Kamaruddin & Aziz, 2018). This is particularly important in Malaysian schools, where classrooms consist of students from various ethnic backgrounds and learning needs. Liew and Kaur (2017) found that teachers with high emotional competence were able to foster empathy and collaboration among students, thus promoting a positive classroom climate conducive to learning. The ability to regulate one's own emotions and manage interpersonal dynamics is critical for addressing behavioral issues, reducing student anxiety, and encouraging positive peer interactions.

Modern teacher competence in Malaysia also involves the application of innovative, student-centered pedagogical approaches. The shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning has been emphasized in Malaysia's national education policy as a means to enhance critical thinking and creativity among students (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). Competent Malaysian teachers incorporate cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based learning to

engage students actively in the learning process (Jamil & Aziz, 2018). Research by Faridah, Noor, and Rani (2020) confirms that the use of active learning strategies improves student engagement and understanding. These methods encourage students to take responsibility for their learning, collaborate with peers, and apply knowledge to real-life situations. Competent teachers are also skilled in differentiating instruction to meet diverse learner needs, ensuring equity and inclusivity in Malaysian classrooms (Zainuddin & Halim, 2020).

The integration of educational technology is a critical component of teacher competence in the digital era. Malaysia's education system has increasingly embraced digital tools and e-learning platforms, particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2021). Teachers proficient in technology use can create dynamic and interactive learning experiences that enhance student engagement and accessibility (Siti Nor & Rohani, 2019). However, several studies highlight challenges faced by Malaysian teachers, including limited digital skills, lack of adequate infrastructure, and insufficient training opportunities (Yusof & Ali, 2020). Continuous professional development and support are therefore essential to empower teachers to integrate technology effectively into their pedagogy. Competent teachers harness technology not only to deliver content but also to facilitate collaborative projects, formative assessments, and personalized learning experiences (Zainal & Wahid, 2018).

Teacher competence also encompasses the demonstration of professionalism and ethical conduct. Malaysian teachers who exhibit integrity, commitment, fairness, and respect positively influence students' attitudes and motivation (Ismail & Ibrahim, 2021). Professionalism entails upholding high standards of conduct, being role models for students, and maintaining positive relationships with parents and the community. According to Nor and Zulkifli (2017), professionalism fosters trust and respect in teacher-student relationships, which enhances students' sense of security and engagement. Such ethical behavior contributes to a positive school culture and supports the overall development of students as responsible citizens. Given the dynamic nature of education, teacher competence in Malaysia increasingly requires adaptability and commitment to lifelong learning. Teachers who engage in continuous professional development and reflective practice are better equipped to keep abreast of new teaching methodologies, curriculum changes, and emerging technologies (Ahmad, 2019). Reflective practice enables teachers to critically analyze their teaching approaches and make informed adjustments to improve student outcomes (Salleh & Hussin, 2018).

The Malaysian Ministry of Education has actively promoted teacher professional development through initiatives such as the Professional Learning Community (PLC) and various in-service training programs. These programs encourage collaboration among teachers and support a culture of continuous improvement, ultimately enhancing teacher competence. The competence of teachers significantly impacts not only students' academic achievements but also their socio-emotional well-being. Studies conducted in Malaysian schools demonstrate that students taught by competent teachers show improved academic results, higher self-confidence, and greater resilience in facing challenges (Rahim & Harun, 2020). Teacher competence helps develop critical 21st-century skills such as creativity, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving—skills essential for success in the global economy Moreover, the nurturing of positive values and attitudes by competent teachers prepares students to become responsible, ethical, and socially engaged citizens (Kamaruddin & Aziz, 2018). Teacher competence is therefore fundamental to shaping not only the intellect but also the character of future generations in Malaysia.

METHODS
Research Design
This study employed a quantitative research design with a descriptive correlational approach to identify and thoroughly analyze the relationship between teacher competence and student satisfaction. The quantitative approach was chosen as it allows for the collection of standardized and objective data through the use of structured questionnaires. By using a descriptive correlational method, the study was able to provide a detailed description of the levels of teacher

competence and student satisfaction, as well as determine the strength and direction of the relationship between these two variables. The data collected were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to measure the correlation between teacher competence and student satisfaction. This approach enabled the study to offer a clear understanding of the role of teacher competence in influencing student satisfaction during the learning process. The findings also have the potential to provide practical guidance for educational stakeholders in efforts to improve teaching quality and enhance students' learning experiences.

Research Participant
The researcher chose a state religious secondary school in Pahang, Malaysia, as the site for this study, focusing on students from Form 4 and Form 5. A total of 120 students were selected as the sample to participate in the research. To ensure that the sample accurately represented the student population of the school, the researcher employed a stratified random sampling technique. This sampling method involved dividing the population into distinct subgroups, or strata, based on their grade level, Form 4 and Form 5. From each stratum, participants were then randomly selected in proportion to their representation in the population. This approach was chosen to prevent sampling bias and to guarantee that both grade levels were adequately represented, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the study's findings. By using stratified random sampling, the researcher ensured that differences in student satisfaction and perceptions of teacher competence across the two grade levels could be properly captured and analyzed. The balanced representation also supports the generalizability of the results, making it possible to apply the study's conclusions to similar contexts within the educational system. In addition to careful sampling, ethical considerations were observed, including obtaining consent from the school administration, students, and, where necessary, their guardians. The data collection process was conducted in a manner that respected participants' confidentiality and voluntary participation. Overall, the sampling and research location selection were strategically planned to provide a robust and representative dataset, contributing to the accuracy and applicability of the research outcomes

Data Collection Method
The most relevant data collection method is the use of a structured questionnaire specifically designed to measure these aspects accurately and systematically. The questionnaire is intended to collect quantitative data from respondents, namely Form 4 and Form 5 students, who were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation between the two grade levels.

The use of questionnaires allows the researcher to measure dimensions of teacher competence such as content mastery, professionalism, pedagogy, classroom management, and the use of educational technology, while simultaneously linking this data to students' satisfaction levels regarding the teaching and learning they experience. Using Likert scales or other structured rating methods, the questionnaire facilitates detailed yet easily analyzable feedback from students through statistical software such as SPSS. Furthermore, questionnaires enable efficient data collection within a limited timeframe, especially given the relatively large sample size. It also minimizes subjective bias because the same questions are presented to all students, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the data obtained. This approach allows the researcher to conduct descriptive, correlational, and linear regression analyses to accurately and comprehensively identify the relationship and contribution of teacher competence to student satisfaction. The main instrument used was a structured questionnaire comprising three sections, respondent demographics, teacher competence dimensions, and student satisfaction, which was distributed and analyzed using SPSS version 27. The analytical methods applied included descriptive analysis to measure the mean and standard deviation. Pearson correlation analysis to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between competence and satisfaction; and linear regression analysis to determine the relative contribution of each competence domain to student satisfaction.

Ethical Consideration

In conducting this study, several important ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure that the research process was carried out with integrity and responsibility, in line with recognized research ethics principles. Firstly, the researcher obtained official permission from the school administration before initiating any research-related activities. This step was crucial to ensure that the study was conducted with institutional support and in accordance with the school's policies and procedures. It also reflected the researcher's accountability to key stakeholders directly involved in the educational environment. Next, the aspect of informed consent from students and guardians was given serious attention. As the primary respondents, students were informed about the objectives, procedures, and implications of their participation in the study. Only those who provided informed consent were allowed to participate. For underage students, consent from their guardians was also obtained as an added measure to uphold the principles of voluntariness and transparency. This ensured that all respondents participated in the study with full understanding and without any confusion regarding their rights and responsibilities as participants.

Furthermore, participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Students were given the opportunity to participate without any form of coercion, pressure, or influence from teachers, school administrators, or the researcher. They were also granted the right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences. This principle of freedom of choice upholds the participants' fundamental rights and reinforces the integrity of the research. In terms of confidentiality, the researcher ensured that all collected data were handled with responsibility and kept strictly confidential. Personal information of respondents was not disclosed in any report or research document. Data were analyzed in aggregate form to ensure that individual identities could not be identified, thus protecting the privacy and dignity of each participant.Lastly, the well-being of the respondents was also carefully safeguarded. The study was designed and conducted in a manner that did not disrupt students' learning or cause them emotional or psychological stress. The questionnaire was thoughtfully designed to avoid sensitive or offensive questions, thereby ensuring a comfortable and safe experience for the participants.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the key aspects identified in the study, including the level of student satisfaction with teacher instruction, the statistical relationship between teacher competence and student satisfaction, as well as the contribution of teacher competence to the variation in student satisfaction. Additionally, the table highlights the main domains that serve as the strongest predictors of student satisfaction, namely professionalism and content mastery, both of which have statistically significant effects. Findings regarding technology integration are also included to show that the level of technology use in the teaching process is still moderate and requires attention and improvement. Finally, the table lists practical implications suggested based on the study's findings, including the need for professional development training, ethics courses, and optimization of technology use in the classroom.

Table 1. The key aspects identified in the study

Aspect	Key Findings
Student Satisfaction Level	High; students have a very positive perception of their teachers' instruction
Relationship between Teacher Competence & Student Satisfaction	Significant positive correlation
Contribution of Teacher Competence to Student Satisfaction	Teacher competence explains 50.7% of the variance in student satisfaction
Strongest Predictors of Student Satisfaction	Professionalism ($\beta = 0.38$) and content mastery ($\beta = 0.33$)
Technology Integration in Teaching	Moderate score indicates technology use is not yet fully optimized

The descriptive analysis results revealed that students' level of satisfaction was notably high, with a mean score of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 0.55. This indicates that, overall, students held very positive perceptions regarding the quality of instruction provided by their teachers at the school. Such a high satisfaction level signifies more than just approval of academic delivery; it suggests that students view their teachers as competent educators who are capable of not only delivering subject matter effectively but also creating a nurturing, supportive, and motivating learning environment. This positive perception plays a critical role in shaping students' overall educational experience, as it reflects their receptiveness towards the teaching approaches adopted by their instructors. The elevated satisfaction scores also imply that students are open to and engaged with various teaching strategies, fostering a classroom atmosphere that is both conducive to learning and interactive in nature.

The importance of students' perception cannot be overstated, as it directly influences their motivation, engagement, and ultimately their academic achievement. When students feel satisfied with their teachers' competence, they tend to develop positive attitudes towards learning, which encourages active participation and persistence in overcoming academic challenges. In addition, a supportive and motivating environment nurtured by competent teachers contributes to students' psychological well-being, reducing stress and anxiety related to academic performance. This holistic impact of teacher competence illustrates why educational institutions must prioritize the development and continual enhancement of teacher quality. Further strengthening this observation, the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between teacher competence and student satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.712$ and a significance level of $p < 0.01$. The robustness of this correlation demonstrates a strong and meaningful connection: as teacher competence increases, so does the level of student satisfaction. This finding not only supports the initial hypothesis but also highlights the multifaceted impact of teacher competence. Beyond improving students' academic understanding and knowledge acquisition, teacher competence significantly contributes to students' emotional well-being and intrinsic motivation. These results align well with established theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies that underscore the critical role of teachers as central agents influencing students' learning experiences and outcomes (Banseng et al., 2021; Husain et al., 2022).

In the realm of pedagogical theory, this strong relationship suggests that teachers who demonstrate mastery over content knowledge, employ effective pedagogical strategies, manage classrooms efficiently, and utilize technology appropriately help students feel valued, heard, and confident in their educational journey. Such teachers serve as role models, inspiring students to adopt positive learning behaviors and attitudes (Handrianto et al., 2021; Hanaysha et al., 2023). The development of this trust and respect is crucial for fostering a collaborative learning environment where students feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, and engaging in intellectual discourse. Consequently, teacher competence facilitates deeper learning and knowledge retention. Building on this, subsequent linear regression analysis demonstrated that teacher competence accounted for a substantial 50.7% ($R^2 = 0.507$) of the variation in student satisfaction. This means that over half of the differences observed in students' satisfaction levels could be explained by the degree of competence exhibited by their teachers.

This significant explanatory power highlights that teacher competence is a crucial determinant of student satisfaction. Importantly, this influence stems not only from teachers' abilities to convey academic content effectively but also from their demonstration of professionalism, dedication, and integrity in everyday interactions with students. Such qualities contribute to a trustworthy and respectful learning environment. These findings resonate with the study by Tg Nur-Wina and Wei Boon Quah (2023), which reported that teaching expertise accounted for more than 80% of student satisfaction in a higher education context, underscoring that the influence of teacher competence transcends educational levels and settings. Hence, teacher competence can be seen as a universal element that shapes positive educational experiences and outcomes across diverse contexts.

When multiple regression analysis was conducted, two core domains emerged as the strongest predictors of student satisfaction: professionalism ($\beta = 0.38$) and content mastery ($\beta = 0.33$), both with statistically significant values ($p < 0.01$). Professionalism encompasses a range of attributes including fairness in treatment, high dedication to professional duties, transparency in communication, adherence to strong ethical standards, and respectful interactions with students. These qualities foster a sense of reliability and safety within the classroom, where students feel respected and understood. The appreciation students express toward teachers who consistently demonstrate these professional traits reflects the importance of relational dynamics in education. Alongside professionalism, content mastery is equally vital, reflecting a teacher's ability to clearly, accurately, and competently explain subject matter, which builds students' trust in the teacher's expertise. This finding is supported by Abdul Latip et al. (2020), who emphasized that teachers' professional values enhance student satisfaction and institutional loyalty, and Mazni Muhammad (2022), who noted that strong subject mastery deepens student engagement and fosters mutual trust within the learning environment.

These outcomes suggest that although pedagogical skills and classroom management are undeniably important, it is ultimately teachers' professional attitudes and competencies that exert a more profound influence on students' positive perceptions of their educational experiences. Teachers who are perceived as experienced, ethical, and transparent create an atmosphere that not only motivates students but also promotes respect and intellectual curiosity. Such an environment encourages students to take ownership of their learning and to approach challenges with resilience and confidence. In contrast, the study's findings on the integration of technology in teaching showed a moderate average score of M = 3.89. This indicates that the use of technological tools—such as online learning platforms, interactive digital media, audiovisual aids, and digital communication resources—has not yet reached its full potential within the school setting. This gap in technology use highlights several constraints, including technical challenges, limited teacher proficiency in educational technology, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient ongoing training and support. Despite these barriers, there is significant potential for technology to enhance student engagement and learning. As shown in the study by Maya Shafiqah et al. (2021), the appropriate use of digital tools can stimulate student motivation and encourage effective self-directed learning. This suggests that with targeted professional development and improved infrastructure, the benefits of educational technology could be greatly amplified.

Moreover, in today's fast-evolving educational landscape, technology plays an increasingly pivotal role in facilitating innovative teaching practices and personalized learning experiences. The ability of teachers to integrate technology effectively is therefore essential to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century (Anggraini et al., 2022; Parmod et al., 2024). Addressing the existing shortcomings requires strategic investment in both human and physical capital: continuous professional development for teachers to improve their digital literacy and pedagogical skills, as well as upgrading hardware and software resources in schools. Schools must also cultivate a culture that embraces technological change and encourages experimentation with new teaching tools and methods. Overall, the primary finding of this study emphasizes that teacher competence is the most critical factor in shaping a meaningful and satisfying learning environment, influencing both the intellectual and emotional dimensions of student learning. Professionalism and content mastery serve as the foundational pillars that uphold quality education, while technology integration acts as a complementary support that requires further enhancement. These findings carry important implications for school administrators, policymakers, and educational leaders. They signal the need for increased focus on teacher professional development, the establishment of structured and sustainable training programs, and strategic investment in educational technology infrastructure (Singh et al., 2021; Matt et al., 2022).

Practical recommendations derived from these findings include implementing regular courses on professional ethics and communication for both teachers and students to foster more transformative and positive interactions. Moreover, internal professional learning programs and

best-practice sharing among teachers could help address gaps in content delivery. Additionally, workshops, ongoing training sessions, and the optimization of existing technological resources are necessary to boost teachers' confidence and competence in using various e-learning platforms effectively. A holistic approach that integrates professionalism, content expertise, and technology use can create a more meaningful, engaging, and transformative learning experience for students (Liu et al., 2022; Hazizah et al., 2024).

In summary, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how teacher competence, especially in terms of professional conduct and mastery of content, significantly enhances student satisfaction. At the same time, it highlights the need for continuous efforts to better integrate educational technology in order to meet the demands of 21st-century learning. The combined focus on these areas promises to foster an educational environment that is both intellectually enriching and emotionally supportive, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes and greater student success.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study demonstrates that teacher competence plays a very important role in determining the level of student satisfaction, especially in the context of religious secondary schools. The findings clearly show that teachers who possess a high level of competence, particularly in the aspects of professionalism and content mastery, are able to create a positive, effective, and meaningful learning environment for students. This competence not only involves the ability of teachers to deliver knowledge clearly and accurately but also their ability to build good and friendly interpersonal relationships with students, which indirectly fosters a conducive atmosphere for learning. The significant relationship between teacher competence and student satisfaction suggests that students are more likely to appreciate and feel satisfied with the learning process when teachers demonstrate high professionalism, deep mastery of the subject matter, and the ability to interact effectively and build positive relationships with them. Moreover, the study also revealed that more than half of the variance in student satisfaction can be explained by the level of teacher competence. This makes teacher competence a primary indicator and a critical factor in assessing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Although the overall level of teacher competence in this study is high, the findings indicate that the integration of technology in teaching remains at a moderate level. This situation reflects ongoing challenges in the use of educational technology, highlighting the urgent need to improve teachers' technological literacy so that they can adapt to the demands of 21st-century education. In an educational world that is rapidly evolving and driven by technological advances, digital literacy and the effective use of technology are crucial elements to ensure that the teaching and learning process runs smoothly, remains relevant, and is engaging for students. Given these challenges, this study recommends that continuous professional development for teachers be prioritized. Efforts should focus specifically on strengthening teacher professionalism, deepening mastery of subject content, and advancing the integration of educational technology in teaching. Well-planned and ongoing training and professional development programs should be designed to help teachers enhance their skills and knowledge comprehensively. In addition, school administrators and policymakers play a very important role in providing the necessary support, such as training facilities, adequate technological resources, and a conducive work environment that supports innovative teaching. This support aims to ensure that teachers remain competent, competitive, and prepared to face the increasingly complex and ever-changing challenges in today's global educational landscape. Furthermore, the roles of administrators and policymakers should also include efforts to promote a culture of lifelong learning among teachers, so that they continuously update their skills and knowledge in line with the latest developments in education and technology. With continuous and comprehensive support, teachers will be more confident and motivated to deliver high-quality teaching, thereby improving student satisfaction and academic achievement. Ultimately, efforts to enhance teacher competence benefit not only individual teachers and students but also contribute to the development of a stronger education system capable of competing at the international level.

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