



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i2/12258> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i2/12258

Received: 08 December 2021, **Revised:** 11 January 2022, **Accepted:** 28 January 2022

Published Online: 16 February 2022

In-Text Citation: (Kularajasingam et al., 2022)

To Cite this Article: Kularajasingam, J., Subramaniam, A., & Kaur, D. (2022). The Role of Competency: Comparing Social Intelligence and Teaching and Learning Performance among Academics Staffs' in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(2), 310–321.

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Vol. 12, No. 2, 2022, Pg. 310 – 321

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www.hrmar.com

ISSN: 2222-6990

The Role of Competency: Comparing Social Intelligence and Teaching and Learning Performance among Academics Staffs' in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Academic staff's social intelligence plays an important part in increasing their teaching and learning performance owing to their magnitude of competency. However, empirical research that associates both constructs is limited. Thus, this research aspires to scrutinise the influence of social intelligence on teaching and learning performance among academic staff with the moderating effect of competency. A self-administered questionnaire survey was used to collect data from 318 academic staff in the business schools of seven Malaysian private higher education institutions located in Klang Valley. SPSS version 26 were used to analyse data. The findings revealed the following: (1) social intelligence has a significant positive influence on competency, (2) competency has a significant positive influence on teaching and learning performance, (3) social intelligence has a significant positive influence on teaching and learning performance and (4) competency significantly moderates the association between social intelligence and teaching and learning performance. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Social Intelligence, Competency, Teaching and Learning Performance, Academic Staffs, Private Higher Education Institutions, Malaysia

Introduction

An institution's human capital is vital in realising the attainment of its goals and aspirations, with each employee playing a key role in their achievement. Human capital is responsible for accomplishing an organisation's tasks, since employees' performance directly reflects organisational performance. This is similar to the atmosphere in higher education institutions, where the success of a higher education institution and its students is greatly determined by academics' success in performing their duties. Therefore, it is essential for crucial for higher education institutions to attain and foster their human capital towards delivering quality performance in teaching and research, as the existence of qualified and experienced academic staff could be a major selling point to student applicants (Bossu et al., 2019). Towards enhancing the performance of the academics, it is imperative to extensively emphasise their teaching and learning performance, which stresses the improvement of academic staff's expertise and capabilities (Talebi & Abedini, 2016).

As posited by June et al (2013), teaching and learning performance is grounded in both work-related knowledge as well as the correct completion of work. Teaching and learning performance can be considered an individual's actions that contribute towards their post-employment performance (June et al., 2013). This calls for academic staff to possess the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude that enable them to perform well in higher education institutions. Academics' expertise and performance (in teaching and research) directly contribute to an institution's success in terms of ranking, scholarly output and the satisfaction of stakeholders' expectations (Cheng et al., 2019). Substantial research has been conducted on teaching performance in the higher education institutions sector (Ghasemy et al., 2018). However, limited empirical work has been done specifically on teaching and learning performance in the higher education institutions arena (Zhu et al., 2013).

Social intelligence is referred to as one's attentiveness to the social dynamics around him/her, wherein his/her knowledge about communication techniques help him/her accomplish the goals of an interaction (Nazarpoori, 2017). Meanwhile, competency is acknowledged as the ability to organise, assimilate and pass on knowledge, skills and resources to achieve or exceed one's designated performance in job tasks, particularly in a manner that contributes financial and social value to oneself and one's organisation (Brown, George & Mehaffey-Kultgen, 2018). Extant studies have established that social intelligence is a requisite factor in the development of competency (Janudin, Maelah, Amir & Abdullah, 2015). Nonetheless, research on academic staff has predominantly emphasised situational work variables, neglecting the influence of personal factors like social intelligence on competency development (Grossman & Salas, 2011). Consequently, it is imperative to study the link between social intelligence and competency in the context of academic staff.

As posited by prior scholars, individuals with high competency are expected to attain greater work performance as competency enables an individual to carry out a given task effectively (Janudin et al., 2015). Scholars have found that the competency level of academic staff assists in improving their performance (Kaur et al., 2018), implying that competency and teaching and learning performance are highly vital elements of academics' delivery of efficient teaching approaches. Even so, academic staff's performance has generally been linked to only teaching and learning outcomes, while few studies have included competency as a determinant of performance (Kaur et al., 2018).

Social intelligence is known to be an effective tool for problem solving in one's various social tasks and social activities (Nagra, 2014). According to previous researchers, social intelligence represents not only dispositional and intrinsic attributes but is also a trainable

skill that facilitates desirable social changes via better individual wellbeing (Saxena & Jain, 2013). Thus, possessing strong social intelligence is crucial for one's success in life (Meijs et al., 2010). Research has also revealed that social intelligence aids academic staff in being empathetic towards others' feelings, motivating others and regulating their own emotions in forming relationships (Nazarpoori, 2017; Saxena & Jain, 2013). As such, social intelligence can greatly affect the teaching and learning performance of academic staff (Goleman, 2006). However, despite this theoretical evidence, empirical research linking social intelligence to academics' teaching and learning performance is rare.

Academicians' teaching and learning performance is strongly related to their knowledge on work goals as well as their proficiency in achieving the job requirements assigned by higher education institutions (Subramaniam & Haji Jasmin, 2017). In this regard, academic staff's social intelligence has the potential to improve their teaching and learning performance via their competency level (Bennett, 2015).

A review of studies associated to higher education management shows that the excellence of higher education institutions is extremely dependent on the competencies of their academic staffs (Gandy et al., 2018; Khalid, 2019). However, only few scholars have attempted to examine competency as a moderator that strengthens the effect of social intelligence on teaching and learning performance.

Prior scholarly efforts on teaching and learning performance in the higher education institutions arena have leaned towards conceptual frameworks that are generally not backed by empirical results. It is clear that the teaching and learning performance of academic staff is dependent on social intelligence (Nazarpoori, 2017). This can be further enhanced by the effect of perceived competency (Bennett, 2015). Therefore, this study has significant value as it addresses the gap in the literature pertaining to the lack of research linking social intelligence to teaching and learning performance with the moderation of perceived competency.

Literature Review

Social Intelligence and Competency

The theoretical foundations of competency in the behavioural psychology field precedes its specific terminology. Intelligence and competency are concepts that have typically been used interchangeably though they are, in fact, different (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Among the distinctions between the two identified in research are the context-specific nature of competency (Deary et al., 2006) and the broader definition of intelligence concepts across settings and contexts (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). While competency seems to vary with learning and enhancement, intelligence has been reported to be inherited and relatively constant over time (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Nevertheless, intelligence is a key component in the measurement of competency (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

Earlier findings reveal that academic staff in a higher education institution can perform their job effectively only if they possess the requisite knowledge, skills and attitude (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron & Osher, 2019). Consequently, competency is mandatory for them to complete their job tasks in a better manner. Studies have found that social intelligence positively impacts an individual's competency in achieving career success (Eshghi, Arofzad & Hosaini, 2013). Therefore, it was hypothesised that:

H1: Academic staff's social intelligence level has a positive effect on their competency level

Competency and Teaching and Learning Performance

Scholar have established that competency facilitates heightened performance and matches an employee to the most fitting occupation as well as organisation (Shaheen et al., 2019). Good fit has been shown to enhance job satisfaction, job engagement and job performance by pairing a job's requirements to the job holder's competencies (Shaheen et al., 2019).

As mentioned by Eshghi et al (2013), the link between competency and teaching and learning performance is grounded in the competency-based framework, wherein academics' fit and efficacy in their job reflects their behaviours and subsequently, their performance. Hakim (2015) found that academics' competencies (pedagogical, social, personal and professional) significantly influence their teaching performance. Based on this discussion, it was hypothesised that:

H2: Academic staff's competency level has a positive effect on their teaching and learning performance

Social Intelligence and Teaching and Learning Performance

Social intelligence is considered among the most important and critical fields in the social sciences and humanities (Jahanian, 2010). Social intelligence is vital for today's lifestyle due to life's growing stresses and various complexities (Saxena & Jain, 2013). Saxena and Jain (2013) reported that social intelligence is learnable, fosterable and useable as a valuable life aptitude that facilitates the management of one's personal life, social connections and success in various life aspects.

Previous scholars have established that social intelligence positively affects academicians' efficacy in the educational context (Agarwal, 2003), specifically in terms of academic, personal and moral effectiveness. Likewise, Lathesh and Avadhani (2018) stated that social intelligence helps one resolve challenges, enhance performance, boost both individual and organisational success. Relating this to academicians' teaching and learning performance, it was hypothesised that:

H3: Academic staff's social intelligence level has a positive effect on their teaching and learning performance

Competency as a Moderator between Social Intelligence and Teaching and Learning Performance

Saxena and Jain (2013) claimed that success in life is hardly feasible without the possession of some level of social intelligence. Social intelligence levels grow with an individual's age and experience, given that it is developed via social connections rather than formal training (Mohan et al., 2015). This implies that healthy relationships can be fostered among academic staff if they possess and apply good communication skills. Using such skills, academicians can strive for personal growth and performance improvement so they can improve their higher education institutions' productivity (Nguyen et al., 2016). Moreover, the result of their efforts would enhance their teaching and learning performance when their competency level (for example, knowledge, skills, and attitude) is high, thereby attaining competitive advantage for the higher education institutions. Based on this discussion, it was hypothesised that:

H4: Competency moderates the positive effect of academic staff's social intelligence level on their teaching and learning performance

Methodology

Sampling and Data Collection

This research was conducted in a developing country in Southeast Asia, i.e., Malaysia. Target respondents comprised academic staff from business schools in seven private higher education institutions in Malaysia, specifically in the Klang Valley region. A self-administered survey was developed and distributed via the drop-and-pick method with the aid of each business school's Dean. The respondents were made aware that completing and returning the survey would signify their informed consent to participate in the research. Upon collecting the completed questionnaires from each higher education institution, a total of 318 usable responses were received.

Measurement

All the survey items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with indicators from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Social intelligence was assessed via the 21-item Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (Silvera et al., 2001). Sample items were "I can predict other people's behaviour" and "I fit in easily in social situations".

Competency was evaluated with Zhu et al.'s (2013) 30-item scale, which included items like "I love to participate in all kinds of training activities" and "I am willing to spend more time on teaching issues". Teaching and learning performance was assessed as a multidimensional construct. The measure for the Innovative Teaching dimension was adapted from Zhu et al (2013) and had 29 items. The Research and Publication dimension comprised four items by Farh, Werbel and Bedeian (1988) that were also verified by (Md-Sidin et al., 2009). Finally, three items adapted from Ishak et al (2009) were used to measure the Supervision dimension. Examples of items for teaching and learning performance were "I try to use different methods to solve the same teaching problem" for the Innovative Teaching dimension, "Editor for journals" for the Research and Publication dimension, and "Number of project supervision" and "Number of postgraduate supervision" for the Supervision dimension.

Profile of Respondents

The survey also measured the demographic background of the respondents, specifically their gender, age, ethnicity, work experience, academic qualification, job position, and employment status. Of the 318 private higher education institutions academicians in this research, females (66.4%) outnumbered males (33.6%). A majority were aged from 38 to 54 (41.8%), followed by those aged from 31 to 37 (33.6%), 24 to 30 (15.4%), and above 55 (9.1). Most respondents were from the Chinese (33.6%) and Indian (28.6%) race, while only 11.3% were Malays. In terms of work experience, an equally large amount had 11 to 15 years (25.8%) or six to 10 years (25.2%) of experience, while the remaining had 16 to 20 years (16.4%), one to five years (15.1%), more than 20 years (14.8%) or less than one year 9 (2.8%) of experience.

Pertaining to their education level, a majority possessed a Master's Degree (61.3%), while a substantial portion also possessed Doctorate qualifications (30.8%). Only a minority had a Bachelor's Degree (6.3%) and DBA (1.6%). With regard to job position in the organisation, most of the respondents were Lecturers (63.5%), while some were Senior

Lecturers (30.5%). A small percentage comprised Associate Professors (3.1%), Professors (2.2%), Heads of School (0.3%) and Deans (0.3%).

Data Analysis and Results

Data Analysis

The data collected in this research was analysed via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 software. This analytical approach constituted frequency distribution for the demographic data and analyses of reliability, simple regression, and stepwise moderated regression for the study variables. The reliability analysis results showed that Cronbach's alpha (α) was between 0.724 and 0.956 for the variables. Specifically, the α coefficients were 0.724 for social intelligence, 0.956 for competency, and 0.904 for teaching and learning performance. These findings confirm that the study constructs had satisfactory internal consistency.

Simple Regression Analysis Results

Simple regression was used to examine the linkages between (1) social intelligence and competency, (2) competency and teaching and learning performance, and (3) social intelligence and teaching and learning performance. As shown in Table 1, social intelligence has a significant positive relationship with competency ($\beta = 0.271$, $p < 0.01$), competency has a significant positive relationship with teaching and learning performance ($\beta = 0.665$, $p < 0.01$), and social intelligence has a significant positive relationship with teaching and learning performance ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.01$). Based on these results, H1, H2 and H3 were supported.

Table 1 Simple Regression Results

Hypothesis tested	Standardised estimate (β)	Critical ratio (t)	p value	Supported
H1: Social Intelligence \longrightarrow Competency	0.27	5.01	0.00	Yes
H2: Competency \longrightarrow Teaching and Learning Performance	0.67	15.84	0.00	Yes
H3: Social Intelligence \longrightarrow Teaching and Learning Performance	0.39	7.47	0.00	Yes

Stepwise Moderated Regression Analysis Results

Following the recommendation of Baron and Kenny (1986), a stepwise moderated regression was performed to examine the moderating effect of competency between social intelligence and teaching and learning performance. As presented in Table 2, the coefficient of determination (R^2) demonstrated a significantly higher value after the inclusion of the interaction term ($\Delta R^2 = 0.324$, $\beta = 0.904$, $p < 0.01$) with the moderator. Therefore, the influence of social intelligence on teaching and learning performance is significantly moderated by competency, as predicted. Hypothesis H4 was thus supported.

Table 2 Stepwise Moderated Regression Results

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable:- Teaching and Learning Performance	
	Model 1 (Standard Beta)	Model 2 (Standard Beta)
Social Intelligence	0.39	
Interaction Term Social Intelligence x Competency		0.90
R ²	0.15	0.47
Adjusted R ²	0.15	0.47
ΔR ²	0.15	0.32
F Value	55.82**	142.14**

** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

This study highlights the crucial role of social intelligence in developing the competency, and subsequently, the teaching and learning performance of academicians in private higher education institutions. Beyond that, the role of competency in strengthening the effect of social intelligence on teaching and learning performance was also explored.

First, the results suggest that academic staff's social intelligence level increases their competency level, which supports previous studies' assertion that one's ability to achieve a higher social standing is linked to better knowledge, skills and attitude (Zhu et al., 2013). That is, academicians' become more confident by attaching social meanings and objectives to their decisions and behaviours, which allows them to demonstrate more job-related knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Thus, academic staff must exert their full efforts in their personal development and performance to portray values that benefit higher education institutions' productivity (Mohan et al., 2015). This would enhance academicians' performance via their improved knowledge, skills, and attitude and consequently, attain competitive advantage for private higher education institutions.

Second, the findings of this study also indicate that academic staff's competency level improves their teaching and learning performance. Consistent with this, Ahadzie, Proverbs, Olomolaiye & Ankrah (2009) found that competency affects teaching and learning performance by channelling academics' suitable and useful competencies into their behaviours, outcomes, and performance. Likewise, other scholars (Ryan, Emmerling & Spencer, 2009) have affirmed the validity and efficacy of competency as a determinant of employees' job performance.

Third, the empirical findings show that social intelligence boosts academic staff's teaching and learning performance, validating that social intelligence, which encompasses social information processing, social skills and social awareness, contributes to teaching and learning performance in the form of innovative teaching methods, research and publication output and supervisory tasks. This is in line with Eshghi et al.'s (2013) finding that as educators' social intelligence increases, so does their teaching and learning performance.

Fourth, the result on the moderating role of competency adds to the knowledge on the boundary conditions that strengthen the effect of social intelligence on teaching and learning performance. It suggests that social intelligence has a stronger impact on academics' teaching and learning performance when they have higher degrees of job-related knowledge,

skills and attitude. Extant research also supports that competency development is critical for academic staff (Nordin, 2021).

Based on these findings, this research offers valuable insights on ways to improve academicians' teaching and learning performance in private higher education institutions. In the current era, higher education institutions have substantially transformed themselves to adapt to dynamic changes in costs, student numbers, globalisation and managerial approaches. The current business environment is further becoming more radical and challenging, making academicians' skill development and talent management a key concern for higher education institutions. Indeed, the higher education sector is heavily dependent on its acceptance of change, its adaptation to change for the improvement of practices, and its creation of competitive advantages. The quality of academic staff is now the main area of attention for higher education institutions, as it is strongly related to the achievement of desired teaching and learning performance. Towards this end, this study offers empirical support for the significant effects of social intelligence and competency on academic staff's delivery of higher quality teaching and learning, which ultimately shapes a more conducive environment for moulding future leaders. Overall, this study posits that academicians should be empowered with the requisite skills that enable them to uphold their professional duties through training and educational opportunities to hone their social intelligence and competency.

Conclusion

Understanding the determinants of teaching and learning performance has long been an important endeavour of researchers in the fields of industrial-organizational psychology and organizational behaviour, but few have shown interest in non-Western countries. With regards to this theoretical standpoint, the present study has built on the literature on teaching and learning performance in the context of academic staff in Malaysian private higher education institutions. In addition to establishing social intelligence and competency as predictors of teaching and learning performance, the findings also expand the knowledge of the boundary conditions that determine the strength of the association between social intelligence and teaching and learning performance, i.e., competency. As few studies have attempted to link social intelligence and competency to teaching and learning performance, this research fills this gap in the literature, especially pertaining to private higher education institutions. Therefore, the present study may potentially serve as a reference for the Ministry of Higher Education in its efforts to increase academic staff's performance via effective human resource policies that prioritise the development of academics' social intelligence, competencies, and teaching and learning performance.

This research is not without limitations. First, the study's data was cross-sectional, which prevents the assumption of causality between the study variables. Future studies could employ a longitudinal approach to examine this topic. Second, to overcome the limitations of the quantitative method used in this study, in-depth qualitative research via interviews, observations and focus groups would be useful. Third, this study only tested competency as a moderator between social intelligence and teaching and learning performance. As such, researchers in the future could incorporate alternative moderating constructs, such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction and emotional states.

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