

The Relationship between Lecturer Competency and Student Achievement: A Case Study at Malaysia's Polytechnics

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Abstract

In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, Malaysian Polytechnic has a greater responsibility than ever to develop individuals' intellectual and professional qualities. The quality of education offered by lecturers is critical to the success of these institutions. The success of teaching in higher learning institutions largely depends on the skills possessed by the lecturers. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between lecturer competency and student achievement in Malaysian Polytechnics. A quantitative research method using multiple regression is used. Data was collected using random sampling and analyzed using the SPSS statistical package. It focuses on three critical aspects: the lecturers' knowledge, interpersonal skills, and the clarity of communicating the message. This research reveals a notable positive relationship between the lecturer's subject knowledge, interpersonal skills, and message clarity, and student achievement. The findings revealed that these competencies are recognized as crucial indicators of students' achievements, involvement, and contentment. To increase lecturer competencies, it is recommended that there be institution development initiatives, including technology in instruction, and implementing learner-centered teaching approaches. Adding to that, the higher learning institution should provide key insights for academic staff, institutional leaders, and policymakers striving to boost student achievement by enhancing lecturer competencies.

Keywords: Lecturer's Knowledge, Interpersonal Skills, Clarity of Message, Student Achievement

Introduction

Competency in teaching is defined as the combination of subject expertise, pedagogical knowledge, communication ability, and professional attitudes that enable lecturers to design and deliver effective learning experiences, engage students actively, and support their academic achievement and personal development. The success of teaching in higher learning institutions is believed to be largely dependent on the skills possessed by the lecturers. For

example, Dunggio (2021) stated that a positive and significant influence of lecturer competencies on achievement is mediated by job satisfaction. Lecturers with these competencies can positively impact the learning process, resulting in improved student achievement and academic success. While, the dynamic nature of higher education, characterized by increasing student diversity, advancements in educational technologies, and evolving teaching methodologies, underscores the need for lecturers to continually develop and refine their competencies to meet students' changing needs effectively.

Nonetheless, competency issues among lecturers present undeniable challenges in higher education including Malaysian Polytechnics, with far-reaching implications for student engagement, academic achievement, and post-graduate success. Central to these challenges is the phenomenon of increased student absenteeism. Feldman (2022) stated that effective teaching practices significantly impact student engagement and attendance. When lecturers employ interesting and relevant teaching tactics, students are more likely to attend class and participate in active learning. Nonetheless, when lecturers fail to deliver compelling and pertinent content, students' motivation to attend class diminishes, driving a spike in absenteeism rates. This disengagement from the academic process undermines the immediate learning environment and signals broader issues of student retention and institutional effectiveness.

The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) outlines that a student's success is measured by their proficiency in science, language, and mathematics, along with their ability to develop 21st-century skills. Additionally, they should possess a positive attitude, uphold high moral standards, and be well-prepared for the future. Pacheco et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of lecturers' aptitudes, attitudes, and professional development in preparing students for a rapidly changing world. Infrastructure, curricula, and academic staff effectiveness should be simplified in academic institutions to provide fresh and satisfying new demands.

In light of heightened academic staff effectiveness, being an effective lecturer as needed, a lecturer requires an understanding of what constitutes student achievement and what variables affect learning. Muhamad Safwan et al. (2020) emphasized that students expect lecturers to be knowledgeable in both theoretical and practical aspects, particularly in courses that require hands-on experience. Various teaching skills should be used while also being aware of each student's specific needs and history. To enhance student achievement, higher learning institutions used to highlight experienced and knowledgeable lecturers. The lecture is evolving as well, as current lecturers are required to educate their students with 21st-century skills.

In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, lecturers must also adapt to the advancements in technology. Shaji and Nagaraj (2020) stated that embracing technology in education is essential for lecturers to meet the needs and expectations of modern-day learners effectively. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of lecturer competencies on student achievement in higher learning institutions. By investigating the specific competencies demonstrated by lecturers and their influence on student learning outcomes, this paper provides valuable insights that can inform the development of effective teaching practices and lecturer training programs.

Literature Review

Lecturer competency has a significant impact on student achievement across multiple dimensions, including academic performance, engagement, satisfaction, and long-term educational outcomes. Academically, students taught by highly skilled lecturers consistently get higher grades and display greater conceptual knowledge (Smith et al., 2023). When discussing student achievement, one of the first things that comes to mind is preparing students by increasing their hard skills, such as their cognitive skills. According to Guskey (2013), student achievement is frequently related to specific learning objectives. Grades are employed as a standardized indicator of a student's achievement since most research on student achievement uses this narrow definition. Furthermore, effective lecturers boost student involvement and motivation, which leads to consistent attendance, active participation, and assignment completion (Chen & Brown, 2023). Positive involvement increases overall student satisfaction, as indicated by increased levels of contentment with courses taught by competent lecturers (Patel & Robertson, 2021). According to Ng (2018), lecturers can improve students' satisfaction with their classes by establishing a positive rapport with them, providing course-related assignments and quality lecture notes, highlighting course objectives, planning various types of class activities, ensuring fairness in exam marking, offering helpful feedback, and delivering a lecture clearly and intelligently.

The competency of the lecturers is widely acknowledged as an important element in determining student achievement. Lecturer competency has several components, including subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, communication qualities, and the ability to inspire and engage students. Teaching effectiveness involves many connected parts that work together for good teaching. Knowing the subject well is key for teachers to offer in-depth and correct information, helping students understand better. Ali and Hassan (2022) point out that this knowledge allows lecturers to make lessons more relevant by linking them to practical situations, which keeps students interested. Teaching methods are important, as Williams et al. (2023) observe, they include various ways of teaching that address different ways students learn and help develop their thinking. The constructs under the lecturer's competency, consist of the lecturer's knowledge, interpersonal skills, and clarity in delivering a message in class.

Knowledge

The rapid changes that are altering the economies and communities pose significant challenges to educational institutions and lecturers. In increasingly diverse classrooms, modern lecturers are required to build students' 21st-century competencies. To be effective, educators must base their practices on established theories and concepts and the most recent research on teaching and learning (Guerriero, 2017). Numerous studies have explored the relationship between lecturer competency and student achievement. Smith and Johnson (2018) found a significant positive relationship between lecturer knowledge and student performance in their study of undergraduate students. Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted by Brown et al. (2023) revealed that lecturer expertise in the subject matter positively impacted student learning outcomes across various disciplines. In addition to subject-matter expertise and teaching methods, lecturers' personal characteristics and communication skills were identified as influential factors in student achievement.

Interpersonal Skills

In the field of education, the competency of lecturers plays a crucial role in shaping student achievement. Lecturers who possess strong interpersonal skills are more likely to create a positive and engaging learning environment, leading to improved student outcomes. Several studies have highlighted the influence of interpersonal skills on job performance at all levels. Albreiki et al. (2021) stated that the development of human relationships and the ability to interact with others are key components of interpersonal skills. While Idrus (2017) conducted additional research with a particular focus on integrating soft skills into technical course instruction. The study found that lecturers and students had similar views regarding the integration of critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills in technical courses. However, there were significant differences in their views on the integration of teamwork and leadership skills. These findings suggest that lecturers' competency in interpersonal skills can have a positive impact on student achievement. According to Zhang (2018), interpersonal qualities including empathy, warmth, involvement, respect (for students and colleagues), accessibility, honesty, transparency, and trust, are essential for the development of individuals as well as the ethos, climates, and cultures of educational organizations. Interpersonal skills are a key feature that lecturers must master to ensure that teaching and learning are delivered properly.

Clarity of Message

In the context of teaching, clarity of message is essential for ensuring that students grasp the material being presented. It involves the use of clear language, organized presentation of information, and the ability to address any potential sources of confusion. Simmons et al. (2015) emphasize that clarity in teaching enhances student engagement and promotes a positive learning environment. The clarity of the message in teaching is paramount for facilitating effective learning outcomes. Research has shown that when educators strive for clarity in their communication and instruction, it leads to better student engagement and understanding. Bolkan et al. (2017) characterized teacher clarity as straightforward, efficient, coherent, interactive, and structured instruction. According to Hall (2019), the participants claimed that their instruction was most efficient when they used whole-class and individual monitoring tactics to purposefully track student and instructor progress through the scheduled session, typically using technology resources. To reduce the amount of time lost through transitions and confusion, they discussed strategies for organizing kids, getting people's attention, and posing questions.

Methodology

This research will use quantitative methods. The sample of the study was drawn from six (6) Polytechnic final-year students who offered the same course. The total population was 290 students. Utilizing the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table to ascertain the necessary sample size, it was determined that 165 participants were needed to achieve a sample that represents the larger population accurately, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp, facilitating an efficient and direct method of engaging with respondents. The initial sample of 165 individuals yielded 180 completed responses, surpassing the intended sample size. This surplus of responses serves to enhance the credibility of the study's results. The high response can be attributed to the effective use of WhatsApp for distributing the questionnaire, which offered participants a quick and straightforward means to fill it out.

Finding and Discussion

Table 1 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients of the independent variables (lecturers' knowledge, interpersonal skills, clarity of message), and the dependent variable (student achievement).

Table 1
Correlation Analysis

Variable	Knowledge	Interpersonal Skills	Clarity of message	Student Achievement
Knowledge	1.000	0.874***	0.841***	0.807***
Interpersonal Skills	0.874***	1.000	0.894***	0.780***
Clarity of Message	0.841***	0.894***	1.000	0.800***
Student Achievement	0.807***	0.780***	0.800***	1.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results show that all variables have substantial positive correlations at the 0.01 level. Lecturers' knowledge and lecturers' clarity of message have a substantial correlation ($r = 0.874$, $p < 0.001$), indicating their tight relationship. Lecturers' interpersonal skills have a significant connection with lecturers' clarity of message ($r = 0.894$, $p < 0.001$). All three independent variables (knowledge, interpersonal skills, clarity of message) are significantly correlated with the dependent variable (student achievement), with correlation coefficients of 0.807, 0.780, and 0.800, respectively. These findings show that if one independent variable increases, so does the dependent variable, which supports our initial hypothesis regarding the correlations between these elements.

To explore how different predictor variables influence the outcome variable, this paper employed a multiple regression analysis. This approach was used to determine the relationships between the dependent variables (student achievement) and the independent variables (knowledge, interpersonal skills, and clarity of message). The dataset includes 180 complete entries, with all records intact following listwise elimination of any missing data.

Table 2
Relationship Lecturer's Competency on Student Achievement (Model Summary)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	Std. Error of Estimate
	.838	.702	.697	1.75315

With an R-squared value of 0.702, the independent variables in the model account for 70.2% of the variance in student success. This high percentage indicates that interpersonal skills, lecturer knowledge, and message clarity are important indicators of student performance. These results suggest that enhancing lecturer competencies may result in improved educational outcomes, which is especially pertinent to the study's goal of determining the relationships between lecturer competencies and student achievement. This outcome is in line with previous research that shows how lecturer competencies have a significant impact on student performance and engagement (Williams et al., 2023).

The number of predictors in the model is taken into consideration by the Adjusted R Square value, which comes out to 0.697. This adjustment penalizes the addition of variables that do not significantly improve the model fit, ensuring a more accurate depiction of the explanatory power of the model. When the Adjusted R Square is around the R Square value, it means that the model's predictors are significant and pertinent to explaining the variation in student success. This is in line with Guerriero (2017) and Turner and Philips (2022) suggestions that lecturer competencies have a major impact on academic achievement and further justifies the model's durability. The average separation between the observed values and the regression line is represented by the Standard Error of the Estimate, which is given as 1.753. This metric shows how accurate the regression model's predictions were. A smaller standard error indicates a better fit between the model's predictions and the actual observed values. A standard error of 1.753 is deemed quite acceptable and suggests a reasonably accurate model, considering the intricacy of educational outcomes and the multitude of external relationships that might impact student performance.

Table 3

Anova Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1265.706	3	421.902	137.269	.000
Residual	537.871	175	3.074		
Total	1803.576	178			

Table 3 indicates that the overall model reaches statistical significance ($F = 137.269$, with a p -value less than .000), demonstrating that the independent variables account for a considerable amount of the variation in the dependent variable.

Table 4

Regression Result

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
Constant	-.820	1.193		-.687	.493
Knowledge	.520	.106	.435	4.922	.000
Interpersonal Skills	.065	.118	.059	.552	.582
Clarity of Message	.0423	.106	.382	3.990	.000

The regression analysis results show how much knowledge, interpersonal skills, and message clarity contribute to the variance observed in student achievement. The intercept, also known as the constant, is -0.820. This represents the predicted value of the dependent variable (student achievement) when all other predictors are zero. However, the p -value associated with the intercept is 0.493, meaning it's not statistically significant. The analysis highlights that knowledge strongly predicts student achievement, while interpersonal skills do not. For every unit increase in the knowledge score, student achievement (DV) increases by 0.520, assuming the other variables remain constant. This relationship is statistically significant (p -value < 0.001), meaning it's very unlikely to occur by chance. On the other hand, interpersonal skills do not show a significant relationship with student achievement in this model. The

coefficient of 0.065 suggests a very small increase in student achievement for each unit increase in interpersonal skills, but this is not statistically significant (p -value = 0.582).

Student achievement can also be significantly predicted by message clarity. After adjusting for other variables, the unstandardized coefficient for clarity of message is 0.423, meaning that a one-unit increase in clarity of message correlates to a 0.423-unit increase in student achievement. The 0.106 standard error indicates that the estimate is accurate. Clarity of message and student achievement have a strong positive association, as indicated by the standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.382. A substantial p -value of 0.000 is associated with the t -statistic of 3.990. This indicates that there is a positive and significant influence of clarity of the message in predicting student achievement.

Table 5

Summary of Hypotheses

No	Hypotheses	Result
H1	Hypothesis 1 (H_1): There is a significant relationship between the lecturer's knowledge and student achievement.	Accepted
H2	Hypothesis 2 (H_2): There is a significant relationship between interpersonal skills and student achievement.	Rejected
H3	Hypothesis 3 (H_3): There is a significant relationship between lecturers' clarity of message and student achievement.	Accepted

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper aims to identify expertise and effective message conveyance as substantial determinants of student achievement, while drawing attention to the intricate role played by interpersonal abilities. Lecturers' knowledge and lecturers' clarity of message have a positive relationship with student achievement while lecturers' interpersonal skills do not have a positive relationship with student achievement. The insights offered by this study are instrumental for tertiary institutions seeking to improve student achievement. By giving precedence to continued development in subject matter knowledge and communication skills, institutions can nurture an educational setting that supports and magnifies student success. This study contributes to the broader discussion on lecturer competencies and their impact on educational attainment, offering practical suggestions for educational policy and practice.

Improving educational practices requires ongoing investigation and exploration into the intricate dynamics of lecturer competencies and their influence on student achievement. Based on the results of this study, several possibilities for further research arise, providing opportunities to enhance our comprehension and improve teaching methods in learning institutions. In future research, it is important to investigate how the integration of technology in teaching practices influences both lecturer competencies and student outcomes. Secondly, there is a need for cross-cultural studies to examine how cultural and contextual factors influence lecturer competencies and student achievement. Researchers can compare teaching practices and educational systems across diverse cultural contexts to understand the cultural nuances that affect effective teaching methods. Understanding the

impact of cultural diversity on teaching and learning can help develop culturally sensitive teaching strategies and create inclusive educational environments that meet the needs of all students.

It is also important to explore how student-centered teaching approaches can enhance lecturer competencies and promote student achievement. Inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, and collaborative learning are becoming popular as effective teaching strategies that focus on student engagement and active learning. Studying the use of these approaches in various subjects and educational environments can provide valuable insights into their impact on lecturer-student interactions, classroom dynamics, and student learning outcomes. Finally, the connection between the emotional intelligence of lecturers and student achievement needs to be investigated further. Emotional intelligence is vital in shaping the relationships between lecturers and students, classroom dynamics, and student engagement. Addressing these research recommendations will advance our understanding of the complex interplay between lecturer competencies and student achievement. By conducting rigorous empirical studies, scholars can inform the development of evidence-based practices to enhance teaching effectiveness, promote student engagement, and foster positive learning outcomes for all students. Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to continual improvement, academia can strive towards creating dynamic learning environments that empower students to thrive academically and professionally.

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