

The Relationship between Professional and Communication Competence on Employees' Performance: A Conceptual Framework

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i4/16558> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i4/16558

Published Date: 08 April 2023

Abstract

The performance of an organisation is very crucial to ensure its sustainability. The success of an organisation does depend on the performance of its employees. Employee performance is critical to the overall success of the company (Leonard, 2019). Thus, it is crucial to ensure that the employees perform significantly to ensure the success of an organisation. This paper is conceptual in nature and not empirical. It is aimed at presenting the preliminary work for a study. The concepts of performance and the numerous theories that have evolved are examined. A review of previous literature on employee performance and other factors that influence employees' performance like professional competency and communication competency is conducted. This conceptual framework will guide in the data collection process whereby a basic quantitative method is proposed as the most suitable approach for this study. Questionnaires will be distributed to lecturers at comprehensive universities within Peninsular Malaysia. With the mediating variable of flexible working, the study seeks to observe whether it affects employees' performance.

Keywords: Organisation, Professional Competence, Communication Competence, Work Flexibility, Employee Performance

Introduction

The success of an organisation does depend on the performance of its employees. Employee performance is critical to the overall success of the company (Leonard, 2019). As stated by Ehido, et. al (2022), employee performance is the most important indicator of a company's capacity to fulfil its goals, and each employee must contribute to the company's vision and purpose. A study conducted by Tarmidi and Arsajah (2019) found in their study that employee performance has a positive impact on organisational performance directly and indirectly.

Thus, it is crucial to ensure that the employees perform significantly to ensure the success of an organisation.

Several studies have been conducted to look at the factors effecting job performance of the employees. Many of these studies evaluated on job satisfaction (Davidescu, et al., 2020; Li et al., 2018; Fadlallah, 2015), others tested on leadership, organizational culture, working environment, motivation, and training (Thao & Hwang, 2010; Watetu, 2017), working from home (Choukir et al., 2022) and work flexibility (Davidescu, et al., 2020). Communication skills (Hee, 2019; Kotamena, et al., 2021; Shaikh et al., 2017) has also become one of the factors tested to evaluate on staff performance. Thus, this study seeks to examine the factors effecting job performance among employees.

Organisations globally do depend on their employees to ensure organisation performance. According to Bahani (2013), high-performing employees are needed for an organisation to reach its objectives, provide exceptional services, and ultimately gain a competitive edge. No matter in which industry, high-performing employees are needed to ensure an overall performance of the organisation, which include the education industry.

In the Malaysian context, the Malaysian higher education system has grown over the past few decades thus, the quality of Malaysia's Higher Education Institutions depends on the quality of its academic community, from educators, researchers, institutional leaders, and practitioners, to academic support staff. The universities will be able to attract, develop, and retain excellent talent through specialized pathways for educators, researchers, leaders, and practitioners. The academic community will also benefit from a conducive, supportive, and meritocratic environment with better continuous professional development programmes that enable them to meet changing responsibilities and expectations (Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) Higher Education, 2015).

Currently, Malaysia does well across Asia in terms of overall rankings, as well as have expertise in particular fields. For example, five Malaysian institutions are currently in the top 100 in Asia, while Universiti Malaya is ranked among the top 200 universities in the globe. Universiti Malaya is also the top university among the OIC member countries, according to rankings (OIC). On another aspect, Malaysian universities are already among the top 200 internationally in the specialised field. For instance, Universiti Sains Malaysia was placed 28th in the world for environmental sciences in the 2014 QS World University Rankings (Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) Higher Education, 2015).

At least one department from 11 other HLIs was ranked in the top 100 or top 200 worldwide. (Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) Higher Education, 2015). However, the issue here is that the ones listed are all Research Universities (RU), those of non- RUs are still far below. Thus, it is important to investigate the performance of these non-research universities by investigating the performance of its employees.

Previous studies conducted globally were mostly on job satisfaction and either organisation (Bakotić, 2016) or individual performance (Bahani, 2013; Dziuba et al., 2020; Eliyana et al., 2018; Inayat & Khan, 2021; Shaju & Subhashini, 2017). Recently, in Malaysia, news spreads on the sudden increased in the number of teachers opting for earlier retirement. News headlines highlights "Constant policy changes, admin work forcing teachers to quit early", this may be an indication of job dissatisfaction (Yap, 2022), which eventually leads to poor job performance. This could also be due to lack competency in this demanding era where most staff are expected to be competent especially in communication and digitalization. Thus, this study is conducted to investigate this area on professional competence, and

communication competence which may influence the staff performance, specifically academic staff performance since not many studies have been conducted in these areas.

The research aims to investigate on the elements that influences the employee performance with special intention to investigate whether flexible working environment mediates the employee performance. Thus, this study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To observe whether professional competence influences the employee's performance.
2. To identify whether communication competence influences the employee's performance.
3. To investigate whether flexible working influences the employee's performance.
4. To examine the mediating role of flexible working on the relationship between professional competence and the employee's performance.
5. To examine the mediating role of flexible working on the relationship between communication competence and the employee's performance.

The study will contribute to the use of theories into practice for empirically testing on the theory of professional competence by Grant et al (1979), theory of personnel measurement model (MaVCTCM) developed by Arifin et al (2017), Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) which is based on Shulman's (1986) and the theory of action and job performance by Boyatzis (2008), all of which reported to have an impact on staff performance.

The study proposes a practical framework from the theories that will be useful for organisation as well as academic staff. The study is assumed to contribute to the existing body of previous research works which have been conducted mostly on job satisfaction. Besides, it will also add an insight in acknowledging the employee's performance particularly performance of the academic staff in Malaysia. Furthermore, the study will also develop a framework for improving employee's performance particularly academic staff performance.

Literature Review

The Concept of Performance

Performance of an organisation is crucial to ensure the sustainability of the organisation in this competitive age. Therefore, excellent job performance must be maintained, and labour class workforce should be well-equipped with the skills that are needed, to ensure that the business was not in misfortunes due to the absence of obliged attitudes at both levels, broadly and globally (Tomaka, 2001), and academia (Institute of higher learning) is not an exception in this context (Iqbal & Baluch, 2017). The Theory of Competency-based Strategic Management examines how companies achieve high performance over an extended period of time (Katz, 2013).

According to Gibson (1996), employee performance is a measurement that can be applied to determine the outcomes of the execution of tasks and responsibilities delegated by the organisation at a specific time, as well as its applicability in gauging individual job performance or the performance of the organisation. Competencies and performance are not directly related.

Employees should typically expect their performance outputs to improve as their proficiency levels rise. It would be reasonable to expect higher organisational performance from companies with highly proficient staff.

Academic Staff Performance

One of the most crucial factors in ensuring the quality of higher education is the academic staff, hence every effort must be taken to establish appropriate and effective hiring, service, development, and assessment policies that are supportive of staff productivity. Every programme must have an adequate number of academic staff members who are suitably competent, as well as a welcoming climate that promotes hiring and retention.

UiTM in its 2025 strategic plans stated clearly the aims for UiTM academic staff which is "to uplift its staff in internalising core quality values and empowering them in performing their duties that involve teaching and learning, research and innovation, and services". An academic staff member or lecturers at institute of higher learning often fulfils three key tasks and responsibilities in the fields of teaching, research, and service, as shown below:

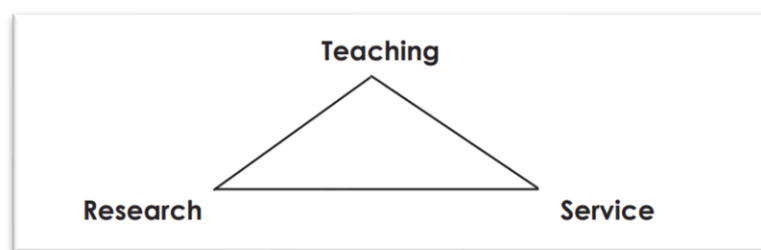


Figure 1: Key tasks and responsibilities of academic staff of Institute of Higher Learning (Teaching Portfolio –A Handbook for UiTM Academic Staff, 2014)

So do UiTM academic staff, who are also expected to perform various tasks and duties which include face-to-face engagement with students, commonly known as "stand-up teaching," is a key component of the teaching role. By applying and integrating innovation and new teaching methodologies into the existing curriculum, lecturers continuously work to grow and improve the curriculum while carrying out their duties as teachers. It is encouraged for lecturers to use a variety of approaches, methods, tactics, and strategies in their instruction. In order to attain the desired learning results, they are also urged to exercise creativity and flexibility in choosing the most relevant learning taxonomy based on their different areas of specialty (Ahmed et al., 2014).

Additionally, academic staff must also participate in non-teaching activities or activities connected to teaching, such as curriculum creation, course design, instructional materials development, learning outcomes evaluation, student supervision, and membership on academic and non-academic committees. Additionally, they are encouraged to participate in teaching and learning-related activities, such as presenting papers at seminars and conferences, delivering speeches, and leading courses in their fields, in order to promote and share their knowledge, fresh perspectives, and experiences.

Ahmed et al (2014) also stated that these academic staff are expected to lead research teams or participate in research groups to conduct academic and non-academic research, including the identifying of new instructional technology and pedagogical techniques as well as the assessment of their efficacy, lecturers proclaim their study. Additionally, they may create

networking and collaboration with corporate organisations, governmental entities, institutes, etc., as well as serve as consultants in their areas of expertise.

Additionally, academic staff are required to participate in community activities both inside and outside of the institution, using their specialised knowledge and experience to benefit the community. They frequently represent the institution by taking part in and engaging in community outreach programmes through various community activities in order to provide society with a lasting experience (Ahmed, et al., 2014).

UiTM Competency framework also stresses that academic staff should focus on these aspects:

1. Teaching and Facilitating
2. Research and Innovation
3. Student development

Masron et al (2012) mentioned five performance indicators to be measured, which is teaching, supervision, research, publication and consultation in ensuring overall performance of an academic staff. Thus, once they are able to full fill these tasks and responsibilities, they are considered to have achieved a certain standard.

Measurement used to evaluate the performance

Masron et al (2012) in his paper, looked into KPI as the standard measurement to evaluate Academic Staff performance. Teaching, research, and services are the three main factors used to evaluate academic staff performance at higher education institutions (Comm and Mathaisel, 1998). Recently, it has expanded to include two other aspects: supervision and consultation. Typically, key performance indicators are used to describe these performance standards (KPI) (Masron et al., 2012).

Higher Education in Malaysia

The Malaysian Education system is made up of various categories, namely primary and secondary education, post-secondary education and tertiary education, as well as private educational institutions. The tertiary education alone is divided into Public Institutions of Higher Learning, as well as Private Educational Institutions (PHEIs).

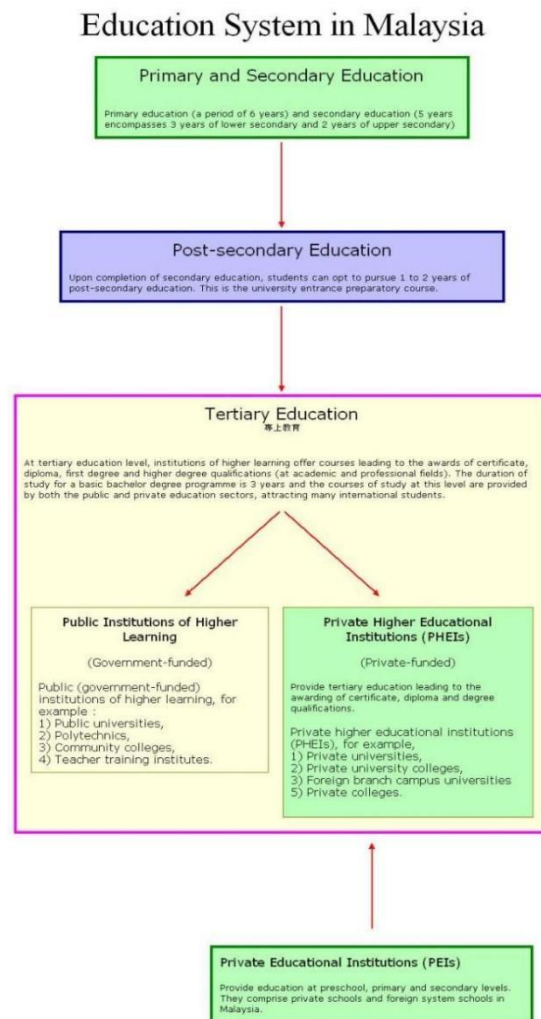


Figure 2: Malaysian Education System
 (Source: https://www.etawau.com/edu/Department/Higher_Education.htm)

The Malaysian public universities may typically be grouped into three broad categories:

1. Public universities, which provide pre-university foundation year and diploma programmes in addition to undergraduate and graduate degree programmes. Research universities, focused universities, and comprehensive universities are the three main categories into which they may be separated.
2. Community colleges and polytechnic institutions that provide certificate- and diploma-level programmes; and
3. Public colleges that provide degree- and certificate-level programmes.

In Malaysia there are a total number of 20 public universities throughout the country from north to south, in Peninsular Malaysia, right up to Sabah and Sarawak, East of Malaysia. The twenty public universities include:

Table 1

Public Universities in Malaysia

1	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia	International Islamic University Malaysia	(IIUM)
2	Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia	Islamic Science University of Malaysia	(USIM)
3	Universiti Teknologi MARA	MARA University of Technology	(UiTM)
4	Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia	National Defence University of Malaysia	(UPNM)
5	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	National University of Malaysia	(UKM)
6	Universiti Utara Malaysia	Northern University of Malaysia	(UUM)
7	Universiti Putra Malaysia	Putra University of Malaysia	(UPM)
8	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	Sultan Idris Education University	(UPSI)
9	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin	Sultan Zainal Abidin University	(UniSZA)
10	Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka	Technical University of Malaysia	(UTEM)
11	Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia	Tun Hussein Onn University of Malaysia	(UTHM)
12	Universiti Malaya	University of Malaya	(UM)
13	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan	University of Malaysia, Kelantan	(UMK)
14	Universiti Malaysia Pahang	University of Malaysia, Pahang	(UMP)
15	Universiti Malaysia Perlis	University of Malaysia, Perlis	(UNIMAP)
16	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	University of Malaysia, Sabah	(UMS)
17	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak	University of Malaysia, Sarawak	(UNIMAS)
18	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu	University of Malaysia, Terengganu	(UMT)
19	Universiti Sains Malaysia	University of Science Malaysia	(USM)
20	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	University of Technology Malaysia	(UTM)

Source: *Education Malaysia Global Services (2022)*

As stated, public universities in Malaysia are divided into three main categories, namely research universities, focused universities, and comprehensive universities.

Research Universities

These universities focus on research and are characterised by quality lectures, competitive entries and academic orientation. The ratio of undergraduates to postgraduates is around 50:50. Currently, Malaysia is home to five research universities: University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), which is the newest. Two Malaysian universities are expected to rank among the Top 100 institutions in the world,

according to the National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020, which seeks to boost research universities in Malaysia. These research institutions must prioritise their efforts in research and innovation, which are supported by highly qualified faculty and competitive student admissions. Research universities must also develop their intellectual potential in order to set an example for Malaysian institutions by carrying out activities that progress knowledge.

In addition, research universities are required to form holding corporations that are in charge of launching business endeavours through the commercialization of their research products. In these research-focused universities, the calibre and quantity of researchers, research, and postgraduates are also anticipated to rise. This necessitates the adoption of a fresh image and organisational concepts, as well as imaginative university leadership. In order to make sure that staff members have the abilities required for the development of research activities, education, training, and employment policies must also be examined (Nooraini & Noordini, 2017).

Comprehensive Universities

These universities offer various courses and different fields of study. Quality education is imparted here and entrance is a highly competitive process. The ratio of undergraduates to postgraduates is 70 to 30 here. There are four comprehensive universities in total, namely Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (IIUM), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

Focused Universities

These institutions focus on specialised fields pertaining to their establishment. With top grade education and good excellent educational standards, these universities are oriented towards specialised research. The ratio of undergraduates to postgraduates is around 50:50. It can further be subdivided into Technical Universities, Education Universities, Management Universities and Defence Universities.

Table 2

Summary of the 3 different categories of public Universities in Malaysia

Research Universities	Universiti Malaya (UM)
Fields of Study: Focus is on research	Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)
Competitive entries	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
Quality lecturers	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)
Ratio of undergraduates to postgraduates is 50:50	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)
Comprehensive Universities	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
Various fields of study	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia
Competitive entries	Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)
Quality lecturers	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)
Ratio of undergraduates to postgraduates is 70:30	
Focussed Universities	Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)
(technical, education, management and defence)	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)
Fields of Study: Focus is on research	Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia
Competitive entries	Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM)
Quality lecturers	Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP)
Ratio of undergraduates to postgraduates is 50:50	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)
	Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP)
	Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)
	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA)
	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)
	Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia

(Source: <https://www.etawau.com/edu/IndexUniversityGovernment.htm>)

The desire to establish a world-class institution or a local university listed in the top 200 (ideally lower than 200) has led to several initiatives by the Malaysian government through the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). One of the effort was done in 2006, where MOHE appointed five universities namely Universiti Malaya, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, as the first five public universities to fall under Research University (RU) which is now falls under the Accelerated Program for Excellence (APEX). These universities have the potential to lead the way in cutting-edge design, research, and invention of the highest calibre, thus has a higher ranking since they have been designated as RU (Masron et al., 2012).

Masron et al (2012) further added that the terms "world-class university" and "global ranking" are now used to describe higher levels of study and research in tertiary education, but they also refer to the ability to compete in the world market for tertiary education through the development and acquisition of advanced knowledge. It is because of this competition, that other universities apart from RU universities feel the need to compete along with the RUs.

Competence*Professional Competence*

Grant et al. (1979) was the first to introduce the notion of professional competence to higher education in the United States. Competence-based education is the notion developed by (Grant et al., 1979). The theory centres on the lecturers' stance on competency-based education in the context of the then-emerging competency movement in the USA. According to Grant et al (1970), specific competency-based lecturer education requirements must be met in order for students to perform favourably on their exam, which is used to gauge learning outcomes. They also emphasise the competence-based programmes, which were poorly regarded by students at several higher education institutions throughout the world. The Grant et al. hypothesis tries to describe competence-based projects at the undergraduate college level in different liberal arts and non-teaching vocations. In order to validate students' competence, competency-based education frequently focuses on a study of a potential or current function in modern society.

According to the literature, the implementation of the environmental education curriculum has a substantial association with teachers' professional competence (Carril et al., 2013). Professional competency, according to Astuty (2015), refers to a lecturer's capacity to deeply and comprehensively understand the curriculum, the materials, as well as the structure and technique. In order to ascertain the professors' level of professional competence at Al-Baha university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the theory of competence is applied as it is suggested in this study (Alghamdi, 2017).

Communication Competence

In order to foster cooperation among employees, which affects organisational performance and decision-making, communication is a highly important and fundamental component of every company. Using communication, firms may convey to their audience information about their goal and vision, rules and processes, responsibilities and obligations, and other company-related activities (Musheke & Phiri, 2021). For a firm to succeed, effective communication is crucial. Thus, between decision-makers and all employees, communication serves as a bridge.

Theoretical Framework**Employees Performance**

The basic concept of job performance is best described by the theory of effective job performance by (Boyatzis, 2008). Boyatzis describes that it is believed that maximum performance occurs when a person's capacity or skill is aligned with the demands of the work and the organisational environment (Boyatzis, 1982). He stated that values, vision, and personal philosophy; knowledge; competences; life and career stage; interests; and style are all used to characterise an individual's skill. The role duties and tasks that must be completed can be used to characterise job expectations or demands. Culture and climate, structure and systems, maturity of the industry and strategic positioning within it, and aspects of the economic, political, social, environmental, and religious milieu surrounding the organisation are all expected to have a significant impact on the demonstration of competencies and/or the design of jobs and roles.

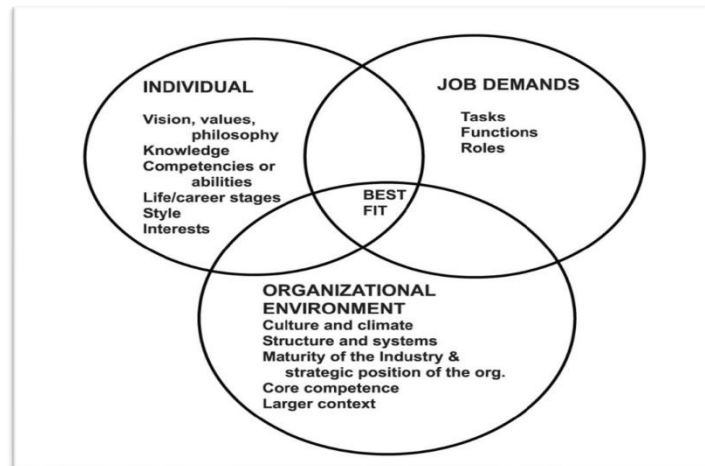


Figure 3: Theory of action and job performance: best fit (maximum performance, stimulation, and commitment = area of maximum overlap or integration (Boyatzis, 2008).

Boyatzis (2008) mentioned many years of published research shows that outstanding leaders, managers, advanced professionals, and people in key jobs, from sales to bank tellers, appear to require three clusters of behavioural habits as threshold abilities and three clusters of competencies as distinguishing outstanding performance which include these clusters of competencies:

1. expertise and experience
2. knowledge (i.e. declarative, procedural, functional and metacognitive); and
3. an assortment of basic cognitive competencies, such as memory and deductive reasoning

He further added that competencies are a behavioural approach to emotional, social, and cognitive.

McClelland's Human Motivation Theory states that every person has one of three main driving motivators: the needs for achievement, affiliation, or power. These motivators are not inherent; we develop them through our culture and life experiences. Achievers like to solve problems and achieve goals. This theory is related as employee's performance has always been associated with motivation.

Professional Competence and Academic Staff Performance

The proposed domain theory of personnel measurement model (MaVCTCM) (Figure 3) developed by Arifin et al (2017) were developed specifically for Vocational College Teacher, where it focuses on four main domains namely Teaching Competency, Professional Competency, Communication Competency and Personal Competency. Arifin et al. stated that the Professional Competency domain ensures that vocational teachers are up to date on the newest information required by vocational learners.

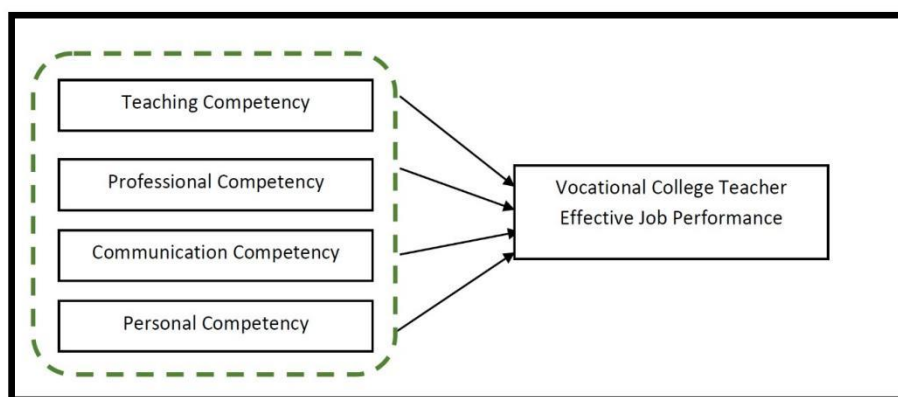


Figure 4: The Proposed Domains for Measurement Model of Vocational College Teacher

Effective Job Performance

Many studies globally discuss on the staff performance of individuals which focus on competency which has one of the factors that contribute to staff performance. Most studies found that professional competence does bring positive effect to staff performance (Abusama et al., 2017; Huda, 2020; Lucky & Yusoff, 2015; Mirfan et al., 2018; Nasir et al., 2017; Rahman, 2014; Simanjuntak & Ritonga, 2018; Sriekaningsih, & Setyadi, 2015), which also have a significant influence on performance of academic staff (Garaika, 2020; Haskas & Mujahid, 2016; Janudin et al., 2015). A study conducted by Biora, Arafat, and Mulyadi (2021) revealed specifically that there was a significant influence between professional competence and teachers' performance.

Sancoko (2020) mentioned in his paper that the teacher and lecturer act specify four competencies which are pedagogical competence (ability to manage learning), professional competence (mastery of extensive and in-depth lecture material), social competence (ability to communicate and interact effectively and efficiently with students and/or the surrounding environment), and personality competence (strong, moral, and exemplary personality abilities), and these competencies must be owned by lecturers.

Previous studies, including research conducted by Biora et al (2021) confirmed the study's findings about the influence of professional competence on teacher performance. The study was also confirmed by the findings of Hamid (2011) where Hamid's findings revealed that motivation, managerial competence, and ability had a highly significant (real) effect on teacher performance, and competence had a highly significant (real) effect on teacher performance.

High competency individuals are expected to attain high work performance because competency is a trait found in one individual which allow them to carry out a task given effectively (Janudin et al., 2019). They further added that the nature of working as lecturer requires teaching competency, competency inquiry, social competency, and personal competency.

Lecturers' role in an institution success is never a doubt. They play an important role in the success of its educational process as well as in the implementation of governance that supports the development and progress of each university (Garaika, 2020). Staff competency in academic intellectual and administrative execution efficiency is often referred to as talent excellence ("UiTM 2025", 2020). Thus, it is critical for the institution to aid in offering highquality lecturers, as employee performance includes individual abilities, devoted work, and organisational assistance. Individual competency is one of the characteristics that can influence employee performance.

Communication Competence and Job Performance

Chomsky (1965), the most prominent contribution to the cognitive idea of competence, voice out his perspective on linguistic competence which focuses on the nature of linguistic knowledge rather than performance criteria. Chomsky tries to characterise the sort of information the ideal speaker listener purportedly needs in order to generate and comprehend appropriate sentences in a language while avoiding behavioural issues. Linguistic competence is described as a person's understanding of the structure of a language. Chomsky and others later established the notion of performance to explain language behaviour (Chomsky, 1965; Smithworth & Daswani, 1974).

Communicative competence is more than just knowing how to speak. According to Allen and Brown (1976 in Wiemann & Backlund, 1980), communication competency, unlike linguistic competence, requires awareness of interpersonal transactions. Competence is linked to real language performance in social circumstances in this perspective (Wiemann & Backlund, 1980).

Wiemann (1980) offers a broad definition of communicative competence that includes more than language use. Communicative competence is an interactant's capacity to select from a variety of communicative actions in order to achieve his or her own interpersonal objectives during a conversation while keeping the face and line of his or her fellow interactants within the confines of the scenario.

Ariffin et al (2017) in their framework also stated that communication competence as one of the main domains in ensuring effective job performance among teachers (Figure 2). To guarantee that knowledge is delivered in an appealing manner, teachers must be able to advise and persuade students during the learning process. This ability also aids instructors in efficiently communicating with students' parents, colleges, and industry-related individuals. The most significant contact happens during the delivery of learning materials, classroom management, and learner consultation (Ariffin et al., 2017).

With the aid of competency-based strategic management theory, the relationship between communication competencies and employee performance is better understood in the context of this study. The idea of competency-based strategic management examines how companies achieve high performance over an extended period of time (Katz, 2013 as cited in Solomon, 2017). The theory further describe how businesses might create structurally and methodically sustained competitive advantage (Baggozi & Edwards, 1998). Economic, organisational, and behavioural issues are included in this integrated strategy theory's framework, which is dynamic, systemic, cognitive, and holistic (Sanchez and Heene, 2004). According to the notion of competency-based strategic management, competence is the capacity to maintain coordinated resource deployment in ways that support organisational goals while generating and sharing value to customers and stakeholders (Solomon, 2017).

A study on communication competency and staff performance was conducted by (Solomon and Ayebale, 2017). The goal of the study was to investigate the connection between staff performance and communication skills in the particular environment of Muni University. With 109 participants, a descriptive cross-sectional survey approach was employed for the study. The results showed that communication is complete with an overwhelming 94 (11%) respondents in agreement, clear with 72 (70%) respondents, accurate with 79 (76%) respondents in agreement, concise with 88 (86%) respondents in agreement, and with an overwhelming majority of 97 (95%) respondents in agreement that communication is concrete. Staff productivity and communication proficiency were closely related. Results from a linear regression of communication competence against staff performance show a

positive significant relationship between communication competence and staff performance ($=0.655$ $P < 0.05$), which further explains why communication competence is responsible for 51.3 of the variation in staff performance. Thus, the findings of the study are in line with many other studies like Tsaur and Lin (2004), who proved that poor communication designs only result in a waste of time and resources and have a significant impact on employee performance.

Working and Job Performance

Since, the Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) pandemic, many organisations have shifted to flexible working, may it be in terms of flexible time flexible workplace. A number of studies have looked into the relationship between allowing the employees to choose their working arrangements and performance. Using social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), it has been proposed that improved employee performance may be viewed as a form of reciprocation between the employee and the employer (Golden, 2001, 2009; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010 as cited in De Menezes & Kelliher, 2016), and that when an employee chooses a flexible work schedule, a sense of obligation toward the employer is generated. The study conducted by Prasad and Mishra (2021) proves that work-life flexibility has an influence on job performance.

Konrad and Mangel (2000) used Akerlof's (1982) gift exchange theory to argue a favourable relationship between the availability of work-life programmes and productivity from a different but similar standpoint. The premise of gift exchange is that if a company gives an employee a "present" by paying higher salaries or other perks than the market requires, the employee will react with a "gift" of superior performance.

As a result, companies may give employees a present in the form of flexibility in their work schedules in exchange for more effort or performance. In the case of informal flexible working arrangements, De Menezes & Kelliher (2016) mentioned in their paper that Atkinson and Hall (2009) found that having an informal arrangement creates a sense of obligation on the part of the employee, as well as a need for reciprocation, which is likely to result in behaviours that are valued by the manager who granted the arrangement and may require additional effort.

Figure 5 shows the most significant research focused on work flexibility, job satisfaction, and job performance, and the studies at the intersection of these three issues. Whereas, on a national basis, Table 3 summarises the most significant research on work flexibility, job satisfaction, and job performance.

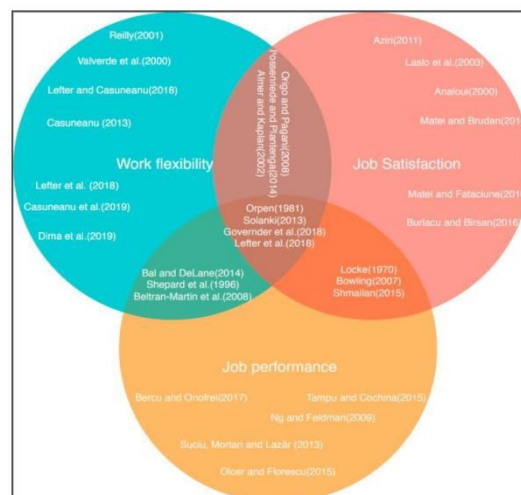


Figure 5: The conceptual framework of theoretical considerations between work flexibility, job satisfaction and job performance (Davidescu et al., 2020).

Table 3

An overview of the most relevant studies on work flexibility job satisfaction and job performance at a national level (Davidescu et al., 2020).

Domain	Authors	Study	Method	Results
Work flexibility	Lefter, Davidescu, and Casuneanu (2017) [99]	Sample of 100 employees	Principal Components Analysis	Most respondents consider teamwork and the use of information technology to be key elements of work flexibility.
	Dima, Tuclea, Vrăncianu, and Țigu [100]	Sample of 1180 employees	Model based on structural equations	At an individual level, telework could establish a greater work-life balance, and at a social level, it could generate lasting effects for long-term labor management.
	Lefter and Cășuneanu (2018) [101]	Sample of 220 employees	Questionnaire	The main forms of flexibility at work in Romanian companies are represented by teamwork, computer use, and telework.
	Casuneanu, Lefter, and Davidescu (2019) [78]	Sample of 220 employees	Questionnaire	Measures to be taken to improve employee motivation are flexible program in case of big companies, while the small companies employees consider the ability to work from home (remote work) or near to the house (teleworking) to be important.
	Lefter, Casuneanu, and Enache (2018) [102]	Sample of 220 employees	Questionnaire	The main elements of flexibility (teamwork and usage of information technology) are very important for Romanian employees-autonomy of work teams and working time flexibility.
Job satisfaction	Pook, Fustos, and Marian (2003) [65]	Sample of 932 employees from Hungary, Poland and Romania	Questionnaire	Degree of functioning, gender and position significantly influence job satisfaction and advancement.
	Analoui (2000) [74]	23 Romanian organizations	Questionnaire and sample interviews	Recognition and appreciation, salary and remuneration, promotion status and professional satisfaction are key factors among Romanian managers.
	Săveanu and Săveanu (2011) [69]	Sample of 1489 subjects	European Values Survey 2008	Work is very important for Romanians, and the main factor that influences job satisfaction is the economic situation.
	Matei and Abrudan (2016) [68]	100 online recruitment companies	Questionnaire	Intrinsic factors have generated an increase regarding the level of satisfaction, proving that the theory is not adequate to the Romanian cultural context.
	Burlacu and Birsan (2016) [116]	Sample of 500 subjects	Questionnaire	Almost half of the interviewees consider that the salary is not sufficient to cover the monthly expenses, the salaries cannot be considered satisfactory nor can they ensure a proper quality of life.
Tampu (2016) [72]	Sample of 629 employees	Questionnaire	Main motivational factors are focusing on extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, attitude at work, job satisfaction, rewards, and incentives.	

The concept of flexible working builds on the model developed by Karasek (1979) but focuses on control over where and when work is done rather than how it is done (Chung, 2019; Kelly, Ammons & Moen, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

Since this study proposes that professional competence, communication competence and digital competence influence positively on employee performance, the framework by Ariffin et al (2018) is used as the underlying model for the theoretical framework (Figure 6) of this study:

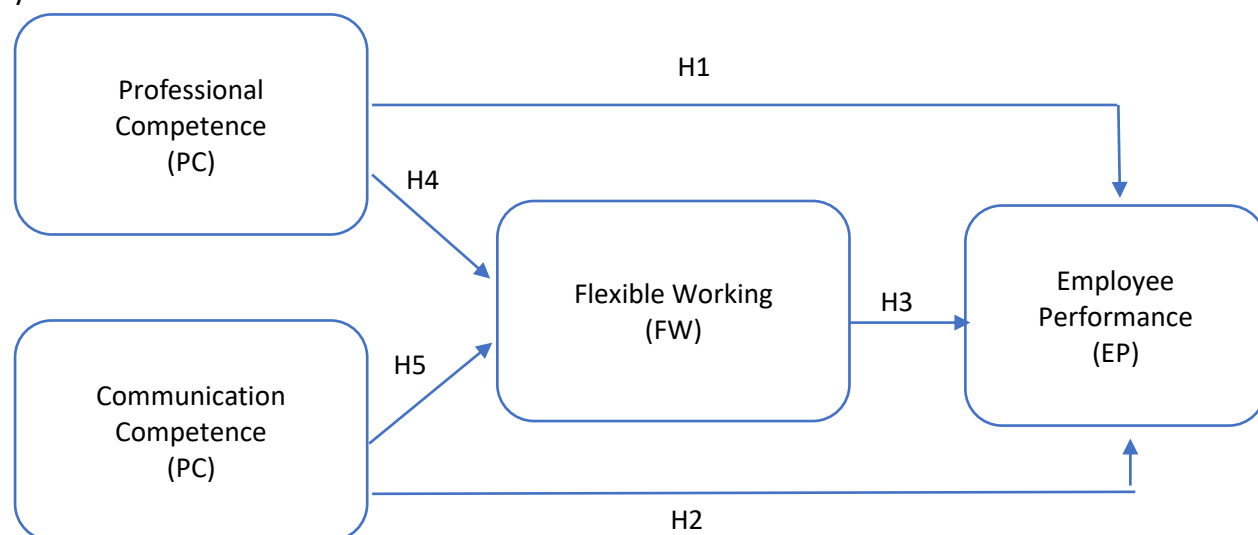


Figure 6: Theoretical Framework

Therefore, the following effects can be hypothesized:

- H1: Professional Competence has a positive significant on employee performance.
- H2: Communication Competence has a positive significant on employee performance.
- H3: Flexible Working has a positive significant on employee performance
- H4: Flexible Working mediates Professional Competence as a positive significant on employee performance
- H5: Flexible Working mediates Communication Competence as a positive significant on employee performance

Quantitative Method

The quantitative research method is concerned with quantifying and analysing variables in order to obtain results. It entails the use and analysis of numerical data through the application of specific statistical techniques to answer questions such as who, how much, what, where, when, how many, and how (Apuke, 2017). According to Aliaga and Gunderson (2002) as cited in Apuke (2017), quantitative research methods are used to explain an issue or phenomenon by gathering data in numerical form and analysing it using mathematical methods, specifically statistics.

Thus, for the purpose of the study, it is most appropriate to use the quantitative method in getting the data as many studies conducted previously on employee performance use quantitative method to test the hypothesis. A structured questionnaire that is developed from prior research will be used for this study to collect data on factors affecting professional competence, communicative competence as well as flexible working in order to support the five presented hypotheses (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Since the focus is to get input on the performance of employees specifically the academic staff, the population of this study would be the academic staff of the public universities in Malaysia, which consists of 20 public universities all together. Thus, the total number of academic staff as of 2020 is 31508 (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 2022), table n. The target sample is taken from the population represented by the sampling frame (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). For this study, the sampling frame will focus on the academic staff of the nonresearch focusing specifically on the comprehensive universities within Peninsular Malaysia, which is Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) as in table 4 below:

Table 4

Number of Academic Staff and Student in Public Universities (Source: Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 2022).

Number of academic staff and student in public university		
	Academic Staff	Student
Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)	1,979	29,254
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	2,094	30,844
Universiti Malaya (UM)	2,045	35,885
Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)	521	11,058
Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP)	764	13,607
Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UNIMAP)	1,109	13,176
Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)	1,042	17,498
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)	830	16,551
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)	668	10,323
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)	872	26,554
Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM)	382	4,972
Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	1,837	28,587
Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)	785	13,608
Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	2,064	31,674
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA)	711	12,901
Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM)	866	14,937
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)	1,697	32,900
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)	8,904	188,701
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM)	1,092	18,581
Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)	1,246	32,965

The samples will be taken from the various faculty members of the universities.

The data collected for this study will be analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This software is more convenient compared to others as it is suitable for quantitative data analysis. All possible factors of professional competence, digital competence, communication competence and flexible working can be analysed thoroughly. The data will be analysed using both descriptive and inferential analyses

Conclusion

The plan to conduct this study is to find out on whether professional competence, communication competence and flexible working show a significant effect to employees' performance. Most of the studies conducted earlier have always focused on job satisfaction and motivation as the factors which contribute to employees' performance. Not many have investigated the possibility of professional, communication and flexible working as some of the factors that could affect employees' performance. In addition to that, most of the studies conducted were on employees in general, and not many have focused on the performance of academic staff particularly on the academic staff of the higher institution. While conducting this study, new findings and theories will be developed inspired by the current wants and needs. Thus, this will give us more input and deep interest on this topic to further enhance the literature on employees' performance as well as focusing on competency specifically on professional and communication competency, as well as the work flexibility as the mediating

factor to employee's performance. As the intention is to uncover new findings and have a better understanding of the current situation, quantitative method would be best way to approach this study. It is hoped that the continuance of this study will surface reasonable findings that will be of value to the academia and practitioners alike.

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