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FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHERS' FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCY LEVEL IN HIGH-PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS

Siti Noor Ismail¹, S. Kanageswari Suppiah Shanmugam¹ & Murugan
Rajoo²

ABSTRACT

Teacher competency is a topic that highly emphasizes smooth teaching and learning process. The situation becomes complicated when teachers fail to translate their potential functional competency as expected. This study aimed to identify the factors that influenced teachers' functional competency level in schools. The study's implementation was based on qualitative methods with an interview medium to obtain the required data. A total of six teachers were randomly selected from three high-performing schools in the state of Kedah. Based on the thematic analysis, four themes contributed to teachers' functional competency level, namely, teacher's attitude, skills, and knowledge born from self as the internal situations in developing self-competence while the school climate factor as the external factor that influenced teachers' functional competence level through the conditions of their work environment. This study contributes to increasing the level of teachers' functional competency level in realizing educational excellence across 21st-century learning. The high level of functional competency is very significant with teachers' work in planning lessons and meaningful teaching strategies. Simultaneously, teachers can also practice high-order thinking skills (HOTS) and build technical skills in achieving the set objectives.

Keywords: Teachers' Functional Competency, Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge, School Climate, 21st-Century Learning

[1]

School of Education
Universiti Utara Malaysia,
Malaysia

[2]

Research and Development
Division,
SEAMEO RECSAM,
Malaysia

Corresponding Author:
School of Education
Universiti Utara Malaysia,
Malaysia

E-mail:
siti.noor@uum.edu.my



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INTRODUCTION

A teacher is an individual tasked with educating and imparting knowledge to students. A teacher's job is not easy; it requires a high level of commitment among educators. Apart from knowing the content, teachers also need to have the skills to implement the teaching and learning process more effectively (Harris & Sass, 2014). The combination of these two sciences will produce a lively combination of students' learning. Teachers can diversify teaching strategies by using pedagogical methods appropriate to the student's level of ability. The presence of digital technology today is indeed very beneficial to educators to vary the pattern of teaching in achieving the set learning objectives (Mannila, Norden, & Pears, 2018; Starkey, 2020).

As agents of change for the learning outcomes, teachers become idols and influencers towards students' behaviours. Having high knowledge and skills is not enough to prove that a teacher has the authority and competence in educating students. To build teacher competence, one thing that needs to be emphasize is their attitude to form meaningful learning. Positive attitude teachers will try to impart knowledge more proactively and use their wisdom to attract students' interest in conveying the knowledge (Gess-Newsome et al., 2019). This situation has to do with teachers' commitment to carrying out their duties well, professionally, and showing signs of being high-quality teachers (Teaching System Lab, 2019). Teachers, especially at high-performance schools, are considered determinants in improving student achievement and school excellence.

In the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025, teachers' quality, efficiency, and effectiveness are crucial in shaping the country's educational excellence (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Therefore, teachers at high-performance schools are always required to improve the teacher quality and produce a more stimulating learning process. In this case, teachers should not be in the comfort zone with the knowledge and skills available. Teachers should always explore and dig for new knowledge that can help improve their level of functional competence. In simple terms, teachers need to change and wisely seek opportunities to improve their abilities through any means, including attending courses, workshops, and professional development programs for the short or long term (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Fischer et al., 2018). Teachers' function will be more meaningful if teachers can improve the current education system's competencies.

In this 21st-century education era, teachers at high-performance schools need to focus on three main components in improving their functional competency, namely knowledge, and skills related to technology, pedagogy, and subject content. It is quite challenging to translate teachers' competencies at a high level if their work environment is less supportive of such actions. Thus, a situation arises where the school climate also has a role in improving teachers' competence. A positive school climate will create a conducive environment for teachers to form active teaching and learning processes (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Communication methods, interpersonal relationships, administrative support, and even the school environment are examples of factors that can enhance a positive school climate. These matters should be emphasized so that the high-performance school climate can encourage teachers to increase their functional competence level.

A teacher's functional competency varies based on their backgrounds, ways of working, and daily life. Past experiences also influence teachers in improving their competencies to a higher level. Usually, teachers will be more competent if they are in a healthier educational environment (Riance, 2019). The way teachers work will be more focused when they have a deep interest and attitude when performing a task. It also illustrates that demographic, experience, and learning environment differences significantly determine teacher teaching quality. These factors are a string to the formation of teacher attitudes, teacher knowledge, and teaching skills in improving their level of functional competence. Thus, this study explored the factors that influenced teachers' level of functional competency in high-performing schools in Kedah.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' Functional Competency

The functional competency of teachers means competencies that have to do with the knowledge and skills needed to perform a more specific task and responsibility. In school, teachers usually carry out various tasks either in the academic field or co-curriculum. Therefore, teachers need more specific competencies to carry out this trust to ensure the expected smoothness and achievement. In the academic field, teachers' functional competency measures through teaching methods, pedagogical formation strategies, effective communication with students, and student engagement (Darishah, Daud, & Omar-Fauzee, 2017). This indicator means that more meaningful teaching can be translated when teachers wisely use their functional competency with the right situation.

In this 21st century learning moment, teacher competence is much needed in various fields. Teachers need to improve up-to-date knowledge and skills and focus on student emotional formation and conductive classroom management (Zaragoza, Diaz-Gibson, & Caparros, 2019). These things prove to also have excellent functional competencies in educating students. Teachers have a significant function if they can act using their competencies. Therefore, Siraj and Ibrahim (2012) have outlined seven characteristics of teachers who have excellent functional competency, namely:

- (a) work collaboratively,
- (b) committed when educating and making decisions,
- (c) ethical, respectful of individual rights, and fair,
- (d) creative and innovative,
- (e) wisely handle student problems,
- (f) be positive, helpful and build relationships with school people,
- (g) able to reflect.

In high-performing schools, teacher competence is a requirement to ensure that the pedagogical journey matches student achievement. The need for teacher competence is because students have high intelligence and the diligence to learn and dig knowledge without feeling bored. Therefore, teachers need to prepare various knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes to face each learning process. Furthermore, the current learning concept is more geared towards the use of technology in improving the quality of pedagogy (Omar, Ismail, & Kasim, 2019). All this requires a high level of teachers' functional competence to produce students who are excellent in academics and have personal literacy.

Teacher Knowledge

Knowledge is a form of input and intake possessed after going through past experiences either directly or indirectly. Knowledge can be learned formally by attending courses, workshops, or directly involved with related activities (Ab Kadir, 2017). In the education system, teacher knowledge is the most critical aspect to meet the desired needs in the education curriculum. Usually, teachers will gain knowledge through teacher training and professional development programs organized for them (Fischer et al., 2018). Based on Ahmad (2006), teacher knowledge is an essential element in helping teachers translate real knowledge to students and develop it to a more critical level in students' thinking.

The challenges of teachers in high-performing schools are indeed challenging. Principal teachers should be at the highest level. Apart from knowledge in subject content, teachers must know about formulating various learning strategies. Teachers need to continually improve their knowledge in current issues and sensitivity to technological developments (Ungar, 2018). At the same time, teachers should understand the background of students. Although



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the average student has wisdom in academics, their backgrounds vary. Therefore, these matters should prioritize ensuring that students can continue their studies without any problems.

Besides, Siraj and Ibrahim (2012) also urged teachers to maximize their ability to the highest level to ensure that students' academic achievement increases. They suggested five aspects of knowledge that can enhance teacher competencies, namely: (1) student knowledge, (2) curriculum knowledge, (3) subject knowledge, (4) pedagogical knowledge, and (5) ICT knowledge. Subsequently, teacher knowledge has also been outlined by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2014), which includes 12 aspects of knowledge that need to be mastered by teachers. These aspects are illustrated in Figure 1 below:

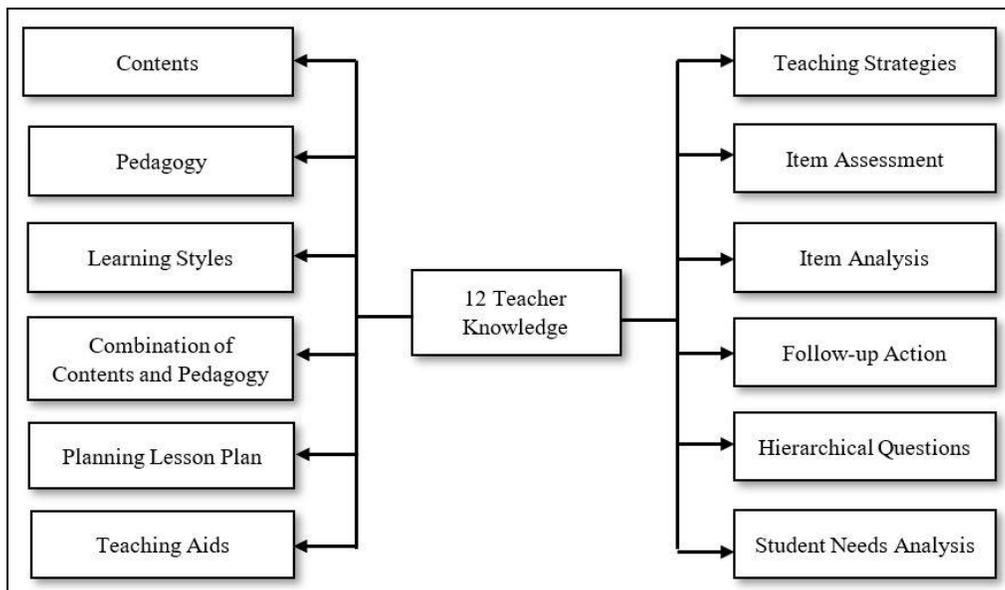


Figure 1. Knowledge aspects needed by teachers in Malaysia

Teacher Skills

Teacher skills are the ability and capability of teachers to conduct teaching and learning sessions more effectively (Harris & Sass, 2014). In this situation, the teacher will try his best to apply the existing skills to achieve the learning objectives. Based on Ahmad (2006), teacher skills include three elements: classroom management, problem-solving of students, and effective communication with the school community. Referring to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2014), teacher skills are the essential aspect of improving teachers' functional competency and student excellence. Three aspects of skills are emphasized, namely, teaching and learning process, knowledge delivery, and assessment. The three aspects are described as follows:

(a) Teaching and Learning Skills

Ministry of Education Malaysia (2014) has outlined five skills that need to be mastered by teachers in the teaching and learning process. The five skills are (1) systematic delivery, (2) classroom control, (3) selecting interesting educational resources, (4) providing useful educational resources, and (5) using educational resources effectively. This case was also stated earlier by Nicholls (2002). The minimum teaching and learning methods are generated from the skills needed to teach and draw students' attention to the knowledge presented.



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(b) Knowledge Delivery Skills

The delivery of knowledge to students requires high level skills; especially in ensuring students to understand what the teacher conveys. Based on Gess-Newsome et al. (2019), the perfect method of presenting information starts from the teacher's preparatory steps until the end of the learning session. The description has uniformity with the eight elements stated by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2014) during preparing teacher competency modules. The eight elements of effective delivery are:

- (1) good listener,
- (2) effective communication,
- (3) inculcating noble values,
- (4) asking exciting questions,
- (5) diversifying questioning techniques,
- (6) encouraging student engagement,
- (7) active multilateral interaction with students, and
- (8) improving student mastery.

(c) Assessment Skills

Assessment in education is a measure to test students' knowledge, abilities, and wisdom after learning sessions (Xu & Brown, 2016). Usually, assessment to students are carried out in two ways, namely during the learning session and after the learning session. Teachers need to have assessment skills to analyse the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities generated after a learning session. A proper assessment can help teachers plan new teaching strategies and approaches that will be more effective in the future (Brookhart, 2011). Assessment skills are also outlined by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2014), which includes three things namely: (1) assess according to student's level, (2) use appropriate methods in assessment, and (3) make follow-up action after assessment.

Based on the current situation, ICT skills are a requirement that has become a trend in pedagogical development. In high-performing schools, teachers should have the initiative to improve their ICT skills by using various technological devices and the latest applications. Now, the presence of educational applications through further android fuels the growth of technology-based knowledge resources (Al-Furaih & Al-Awidi, 2020). Besides, teachers can use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube to channel their pedagogical information. Therefore, teachers need to strengthen their functional competencies, especially in the face of ever-changing educational challenges.

School Climate

The school climate depends on the pattern of experience created in the school environment in norms, values, interpersonal relationships between citizens, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structure. A positive school climate will encourage teachers to implement teaching and learning activities more productively and effectively (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Students also gain an advantage when there is a positive school climate. The learning process should be more stimulating to attract students to be directly involved in each planned activity (Dernowska, 2017).

The location of the organization also influences school climate change. A study conducted by Bear et al. (2018) found that the school climate between Asia and the United States is very different. Their study found that students in Asia cared less about school climate change than students in America. This situation is also acknowledged by Cohen et al. (2009), that school climate changes are heavily influenced by the place's organizational structure and culture. They also listed four crucial elements in influencing the school climate, namely (1) school safety, (2) teaching and learning methods, (3) relationships between school citizens, and (4) organizational environment.



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These four aspects need to be given attention to form a positive school climate so that organizational objectives towards student excellence can be achieved.

Conceptual Framework

Teacher's functional competency is a form of ability and capability possessed by teachers to perform tasks better, especially in the success of the teaching and learning process. Teachers' main focus is to improve their abilities and capabilities so that the knowledge imparted to students can be more accurate, practical and achieve the set objectives (Ahmad & Jingga, 2015; Ningtiyas & Jailani, 2018). Teachers are highly qualified individuals to guide and facilitate students' learning. At the same time, teachers are reference experts in the field they master and become an idol to students (Kunter et al., 2013). Thus, teachers need to act fast to master the knowledge and skills related to the subjects they teach.

Nowadays, teachers should improve their competencies through new knowledge that emerges and absorbs into the world of education. Teachers' teaching strategies should vary according to the level and abilities of students. The use of digital technology devices such as smartphones, tablets and notebooks is also encouraged in giving a new dimension to the changing learning environment (Akar, 2019; Starkey, 2020). Many educational resources can quickly be obtained when using the latest technology. These resources are available quickly and easily through online access. In this regard, teachers need to keep up with the pace and change of the times by expanding and mastering technology-based teaching and learning methods (Zaragoza et al., 2019). In this case, teachers who can improve their skills and knowledge in the field of digital technology have a bright potential in developing their level of functional competency in the current education.

Teachers' high level of knowledge and skills are not enough to increase their level of functional competency. Previous studies by Ahmad (2006), Darishah et al. (2017) and Niwas (2018) mentioned that teachers' competencies can be improved through changes in their attitudes. A positive attitude symbolizes that the teacher will work hard to achieve the goal in performing the given task (Siraj & Ibrahim, 2012). Positive-minded teachers will also try to build an effective teaching process by using a variety of teaching strategies and making the learning environment more conducive. Thus, the construction of teacher functional competency begins when teachers are ready to change their attitudes to boost their abilities and capabilities in the implementation of each given task.

The study also touched on school climate change which led to an increase in the level of functional competence of teachers. Ahmad (2006) stated that the school climate can be formed through the influence and administrative power, as well as changes in the learning environment. Principals or headmasters have the power to build, create and design the school atmosphere according to their mould. As teachers, they will abide every instruction given by the top party. Therefore, the school climate can change more positively if good values can successfully be applied in the school. Effective communication methods, close relationships between school citizen, administrative support and learning culture also lead to changes in teacher competencies in the school (Sembiring & Purba, 2019; Thapa et al., 2013). Teachers will become more competent in their careers when working in a cheerful, peaceful, and stress-free environment. They have the freedom to make choices in implementing the teaching and learning process.

As such, this study focused on four themes that are the backbone to the formation of high functional competency of teachers. The four themes are teacher attitudes, teacher skills, teacher knowledge and school climate. These themes are the main point in building the conceptual framework of the study, as shown in the following Figure 2:

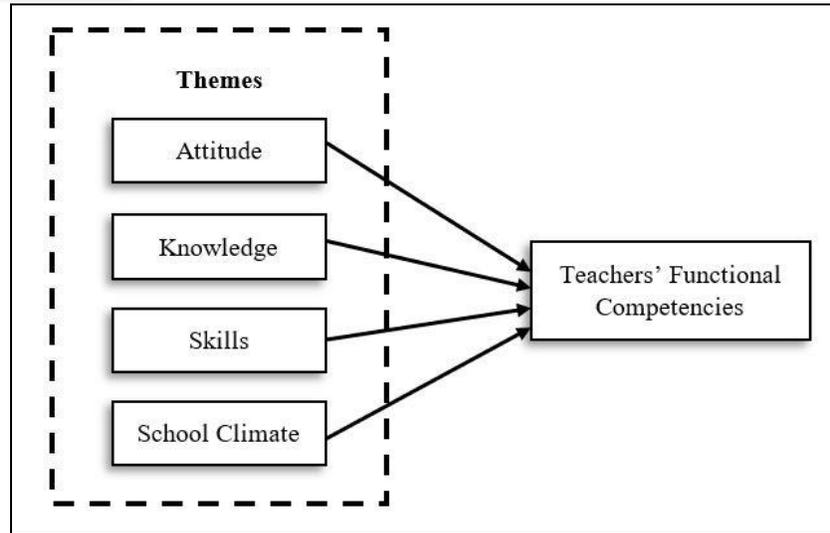


Figure 2. Themes on Improving Teachers' Functional Competency

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Research Design

This qualitative method study measured the contributing factors of teachers' functional competency in schools using a semi-structured interview approach. The semi-structured interview method is among the most popular qualitative data collection techniques by researchers compared to observation methods, field notes, and document analysis. The semi-structured interview method also provides an opportunity for researchers to obtain more detailed information from respondents despite using formally constructed questions (Creswell, 2014). Researchers usually construct questions first before they are developed openly at the researcher's discretion and respondent during the interview session.

Qualitative methods have their advantages. Most facts and information are easily obtained more accurately directly from the respondents through an interview session. According to Patton (2002), personal information about a respondent can be studied more easily through conversation or face-to-face discussion. Typically, respondents feel embarrassed and shy to answer questions posed by researchers, in particular, involving their sensitivity. Therefore, the semi-structured interview method was the best option in this study. A response in the minds of respondents can be better conveyed.

In this study, researchers are very concerned about the quality of information obtained. Therefore, the interview sessions took place according to the comfort of the respondents. Locations such as enclosed, air-conditioned interview rooms, and quiet environmental conditions are essential features before the interview process takes place. Researchers are more focused on short questions that are more open-ended and facilitate the understanding of respondents. Respondents also had ample time to answer the questions posed. It also provides space for respondents to express their ideas and views more honestly and sincerely based on their respective experiences.

Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of teachers who teach in high-performing schools in the state of Kedah. The sample selection was based on simple random sampling. A simple random sampling method is suitable to be



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applied in this study because it is suitable for populations that have properties that are almost uniform with each other (Chua, 2011). The suitability of this sampling selection was that each population member has the same opportunity to be selected and selecting the subjects was independent. It does not depend on others (Yahaya, Voo, Maakip, & Malek, 2017).

There were three high-performing schools involved in this study. Each school had two teachers randomly selected as study respondents. In total, six respondents were involved in the interview process conducted. The following Table 1 shows the distribution of the study respondents.

Table 1

Distribution of the study respondents

School	Teacher	Age	Gender
School X	Teacher A	35 years old	Male
	Teacher B	42 years old	Female
School Y	Teacher C	49 years old	Female
	Teacher D	40 years old	Male
School Z	Teacher E	37 years old	Female
	Teacher F	33 years old	Male

Teacher A is a teacher who has a master's degree in education and is active in giving students motivational talks. Teacher B is the head of the field and has a doctorate in educational management. Besides, Teacher C is a senior administrative assistant and has more than ten years of experience in administration. Teacher D is an excellent teacher and often leads activities involving students' academic achievement. Also, Teacher E is a school counsellor, while Teacher F is active in channelling educational information through social media.

Instrumentation

Overall, this study was conducted qualitatively involving interview data collection method. Therefore, no specific instrument was used formally. The researcher provided some semi-structured interview questions to obtain information related to the research questions. However, there were several themes to guide the interview process in this study. Table 2 shows the details of the themes used as questions throughout the interview process.

Table 2

Interview questions based on themes

No	Theme	Question
1	Attitude	1. What are the attitudes that can increase the functional competency level of teachers? 2. Why is attitude important towards the functional competency of teachers? 3. What is the importance of having skills that can improve the functional competency of teachers?
2	Skills	4. What is the knowledge needed in improving the functional competency of teachers?
3	Knowledge	5. Can climate affect the way quality teachers work?
4	School Climate	6. How can the school climate affect the functional competency of teachers?



RESULTS

Teacher Attitude

Teachers are the vital pillars in the education system in schools. Apart from educating, this group is a contributor to the success of a school in various fields. Teachers are also the driving force towards achieving the mission, vision, and setting of school goals in realizing student excellence in academics. Thus, teachers' attitude is the most crucial aspect in determining the success or failure of a school (Ahmad & Jingga, 2015). Teachers' attitude also plays a role in improving their level of functional competency. This situation is clearly described by one respondent as follows:

"...professional teachers will ensure that their work achieves the best possible level. For example, they will ensure that they collaborate with other teachers and follow any professional learning of the community..."
(Teacher A)

The importance of attitude towards the functional competency of teachers was also acknowledged by the following respondents who stated that:

"...attitude is the main factor in determining teachers' level of functional competency because the teacher needs to have a positive attitude, wants excellence, and be willing to work hard to become a competent person..." (Teacher C)

In addition, the positive attitude practiced by teachers contributes to the improvement of their level of competency. This matter was acknowledged by three other respondents who stated that:

"...the level of teacher competency depends on their attitude, positive or negative..." (Teacher E)

"...to me, the teacher himself... how he behaves towards his daily tasks..." (Teacher B)

"...how the attitude practiced by the teacher determines whether they have the competency or not..."
(Teacher F)

Analysis of interview transcripts showed that teachers' attitudes were the determinants of their functional competency level in performing daily tasks. Competent teachers will try to improve self-efficacy in various fields to realize the aspirations and objectives set. Simultaneously, the mastery of subject content and the variety of pedagogical skills possessed by teachers are crucial to improving the quality of their teaching (Teaching System Lab, 2019). A positive attitude also helps teachers improve their knowledge and skills competencies so that the implementation of pedagogy takes place more creatively, effectively, and produces student results. Therefore, teachers should be prepared to make careful planning before classroom instructions until the end of teaching and learning sessions.

Teachers' attitudes also symbolize their personality in performing a task. Positive-minded teachers will try to do their best to ensure that knowledge can be passed on to students correctly. Teachers' attitude also helps them build self-competence to create more creative teaching methods (Niwas, 2018). Thus, the functional competency of teachers can better be translated into creating a more stimulating learning environment. This positive teacher attitude is the backbone of forming the coveted pedagogical process in line with the implementation of 21st-century learning concepts (Sulaiman & Ismail, 2020).



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Teacher Skills

Teacher skills cover various aspects of education. Examples of skills required are deepening the subject's content, managing the classroom, implementing various pedagogical strategies, and reflecting and assessing students. Besides, teachers also need to be skilled in raising their competency standards in other areas, including curriculum flow or co-curricular (Drake & Reid, 2018). In this regard, teachers should show a high commitment to continuing their efforts towards student excellence. These skills include their concern for learning needs, student problems, creating a stimulating learning environment, and involving students in achieving targeted objectives.

The importance of skills elements towards teacher competency level was acknowledged by the study respondents in the interview as follows:

"...teacher competency depends on the strength of their skills..." (Teacher B)

"...skills is the major factor in determining the level of functional competency of teachers. Teachers who are skilled and have extensive knowledge in their field are more confident in delivering teaching and learning." (Teacher C)

"...teacher competency depends on the diversity of skills, and it is an advantage for them to deal with current educational issues..." (Teacher E)

Nowadays, the elements of skills involving technology are also a necessity in the education system. The presence of technology has given teachers the option to create a more enjoyable learning environment. Existing educational applications are exciting teaching aids to increase student engagement in the classroom (Omar & Ismail, 2020). Therefore, teachers should act quickly to improve their operating technological devices in line with the level of functional competency they possess. This matter was clearly explained by a study respondent as follows:

"...skills are an important feature of a teacher's quality, especially for 21st-century learning skills. Skills are needed at this stage, what is said to be the 4th industrial revolution era where communication skills to operate digital technology...." (Teacher A)

Skills require constant training without feeling weary. Skills can also be formed through workshops, seminars, and courses attended. Skills development programs are a vital element in triggering the improvement of teachers' competencies in education. Professional development programs are a method to improve teacher competency in focusing on student achievement (Fischer et al., 2018; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). Such programs will contribute to the best results to be implemented in teaching and learning sessions. Through an interview session, one respondent acknowledged the importance of the following skills:

"...skills possessed by teachers from the courses attended to be applied in the classroom during teaching and learning will contribute to their level of competence...." (Teacher F)

Based on the interview session, it turned out that skills are an element that should be improved by teachers today. High level skills will contribute to a superior level of teacher competency. The formation of the required skills will not be present in a short period. Teachers should always strive and diligently search for the latest skills needed in line with the current modernization of education (Ningtiyas & Jailani, 2018). These skills are needed to boost teachers' level of competence, thus elevating their status as dedicated educators.

Teacher Knowledge

As teachers, knowledge in education-related field is something that should be mastered by them. The knowledge that should be in a teacher is the subject's content, teaching strategies, pedagogy, professional development, and



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the learning environment. Compatibility between the knowledge that teachers have can have a massive impact on student achievement. A teacher is an individual who serves as a conduit of accurate knowledge and information to students (Gess-Newsome et al., 2019). The following respondents also acknowledged the above statement:

"...teachers must master the knowledge of the content of the subject taught. Knowledge must also be relevant to the learning needs of the 21st century. Besides, pedagogical knowledge must also master so that the content presented has a high impact on students..." (Teacher A)

Knowledge is also obtained from past experiences. Teachers will go through regular phases of learning to acquire the necessary knowledge. This experience is an essential source of knowledge for significant interactions when teachers channel knowledge to students (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). One respondent expressed his opinion as follows:

"...knowledge is the main factor in determining the level of functional competency of teachers. Knowledgeable teachers will produce many inputs based on experience in their field as well as more confident in imparting knowledge to students..." (Teacher C)

Moreover, teachers' knowledge is inseparable from their skills and attitudes. Teachers can build knowledge if they have a positive attitude to improve self-competence (Akman & Alagoz, 2017). Teacher skills can be honed through existing knowledge that teachers have due to continuous training and attending professional development courses (Danielson, 2007). The matter was acknowledged by the respondent, stating that:

"...competency depends on the elements of ASK, namely attitude, skill and knowledge..." (Teacher E)

"...nothing is more important than knowledge and skills in the field taught. Teachers' attitudes need to be changed to gain a variety of knowledge..." (Teacher F)

"...knowledge, skills and teaching techniques come from the experience and background of the teacher..." (Teacher B)

According to Teacher B, demographic factors also played an essential role in shaping knowledge and skills. Teachers' backgrounds, such as gender, location, attitudes, and values, were the triggers to increase functional competency. This situation was built from past experiences either while the teacher attended a teaching course or activities organized. Teachers' attitude to get involved in the programs carried out was the trigger to strengthen their knowledge and skills to be translated into students.

School Climate

The school climate is an environment that exists in the organizational environment to evoke the efficiency and effectiveness of the school. The school climate also varies from one school to another. The school climate's formation is influenced by the significant interaction between teachers, students, and the entire school community to create optimal job satisfaction (Sembiring & Purba, 2019). The combination of existing social systems is an implication for constructing a more conducive learning environment (Riance, 2019). A conducive environment also inspires teachers to improve their knowledge and skills in related fields. This matter was mentioned by a respondent who stated the following:

"...knowledge and skills do not just exist. It must be nurtured. This means that teachers must be supported by a conducive environment that encourages them to learn, that is, to improve their knowledge and skills..." (Teacher A)



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Besides, school climate is also influenced by organizational factors, whether formally, informally, or school leadership personality. Usually, each school has its climate and its existence due to the way or method of administration of a school (Castro Silva, Amante, & Morgado, 2017). Administrators have tremendous power to change the way schools run, provide the facilities needed by teachers, and influence teachers to diversify teaching and learning methods more effectively. This situation illustrates that the administration also helps teachers improve their functional competency. This point was also acknowledged by the respondents as follows:

"...administration must be supportive, provide ways and means for teachers to build their competencies..." (Teacher F)

"...teachers will be excited if the management understands the needs of teachers. The management should try to help teachers upgrade the latest skills and transfer them to students ..." (Teacher D)

Specifically, the excellence of a school depends on the overall performance of the members in the organization. High teacher performance is the result of the existence of a positive school climate practiced. This situation depends on the way teachers work to handle their responsibilities more competently based on their competencies. Dedicated teachers will try to use the facilities available to form a more encouraging pedagogical method. This statement was also in line with the revelation made by the respondent as follows:

"...school climate also contributes to the formation of teacher competency. The necessary infrastructure should be sufficient for teachers to deliver lessons more effectively..." (Teacher B)

A positive school climate can also be manifested through high teacher competence. Teachers should have continuous efforts to improve knowledge and skills in their field. In this case, the school administration should be aware that teachers need to be exposed to a diversity of knowledge through professional development programs. This statement was mentioned by one respondent as follows:

"...support from school leaders is an important factor that determines a teacher's competency. School leaders need to monitor, supervise and provide relevant professional development programs to strengthen teacher competencies under his administration..." (Teacher C)

Results from teacher interviews acknowledged that the school climate has its influence in improving teacher functional competency. In this situation, the way teachers work matches to the existing school environment. A favourable climate creates more effective teacher qualities in shaping the teaching and learning process (Dernowska, 2017). Therefore, the school administration should be aware that the school climate's formation plays a massive role in ensuring teachers' competencies in producing coveted student excellence.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study's findings have identified four main themes that were the main factors influencing the level of teachers' functional competency in schools. These factors were teacher attitudes, teacher knowledge, teacher skills, and school climate. The results of the interviews found that teacher competence has a positive and significant relationship with organizational performance. These findings are also supported by the study by Ahmad (2006) and Kunter et al. (2013). They showed that competent teachers know the subject's content, teaching strategies, and skills needed to handle the pedagogical process. High level of teacher competence is an essential indicator in improving student learning outcomes (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). This situation occurs when the teacher can capture the students' attention and is skilled in explaining the students' knowledge.

Teacher competence also refers to the ability to improve students' academic achievement more effectively through technological devices. This finding is supported by Ahmad and Jinggaan (2015) study where teachers who



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can use technological teaching aids can organize more effective pedagogical methods. The skill of selecting, creating, and using appropriate technology is an element of functional skills that all teachers need to master. The use of appropriate technology resources can further increase students' interest in approach the learning process and being able to involve them in every planned activity (Omar et al., 2019). Thus, knowledge and skills in digital technology are necessary for today's education to becomes an indicator of educator competence.

A study by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2014) found that teachers' functional competency instrument is a mandatory module measuring teacher competence. The ministry's noble efforts aim to encourage teachers to increase their competitiveness through various programs involving professional development. In strengthening teacher competence, each program implementation should be recorded for documentation purposes either in the school environment or otherwise. This work culture is an exercise for teachers to increase motivation further, job satisfaction, and a catalyst to the formation of more mature competencies in the future (Tanzeq, 2019).

An inescapable fact is that school leaders act as a liaison agent between teacher competence and student excellence. The school administration is the most important group that can act proactively to create a conducive school climate. A positive school climate will provide peace of mind and create a more cheerful learning environment (Castro Silva et al., 2017). In this situation, teachers' competencies can be highlighted when they can organize and implement teaching and learning activities according to their creativity. Innovative teachers can use the existing school environment to hold learning sessions outside the classroom or use technological devices as alternative (Akar, 2019).

Education in Malaysia intends to produce competent educators and produce students who are highly competitive and skilled. To express that desire, teachers need to equip themselves with the high knowledge and skills required. This situation will not become a reality if teachers do not change their attitudes and perceptions towards a more positive direction towards meaningful learning. However, the teaching and learning process is also influenced by the conducive school climate. The combination of teacher attitude, teacher knowledge, teacher skills, and school climate leads to a higher level of teacher functional competency. If this situation exists, then educational excellence in Malaysia can be raised across globalization to support the 21st-century learning concept.

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