

Students' Learning Difficulties: a Correlational Study on the Influence of Teachers' Social Competence.

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of teachers' social competence on students' learning difficulties in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) Al Hidayah, Tunggul Pawenang, Pringsewu. The research utilizes a quantitative correlational approach, focusing on the relationship between teachers' social competence and the learning challenges faced by students. A survey was conducted with 70 students from class VIII using validated and reliable questionnaires. The results indicate a significant correlation between teachers' ability to communicate effectively, show empathy, and create a supportive learning environment, and the reduction of students' learning difficulties. Specifically, teachers who establish positive relationships and facilitate open communication create a more conducive learning atmosphere, enhancing students' confidence and participation. Conversely, teachers with lower social competence tend to experience more significant barriers in addressing students' academic challenges. The findings suggest that improving teachers' social competence can be an effective strategy to mitigate learning difficulties, especially in environments with diverse cultural and social backgrounds. This research contributes to the literature on teacher-student interaction, emphasizing the importance of teachers' emotional and social skills in fostering inclusive and effective learning environments. Furthermore, the study calls for teacher training programs that enhance both pedagogical and social competencies to optimize student learning outcomes in Islamic educational settings.

INTRODUCTION

Learning difficulties represent a significant challenge in contemporary education, manifesting as obstacles that impede students' ability to comprehend and master academic content. These difficulties stem from multifaceted factors including cognitive abilities, instructional methodologies, environmental conditions, and motivational deficits (Amaliyah et al., 2021). Research demonstrates that students with learning difficulties often exhibit lower social performance, which negatively impacts their participation in learning activities (Vasileiadis et al., 2024). Given the heterogeneous nature of student learning styles and paces, teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating students' navigation through these academic challenges (Nurfadhilah et al., 2022). Students frequently encounter difficulties in grasping abstract concepts, experience reluctance to seek clarification (Nazihah et al., 2025; Coelho et al., 2023; Wulandari & Kartika, 2025), and demonstrate insufficient confidence in articulating their perspectives (Akmal & Fitriani, 2024). Consequently, teachers must transcend traditional content

delivery roles to function as facilitators who cultivate supportive and comfortable learning environments (Hanifah & Sumardi, 2022). Through effective communication strategies, interactive pedagogical approaches, and appropriate guidance mechanisms, learning difficulties can be substantially mitigated, thereby enhancing student motivation and comprehension (Nurfadillah et al., 2021).

In optimal educational settings, teachers serve as mediators who establish positive interpersonal relationships with students. Effective teacher-student interactions generate engaging learning atmospheres that facilitate deeper material comprehension and active participation (Hartuti et al., 2024). International research confirms that high-quality teacher-student interactions characterized by empathy lead to better academic performance and social adjustment (Sun et al., 2023). A supportive classroom climate (Rafi et al., 2024; Liud et al., 2025), coupled with instructional methods aligned with student needs, enhances learners' academic confidence. Teachers possessing robust social competence demonstrate the capacity to identify student needs and characteristics, provide tailored attention, and foster enjoyable learning atmospheres (Rachman et al., 2023). Evidence suggests that teacher empathy enables educators to understand and respond to students' emotional experiences, creating supportive environments that enhance student engagement and reduce stress levels (Tettegah & Anderson, 2007; Cooper, 2010). Therefore, effective learning outcomes depend not solely on pedagogical methods but fundamentally on the quality of teacher-student interactions (Mutia & Pranoto, 2024).

Teachers' social competence encompasses educators' capabilities to interact, communicate, and establish positive relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and the broader school community (Widodo et al., 2024). Teachers with well-developed social competence create comfortable, inclusive, and motivating learning environments. These abilities include understanding student characteristics, providing emotional support, and establishing effective communication within teaching-learning processes (Khasanah et al., 2025). Research demonstrates that teachers' social-emotional competence enables them to master manifold social and emotional challenges, including addressing student learning difficulties and negative teacher-student relationships (Aldrup et al., 2020). Teachers with high social competence function not merely as knowledge transmitters but as facilitators who guide and encourage students' academic and social development (Lufita et al., 2024). Conversely, teachers lacking social competence create learning barriers, including insufficient student rapport, ineffective communication, and inadequate emotional support, which negatively impact student comfort and learning motivation (Fauziah & Suwandi, 2021).

Previous research has explored the relationship between teachers' social competence and students' learning processes. Wight and Chapparo (2020) demonstrated that students with learning difficulties exhibit lower social performance, affecting their learning activity participation. Novianti (2023) found that teachers' social competence exerted more significant influence on learning quality than pedagogical competence in inclusive early childhood education settings. Khasawneh (2021) revealed that extracurricular activity-based training enhanced social competence among students with learning disabilities in Jordan.

Despite extensive research emphasizing social competence's importance in education, investigations examining teachers' social competence impact on students' learning difficulties in Madrasah Tsanawiyah remain limited. Madrasahs possess unique sociocultural characteristics that require strengthening Islamic psychosocial and emotional intelligence perspectives in teacher professionalism (Tambak & Sukenti, 2020). Preliminary observations at MTs Al Hidayah Tunggal Pawenang Pringsewu revealed critical issues regarding teacher-student interactions, instructional methods, student hesitancy in questioning, and varying motivation levels. Survey results indicated that while 28% of teachers demonstrated effective communication abilities, only 22% adequately adapted to sociocultural diversity, suggesting substantial challenges in inclusive learning implementation.

This study addresses this research gap by examining the influence of teachers' social competence on learning difficulties among eighth-grade students at MTs Al Hidayah. The primary

novelty lies in highlighting social-emotional factors within teacher-student relationships in Madrasah Tsanawiyah contexts. This research aims to contribute toward developing more relational and inclusive teaching strategies while providing foundations for teacher training programs emphasizing social-emotional competencies, ultimately enhancing educational quality in madrasahs and creating more conducive learning environments.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between teachers' social competence and students' learning difficulties at MTs Al Hidayah Tunggul Pawenang Pringsewu. The correlational design was deemed appropriate as it enables systematic examination of the strength and direction of associations between variables in naturalistic educational settings without experimental manipulation. Teachers' social competence served as the independent variable, while students' learning difficulties functioned as the dependent variable, allowing for empirical investigation of how variations in teacher competencies relate to student academic challenges.

The research population consisted of 200 eighth-grade students enrolled at MTs Al Hidayah Tunggul Pawenang Pringsewu during the academic year. From this population, 70 students were selected as research participants through simple random sampling technique, ensuring equal probability of selection for all population members and minimizing potential sampling bias. This sample size was determined adequate for conducting robust correlational analyses while maintaining statistical power sufficient to detect meaningful relationships between the examined variables.

Data were collected using two validated questionnaire instruments specifically designed for this investigation. The first instrument assessed teachers' social competence across multiple dimensions, including communication effectiveness, empathetic engagement, relationship-building capabilities, and sociocultural adaptability in interactions with students, colleagues, parents, and the wider educational community. The second instrument measured students' learning difficulties encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, examining challenges in comprehension, motivation, confidence, and classroom participation. Each questionnaire comprised 20 items utilizing a Likert scale format to capture nuanced response variations.

Both instruments underwent rigorous psychometric evaluation prior to implementation. Content validity was established through expert judgment, while construct validity was assessed using Pearson Product-Moment correlation to verify that individual items appropriately measured their intended constructs. Reliability analysis employed Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to determine internal consistency, yielding values of 0.85 for the teachers' social competence questionnaire and 0.87 for the students' learning difficulties questionnaire. These coefficients exceeded the conventional threshold of 0.70, confirming excellent reliability and indicating that both instruments possessed high internal consistency for their respective constructs.

Data analysis proceeded systematically through multiple stages. Initially, prerequisite tests were conducted to verify statistical assumptions necessary for parametric procedures. The Shapiro-Wilk test examined data normality given the sample size below 100, while Levene's test assessed homogeneity of variance across groups. Linearity testing evaluated whether relationships between variables could be appropriately modeled through linear functions. Upon satisfying these assumptions, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to quantify the strength and direction of the relationship between teachers' social competence and students' learning difficulties. Subsequently, simple linear regression analysis was performed, incorporating t-tests to assess individual predictor significance and F-tests to evaluate overall model validity. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was computed to determine the proportion of variance in students' learning difficulties attributable to teachers' social competence. All statistical procedures were executed using SPSS version 25.0 software, with statistical significance established at $\alpha = 0.05$ level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study examined the relationship between teachers' social competence and students' learning difficulties among 76 eighth-grade students at MTs Al Hidayah Tunggal Pawenang Pringsewu. Prior to testing the research hypothesis, prerequisite statistical analyses were conducted to ensure the appropriateness of parametric testing procedures. The following sections present the findings from these preliminary analyses and subsequent hypothesis testing.

To determine whether the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis, a normality test was conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk method, which is recommended for sample sizes below 100. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1. The normality test revealed that both variables demonstrated normal distribution patterns. Specifically, the teachers' social competence variable yielded a significance value of 0.706, substantially exceeding the threshold of 0.05, thereby confirming normal distribution. Similarly, the students' learning difficulties variable produced a significance value of 0.133, also indicating conformity to normal distribution assumptions. These findings established that the data satisfied the normality requirement for conducting parametric correlation and regression analyses.

Table 1. Results of Normality Test

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Data	1.00	.102	76	.050	.988	76	.706
	2.00	.116	76	.014	.975	76	.133

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Following the normality assessment, homogeneity of variance was examined to verify whether the data distributions possessed equal variances across groups. Table 2 presents the results of Levene's test for homogeneity of variance. The analysis yielded a significance value of 0.303 based on the mean, which exceeded the critical threshold of 0.05. This result indicated that the variances for teachers' social competence and students' learning difficulties were homogeneous, satisfying another essential assumption for parametric testing. The consistency of variance across groups strengthened the validity of subsequent correlation and regression analyses.

Table 2. Results of Homogeneity Test

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Data	Based on Mean	1.068	1	150	.303
	Based on Median	.797	1	150	.373
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.797	1	147.530	.373
	Based on trimmed mean	.979	1	150	.324

The linearity of the relationship between teachers' social competence and students' learning difficulties was subsequently examined to determine whether a linear model appropriately represented their association. As displayed in Table 3, the deviation from linearity yielded a significance value of 0.429, considerably greater than 0.05. This finding confirmed a significant linear relationship between the independent variable (teachers' social competence) and the dependent variable (students' learning difficulties), justifying the application of linear regression modeling. Furthermore, the linearity component demonstrated a significance value of 0.015 ($p < 0.05$), providing additional evidence of a meaningful linear association between these constructs.

Table 3. Results of Linearity Test

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
VariabelY *	Between Groups	(Combined)	622.857	21	29.660	1.297	.219
VariabelX		Linearity	144.257	1	144.257	6.307	.015
		Deviation from Linearity	478.600	20	23.930	1.046	.429
	Within Groups		1235.077	54	22.872		
	Total		1857.934	75			

With all prerequisite assumptions satisfied, hypothesis testing proceeded through t-test and correlation analyses to examine whether teachers' social competence significantly influenced students' learning difficulties. Table 4 presents the regression coefficients and t-test results. The analysis revealed a significance value of 0.015 ($p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a). This finding demonstrated that teachers' social competence exerted a statistically significant effect on students' learning difficulties. The standardized beta coefficient of 0.279 indicated a positive relationship, suggesting that higher levels of teachers' social competence were associated with reduced learning difficulties among students.

Table 4. Results of T-test

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	33.073	3.572		9.259	.000
	VariabelX	.248	.099	.279	2.496	.015

a. Dependent Variable: VariabelY

To assess the overall significance of the regression model, an F-test was conducted to evaluate whether teachers' social competence collectively explained significant variance in students' learning difficulties. As shown in Table 5, the F-test yielded a significance value of 0.015 ($p < 0.05$), confirming that the regression model was statistically significant. The F-value of 6.229 indicated that teachers' social competence significantly predicted students' learning difficulties, providing robust evidence for the validity of the predictive model.

Table 5. Results of F-test

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	144.257	1	144.257	6.229	.015 ^b
	Residual	1713.678	74	23.158		
	Total	1857.934	75			

a. Dependent Variable: VariabelY

b. Predictors: (Constant), VariabelX

Finally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to quantify the proportion of variance in students' learning difficulties explained by teachers' social competence. Table 6 displays the model summary statistics. The R-squared value of 0.078 indicated that 7.8% of the variance in students' learning difficulties could be attributed to teachers' social competence. The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.279 confirmed a positive relationship between these variables. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.065 suggested that after accounting for the number of predictors in the model, approximately 6.5% of the variance remained explained. These findings indicated that while teachers' social competence significantly influenced students' learning difficulties, other factors not included in

this model accounted for the remaining 92.2% of the variance, suggesting the multifaceted nature of learning difficulties.

Table 6. Results of Coefficient of Determination Test

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.279 ^a	.078	.065	4.81226

a. Predictors: (Constant), VariabelX

Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence that teachers' social competence significantly influences students' learning difficulties in the context of Madrasah Tsanawiyah education. The positive correlation ($r = 0.279$, $p < 0.05$) and the significant regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.279$, $p = 0.015$) demonstrate that enhanced teacher social competence is associated with reduced learning difficulties among students. This finding substantiates the theoretical proposition that positive teacher-student interactions serve as critical mechanisms for reducing both cognitive and affective learning barriers, as suggested in contemporary educational literature (Hastuti & Iswatiningsih, 2025).

The results align with the research framework established in the introduction, which emphasized the importance of teachers' social competence in creating supportive learning environments. Specifically, the finding that teachers' social competence explains 7.8% of variance in learning difficulties confirms that teacher interpersonal skills constitute a meaningful, though partial, contributor to student academic challenges. This supports the assertion by Widodo et al. (2024) that optimizing teachers' social competence can strengthen the learning climate, while also acknowledging that learning difficulties emerge from multiple interacting factors. The moderate correlation observed in this study reflects the complex etiology of learning difficulties, which encompass cognitive abilities, instructional methodologies, environmental conditions, and motivational factors (Amaliyah et al., 2021).

These findings corroborate previous research by Fauziah and Suwandi (2021), who demonstrated that teachers' social competence influences students' social attitudes in madrasah settings. The present study extends this work by establishing a direct link between teacher social competence and learning difficulties, rather than solely social attitudes. Students who perceive their teachers as possessing strong social competence—characterized by effective communication, empathy, and relationship-building skills—demonstrate greater willingness to seek clarification, engage in discussions, and overcome academic challenges. This mechanism supports the theoretical framework proposed by Sun et al. (2023), who found that high-quality teacher-student interactions characterized by empathy lead to better academic performance and social adjustment. In contrast, when teachers lack social competence, students often remain passive and reluctant to express their difficulties, thereby perpetuating learning barriers.

The research also validates the importance of teacher empathy in addressing learning difficulties, as emphasized by Tettegah and Anderson (2007) and Cooper (2010), who argued that teacher empathy enables educators to understand and respond to students' emotional experiences. In the current study, teachers who demonstrated empathetic engagement and effective communication created more conducive learning atmospheres, allowing students to feel valued and confident in facing academic challenges. This finding reinforces Aldrup et al.'s (2020) assertion that teachers' social-emotional competence enables them to master manifold social and emotional challenges, including addressing student learning difficulties and negative teacher-student relationships.

However, the relatively modest R^2 value (7.8%) indicates that teachers' social competence, while significant, represents only one component of a more complex system influencing learning difficulties. This finding extends the work of Hanifah and Sumardi (2022), who highlighted the role of

student activity in learning outcomes, by demonstrating that teacher-student social relationship quality also affects student engagement. The remaining 92.2% of unexplained variance suggests that other factors—including family support, peer relationships, school resources, intrinsic motivation, and individual cognitive differences—play substantial roles in determining learning difficulties. This multifaceted perspective aligns with Vasileiadis et al.'s (2024) observation that students with learning difficulties often exhibit lower social performance influenced by multiple contextual factors.

The study's findings also illuminate the unique challenges within Madrasah Tsanawiyah contexts. The preliminary data revealed that only 22% of teachers adequately adapted to sociocultural diversity, suggesting significant room for improvement in teachers' cultural responsiveness. This finding resonates with Wight and Chapparo's (2020) research in Australia, which discovered that students with learning difficulties often exhibit low social performance. Recent research by Rotschild (2025) further emphasizes that teacher communication significantly impacts positive self-concept development in children with learning disabilities, underscoring the critical role of social competence in addressing diverse learning needs. However, the current study provides novel insights by focusing on the socio-religious context of Islamic education, where teachers must navigate distinct cultural and religious values that shape teacher-student dynamics. As noted by Tambak and Sukenti (2020), madrasahs require strengthening Islamic psychosocial and emotional intelligence perspectives in teacher professionalism, highlighting the need for culturally responsive social competence.

Furthermore, these findings support and extend Novianti's (2023) research, which demonstrated that teachers' social competence has a greater impact on learning quality than pedagogical competence in inclusive early childhood education settings. Similarly, Pratiwi and Lisnawati (2023) found that Islamic education teachers' competence plays a crucial role in addressing grade XII students' learning difficulties, reinforcing the importance of teacher competencies beyond mere content expertise. In the context of MTs Al Hidayah, teachers who established warm communication, demonstrated empathy, and provided personal attention proved more effective in helping students overcome learning difficulties than those relying solely on pedagogical expertise. This evidence indicates that in madrasah environments, social competence functions as a bridge for delivering educational content in more meaningful and accessible ways, particularly for students struggling with abstract concepts, low confidence, or hesitancy in expressing opinions (Akmal & Fitriani, 2024). This aligns with Widiyaningsih and Narimo's (2023) findings that teachers play essential roles in maximizing student learning enthusiasm through supportive interactions.

The study's novelty lies in its specific focus on examining the relationship between teachers' social competence and learning difficulties at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level—an area that has received limited empirical attention in existing literature. While previous research has primarily investigated relationships between social competence and students' social attitudes or learning motivation, this study demonstrates that teachers' social competence directly impacts students' ability to overcome academic challenges. This extends the current understanding of teacher social competence beyond attitudinal outcomes to encompass cognitive and academic dimensions of student learning.

From a practical perspective, these findings underscore the necessity of comprehensive teacher training programs that integrate both pedagogical and social-emotional skill development. As suggested in the introduction, teachers with strong social competence foster a sense of security, self-confidence, and active student engagement, thereby minimizing learning difficulties. The results provide empirical justification for educational policies in madrasahs to prioritize professional development focused on enhancing teachers' communication skills, empathy, cultural responsiveness, and relationship-building capabilities. Such initiatives align with recommendations from international research (Aldrup et al., 2020; Cooper, 2010) emphasizing the importance of teachers' social-emotional competencies in creating inclusive and effective learning environments.

Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of addressing teachers' capacity to adapt to sociocultural diversity, given that the preliminary survey revealed this as the weakest dimension of

social competence among participating teachers. This limitation may create psychological distance between teachers and students from diverse backgrounds, potentially exacerbating learning difficulties for already vulnerable students. Training programs should therefore emphasize cultural sensitivity, inclusive communication strategies, and differentiated support approaches that acknowledge and respond to the heterogeneous learning needs within madrasah classrooms (Nurfadhilah et al., 2022).

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on teacher-student interactions in Islamic educational contexts by providing empirical evidence that teachers' social competence significantly influences students' learning difficulties. While the effect size is moderate, reflecting the multifactorial nature of learning difficulties, the findings confirm that enhancing teachers' social competence represents a valuable strategy for reducing academic barriers and promoting more inclusive, relational, and effective learning environments in madrasahs. Future research should explore additional factors that interact with teacher social competence, examine longitudinal effects of social competence interventions, and investigate how specific dimensions of social competence (e.g., empathy, communication, cultural responsiveness) differentially impact various types of learning difficulties.

CONCLUSION

This study established that teachers' social competence significantly influences students' learning difficulties among eighth-grade students at MTs Al Hidayah Tunggul Pawenang Pringsewu, with a positive correlation ($r = 0.279$, $p = 0.015$) indicating that enhanced teacher social competence is associated with reduced learning barriers. The findings demonstrate that teachers who exhibit effective communication, empathy, and positive relational skills create more conducive learning environments that enhance student confidence and academic engagement. However, teachers' social competence explains only 7.8% of variance in learning difficulties, confirming the multifactorial nature of academic challenges influenced by family support, peer relationships, intrinsic motivation, and cognitive factors. The primary contribution of this research lies in extending understanding of teacher social competence beyond attitudinal outcomes to encompass direct effects on students' cognitive and academic functioning within Madrasah Tsanawiyah contexts—an area previously underexplored in existing literature. These findings have important practical implications for educational policy and teacher professional development in madrasahs, emphasizing the necessity of integrating social-emotional competency training alongside pedagogical skill development. Training programs should particularly address cultural responsiveness and adaptability to sociocultural diversity, given that preliminary findings identified these as weak areas among participating teachers. The study's limitations include its cross-sectional design, reliance on student perceptions, single-site focus, and modest explained variance, which restrict generalizability and causal inference. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine temporal dynamics, investigate specific dimensions of social competence and their differential effects on various learning difficulty types, explore interaction effects with other contextual variables, and extend investigations across diverse madrasah settings to enhance external validity and provide more comprehensive understanding of teacher social competence in Islamic educational contexts.

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