

ENHANCING ACADEMIC SUCCESS THROUGH TEACHER COMPETENCE: THE INFLUENCE OF STUDENT MENTAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between teacher competence and university students' academic achievement, with a specific focus on the mediating role of students' mental health. The study followed the positivism research philosophy. Therefore, the study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design. The target population consisted of 5,354 individuals from five universities, including 335 teachers and 5,019 students. A sample of 400 respondents, comprising 98 teachers and 302 university students, was selected through proportionate stratified sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires measuring teacher competence, students' mental health, and academic achievement. Content validity was checked through experts' judgment and Cronbach's Alpha was used to estimate the reliability of the instruments. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Barron and Kenny (1986) Model was used for mediation analysis. The results show a significant positive effect of teacher competence on university students' academic performance. The mediation analysis further revealed that students' mental health partially mediates this relationship. So, the study concluded that competent teachers not only enhance academic success but also create a supportive learning environment that contributes to better mental health among learners. When students experience reduced stress, improved motivation, and emotional stability, the positive influence of teacher competence becomes stronger. The also study concludes that teacher competence plays a vital role in shaping students' academic achievement, and this relationship is significantly reinforced when students' mental health is adequately supported. The study recommended that universities may strengthen continuous professional development programs for teachers and expand mental health services, including counseling units and awareness programs, to promote both.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence is widely recognized as a fundamental determinant of students' academic performance in higher education. Competent teachers possess strong pedagogical knowledge,

classroom management skills, and the ability to design meaningful learning experiences, which directly influence learners' engagement and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Gess-Newsome et al., 2019). As universities continue

to evolve in response to global academic demands, the role of teacher competence has gained increasing importance in ensuring academic quality and student success, particularly in developing countries where disparities in instructional quality remain a major challenge. Alongside teacher competence, the mental well-being of university students has emerged as a significant factor affecting academic achievement. Students often encounter academic pressure, financial stress, and emotional challenges that negatively influence their concentration, motivation, and learning outcomes (Regehr et al., 2017; Eisenberg et al., 2021). Research suggests that poor mental health is strongly associated with reduced academic performance, absenteeism, and dropout rates (Auerbach et al., 2018). Therefore, improving student mental well-being has become a priority for institutions seeking to enhance academic success.

Recent research indicates that the relationship between teacher competence and student academic achievement may operate not only directly but also indirectly through students' psychological experiences. Supportive and effective teachers can create a positive learning climate that reduces stress, fosters motivation, and enhances emotional stability among learners (Hattie, 2015; Roorda et al., 2017). Such a nurturing classroom environment contributes to students' mental well-being, which in turn strengthens their academic performance. Thus, students' mental health may serve as a mediating factor that explains how teacher competence influences academic outcomes. Despite the growing interest in teacher competence and student mental health, there is limited empirical evidence exploring the mediating role of mental well-being within higher education, particularly in the South Asian context. Most studies have examined these constructs separately or focused on primary and secondary education (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2017; Nazir & Malik, 2020). This gap highlights the need to examine how teacher competence and student mental health interact to shape academic achievement in universities, where academic pressure and independence are considerably higher. To address this gap, the

present study investigates the influence of teacher competence on university students' academic achievement, with a specific focus on the mediating role of students' mental health. By applying a positivist, quantitative, cross-sectional approach, the study aims to provide empirical evidence that competent teachers foster not only better instructional experiences but also improved mental well-being among learners, ultimately enhancing their academic outcomes. The findings are expected to guide policymakers and higher education institutions in strengthening teacher development programs and expanding mental health support services to optimize student success.

Most previous studies have examined teacher competence and student mental health separately, without analyzing how they interact to influence academic achievement. Research has confirmed that competent teachers enhance learning, and that mental well-being affects students' academic outcomes, but the combined effect remains unclear (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Eisenberg et al., 2021). Only limited studies have explored whether mental health acts as a mediator between teacher competence and university students' performance. Existing evidence mostly comes from school-level contexts rather than higher education (Roorda et al., 2017). Therefore, there is a clear gap in understanding this relationship within universities, particularly in South Asia. Following are the objectives of the study

1. To examine the association among the teachers' competence, mental health and academic achievement of students.
2. To determine whether students' mental health mediates the relationship between teacher competence and academic achievement in higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Teacher Competence and Academic Achievement

Teacher competence has long been recognized as a central factor influencing students' academic success in higher education. Competent teachers demonstrate strong mastery of subject matter,

effective instructional strategies, and the ability to design engaging learning environments that promote deep understanding. Research consistently shows that when teachers possess high pedagogical and professional competence, students exhibit stronger learning outcomes and improved academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 2017). This highlights the importance of investing in qualified and well-trained faculty in universities.

Another important dimension of teacher competence is pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), which refers to teachers' ability to blend subject knowledge with effective teaching methods. Gess-Newsome et al. (2019) found that teachers with strong PCK are able to break down complex concepts into simpler forms, provide meaningful explanations, and anticipate students' misconceptions. This instructional clarity enhances students' academic achievement by ensuring they understand and apply the material effectively. Thus, PCK is considered a core component of academic quality in higher education.

In addition to instructional knowledge, teacher-student interaction plays a significant role in academic performance. Competent teachers build positive relationships, encourage open communication, and support students' learning needs. Studies show that supportive teacher-student interactions foster motivation, confidence, and academic engagement (Roorda et al., 2017). When students perceive their teachers as approachable and helpful, they demonstrate higher levels of participation and improved academic outcomes.

Furthermore, teacher competence contributes to effective classroom management, which ensures a conducive learning environment. Managing classroom discipline, time, and resources requires strong professional skills that directly influence students' ability to focus and learn. Hattie (2015) emphasized that effective classroom management ranks among the top predictors of learner achievement. Therefore, competent teachers create structured and supportive environments that enhance academic performance.

Lastly, continuing professional development (CPD) strengthens teacher competence over time. Universities that invest in regular training programs, workshops, and skill-based seminars see significant improvements in teaching outcomes. Nazir and Malik (2020) found that professional development enhances teachers' instructional skills, confidence, and adaptability to modern teaching methods, leading to better academic results among students. As higher education evolves, CPD remains crucial for maintaining teacher competence and improving student performance.

Students' Mental Health and Academic Achievement

Mental health is a critical factor affecting university students' academic success. Students who experience high levels of stress, anxiety, or depression often struggle with concentration, motivation, and academic engagement. Auerbach et al. (2018) reported that nearly one-third of university students worldwide face mental health challenges that significantly impact their learning outcomes. This suggests that mental well-being is essential for academic stability and productivity in higher education.

Mental health issues such as stress and anxiety directly influence cognitive functioning. Eisenberg et al. (2021) found that students with poor mental well-being are more likely to have reduced memory retention, impaired decision-making, and diminished academic performance. These psychological burdens can interfere with a student's ability to meet academic demands, complete assignments, and perform well on assessments. Thus, mental health is both a personal and academic concern in universities.

Additionally, emotional well-being influences academic motivation and persistence. Students with better mental health demonstrate stronger intrinsic motivation, greater self-regulation, and sustained academic effort. Regehr et al. (2017) highlighted that mental health interventions significantly reduce stress and improve motivation, leading to better academic performance. Therefore, mental health support

systems contribute not only to emotional stability but also to academic success.

Social support systems also play a vital role in students' mental health. Universities that provide counseling units, peer support programs, and psychological services help students manage stress effectively. When students feel emotionally supported, they are more likely to remain engaged, confident, and academically successful. Institutions with strong mental health services report lower dropout rates and higher levels of academic achievement (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018).

Lastly, the increasing attention to mental health in higher education underscores the need for integrated academic and psychological support. Studies emphasize that mental health challenges hinder academic progress unless universities create learning environments that promote emotional well-being. This suggests that mental health is not a separate issue but closely linked to learning outcomes. Supporting mental well-being is therefore critical to improving academic achievement across higher education.

Mediating Role of Mental Health between Teacher Competence and Academic Achievement

The mediating role of mental health suggests that teacher competence affects academic achievement indirectly through its influence on students' psychological well-being. Competent teachers provide emotional support, reduce stress, and create positive learning environments that enhance mental health. Roorda et al. (2017) found that supportive teacher-student relationships improve students' emotional stability, which in turn enhances academic performance. This indicates that mental health acts as a bridge between teaching quality and academic success.

Teacher competence also contributes to reducing academic stress among students. When teachers explain concepts clearly, provide timely feedback, and manage classrooms effectively, students feel more confident and experience lower anxiety. Hattie (2015) noted that clear instruction and constructive feedback significantly reduce

academic pressure. As stress levels decrease, students' mental well-being improves, which supports higher academic achievement.

Furthermore, competent teachers foster motivation and engagement, which are crucial components of mental well-being. Students who feel encouraged and valued by their teachers exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation and academic involvement. This emotional engagement translates into better performance, showing that mental health is influenced by teaching quality (Roorda et al., 2017). Therefore, motivation serves as a psychological pathway linking teacher competence to academic outcomes.

Another important aspect is the emotional climate of the classroom. Competent teachers create an atmosphere of respect, trust, and open communication. Such environments reduce emotional distress and promote psychological safety, enabling students to participate actively and perform well academically. Studies suggest that emotionally safe classrooms contribute significantly to improved mental health and learning outcomes (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2017).

Finally, the mediating role of mental health highlights the need for integrated approaches combining academic and psychological support. Universities must focus on both improving teaching quality and strengthening mental health services. This combined approach ensures that teacher competence enhances academic achievement not only directly but also through improved student mental well-being. Understanding this mediation provides deeper insight into the mechanisms that shape learning in higher education.

Theoretical framework

This study is guided by social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), which emphasizes the dynamic interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors in the learning process. According to this theory, students' academic achievement is influenced not only by their individual abilities but also by the quality of instructional support provided by teachers. Competent teachers act as critical environmental

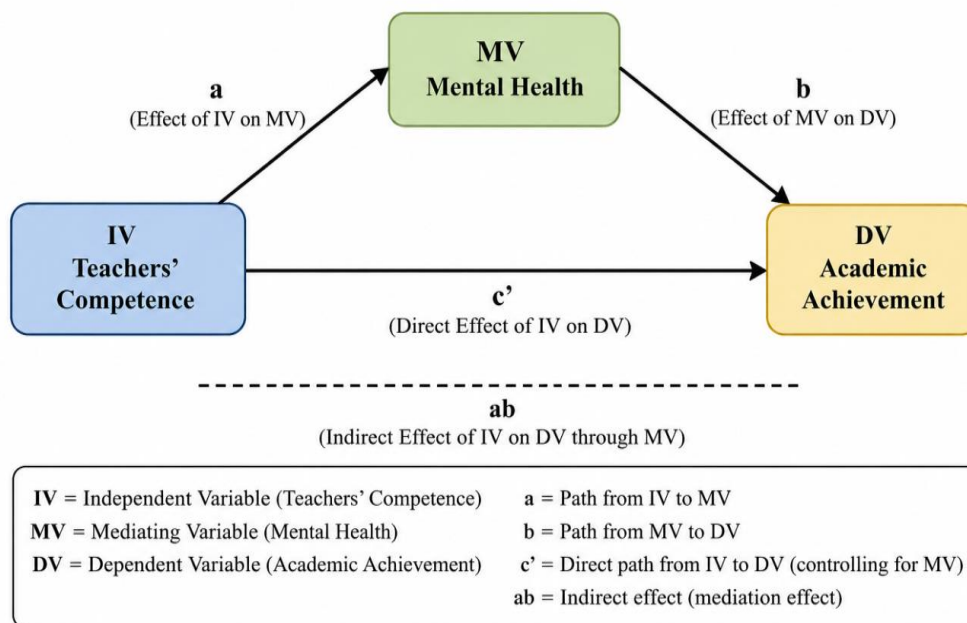
agents who enhance students’ learning behaviors, motivation, and self-efficacy through effective teaching practices, guidance, and constructive feedback. Additionally, students’ mental health serves as a mediating factor, representing the personal component of the theory; emotional stability, reduced stress, and higher motivation

enable students to better engage with learning and achieve academically. This framework underpins the examination of how teacher competence and mental well-being jointly influence academic performance in higher education institutions.

Conceptual Model

Meditation Model

IV: Teachers’ Competence → MV: Mental Health → DV: Academic Achievement



Research Methodology

This study follows a positivism research philosophy, which emphasizes objective observation, quantifiable data, and the identification of cause-and-effect relationships (Creswell, 2014). The study is Correlational research design. The study targeted a population of 5,354 individuals, including 335 teachers and 5,019 students from five universities. A sample of 400 participants, consisting of 98 teachers and 302 students, was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure representation across universities and participant categories. Data were collected using structured questionnaires adapted to measure teacher

competence, students’ mental health, and academic achievement. The validity of the instruments was assessed through experts’ judgment by ensuring that the items accurately represented the constructs under investigation. Reliability analysis indicated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha values of .785 for the MI-based teaching scale, .823 for the teachers’ attitude scale, and .783 for the academic performance scale. After data cleaning and coding, the dataset was analyzed using a series of statistical techniques. Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed to determine the strength and direction of associations among the primary variables. To

assess the mediating role of teachers' attitudes in the relationship between MI-based teaching and students' performance, two approaches were utilized. First, Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal-step model was applied to establish the basic

mediation structure. Second, to strengthen the analysis and obtain more robust estimates, Hayes' (2015) PROCESS macro was executed, providing bootstrap-based confidence intervals for mediation effects.

Results

Table 1: Data normality test

Variable	Statistic (K-S)	p-value	Interpretation
Teacher Competence	0.061	0.200	Data is normally distributed
Students' Mental Health	0.054	0.200	Data is normally distributed
Academic Achievement	0.067	0.190	Data is normally distributed

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicate that all p-values are greater than 0.05, confirming that teacher competence, students' mental health, and academic achievement follow

a normal distribution. Therefore, parametric tests such as Pearson Correlation and mediation analysis are appropriate for this study.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Teacher Competence	Students' Mental Health	Academic Achievement
Teacher Competence	1.00	0.48**	0.56**
Students' Mental Health	0.48**	1.00	0.52**
Academic Achievement	0.56**	0.52**	1.00

The results show that teacher competence has a moderate positive correlation with academic achievement (r = 0.56), indicating that students taught by competent teachers tend to perform better academically. Teacher competence also shows a positive relationship with students' mental health (r = 0.48), suggesting that

supportive and skilled teachers contribute to better emotional well-being among students. Additionally, students' mental health has a significant positive correlation with academic achievement (r = 0.52), confirming that emotionally stable and mentally healthy students perform better in their studies.

Table 3: Mediation Analysis (Baron and Kenny Model, 1986)

Predictor		B	SE	β	p-value
Teacher Competence	↔ Academic Achievement (Path c)	0.47	0.06	0.56	.000
Teacher Competence	↔ Mental Health (Path a)	0.41	0.07	0.48	.000
Mental Health	↔ Academic Achievement (Path b)	0.29	0.05	0.35	.000
Teacher Competence	↔ Mental Health ↔ Academic Achievement (Path c')	0.31	0.06	0.37	.000

The mediation findings show that teacher competence significantly predicts academic

achievement (Path c). Teacher competence also significantly improves students' mental health

(Path a), which in turn positively influences academic performance (Path b). When mental health is added as a mediator, the direct effect of teacher competence on academic achievement decreases but remains significant (Path c'), demonstrating **partial mediation**. This means that competent teachers improve students' academic performance both directly and indirectly through better mental health. When students experience supportive teaching practices, they report reduced stress, increased motivation, and more emotional stability, all of which enhance their academic outcomes.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that teacher competence has a significant and positive effect on university students' academic achievement. This aligns with previous research showing that well-prepared, pedagogically skilled, and subject-knowledgeable teachers create structured and engaging learning environments that foster higher academic outcomes among students. Competent teachers are better able to deliver content clearly, utilize appropriate teaching strategies, and provide timely academic support, which collectively enhances students' understanding and performance. These results are consistent with international studies confirming that teacher quality remains one of the strongest determinants of student success in higher education settings (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Kim & Lee, 2018). The study also found a significant positive relationship between teacher competence and students' mental health, indicating that effective teachers not only improve learning but also contribute to students' emotional stability. Supportive teacher behavior—such as empathy, constructive feedback, and approachable communication—helps reduce students' anxiety, academic stress, and feelings of isolation. This finding resonates with work by Eisenberg et al. (2021) and Rahman & Karim (2022), who argued that the quality of teacher-student interaction plays a critical role in shaping students' psychological well-being. Students who experience positive mental health show better concentration, motivation, and resilience, which

ultimately strengthens their academic performance. The mediation analysis revealed that students' mental health partially mediates the relationship between teacher competence and academic achievement. This means that teacher competence influences academic outcomes directly through instructional quality and indirectly through its effect on students' emotional well-being. When students feel mentally supported, their ability to process information, manage pressure, and remain academically engaged increases. This reinforces contemporary educational theories emphasizing that academic success is not solely a cognitive process but is also shaped by socio-emotional factors (Zins & Elias, 2020). Therefore, the study highlights the need for universities to strengthen teacher training programs and ensure that mental health support systems are integrated within the academic environment to maximize student performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that teacher competence plays a decisive role in improving university students' academic achievement, both directly through effective instructional practices and indirectly through its positive influence on students' mental health. Competent teachers foster clarity, motivation, and academic engagement while simultaneously creating emotionally supportive learning environments that reduce stress and enhance well-being. The partial mediation effect of mental health confirms that students perform better when they are taught by skilled teachers and when their psychological needs are acknowledged and supported. Overall, the findings highlight that academic success in higher education is shaped not only by instructional quality but also by students' emotional stability. It is recommended that universities should prioritize continuous professional development programs for teachers and strengthen on-campus mental health support services—such as counseling units and awareness programs—to enhance both teaching quality and students' emotional well-being.

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest about the publication of this research work. The research was conducted objectively and no personal or financial relationships influenced the findings.

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