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Building Learning Loyalty through Teacher Competence: The Role of Teacher Role Modeling and Student Satisfaction

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Abstract
Sustaining students' commitment to learning remains a persistent challenge in Islamic Religious Education, particularly after the disruptions of the pandemic period. This study examines how teacher competence shapes student learning loyalty, and whether teacher role modeling and student satisfaction help explain that relationship at SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya. A quantitative survey was distributed to all 120 students through saturated sampling, and the data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling with SmartPLS. The results were unexpected. Teacher competence showed no significant effect on either student satisfaction or learning loyalty. Teacher role modeling, by contrast, exerted a strong and significant influence on both, and student satisfaction significantly predicted loyalty while mediating the link between role modeling and loyalty. What students seem to value is not technical teaching skill alone but the moral example their teachers set in daily conduct. One caveat deserves attention, namely that the role modeling construct fell short of conventional validity thresholds, so its dominant role should be read as indicative rather than conclusive. Schools are therefore encouraged to treat teachers' character formation and exemplary behavior as professional standards on par with pedagogical competence, not as an afterthought.

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INTRODUCTION

Student commitment to learning has never been a guaranteed product of schooling, and the problem feels especially sharp in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has long insisted that national education carries a dual mandate, namely transmitting knowledge and cultivating noble character (Pratomo et al., 2021; Suyatno et al., 2019; Wica & Marzuki, 2021). PAI bears the institutional weight of both, serving as the primary arena where religious values, moral discipline, and social ethics are formed rather than merely taught. Handayani et al. (2022)contended that the success of Islamic education must be measured beyond cognitive achievement to include students' sustained behavioral and ethical commitments. That argument has gained fresh urgency since the pandemic. Maldonado & De Witte (2022) showed, through standardized test data, that school closures produced measurable learning losses and widened educational inequality, and

these losses left a residue of weakened engagement once classrooms reopened. Conditions at SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya echo this pattern, where student enthusiasm fluctuates, participation in PAI classes stays uneven, and learning commitment has yet to stabilize. Imaduddin et al. (2021) reported comparable signs in Indonesian secondary schools, noting declining attendance motivation and reduced face-to-face participation after the return from online learning. Read together, these conditions raise a pointed question about what actually sustains students' commitment over time, a construct this study terms learning loyalty and defines as students' active, persistent, and consistent engagement in the learning process (Chen et al., 2024; Eum, 2023; Osman et al., 2024).

Scholarship on student loyalty and its antecedents has grown substantially over the past two decades, though its lessons have not transferred evenly across educational levels (Hu & Widtayakornbundit, 2024; Moore, 2022; Rasa et al., 2025). One recurring thread treats student satisfaction as a precondition for loyalty. Pai et al. (2022) framed satisfaction as an affective judgment of educational service quality, shaped by teaching, teacher interaction, facilities, and assessment. Supriyanto et al. (2025) found that satisfaction predicts continuance intention and loyalty in higher education, and Supriyanto et al. (2024) reported the same dynamic at the school level in Indonesia. A second thread positions teacher competence as a primary driver of that satisfaction. Darling-Hammond (2021) demonstrated that teachers with strong pedagogical and professional competence markedly elevate students' learning experiences, a finding that Imaduddin et al. (2021) extended into Islamic school settings. A third and comparatively neglected thread concerns teacher role modeling. Engels et al. (2021) Social Learning Theory holds that people form attitudes and behaviors by observing credible models. Gehlbach et al. (2022) showed that the quality of teacher-student relationships strengthens trust and classroom engagement, Sholeh et al. (2024) while found that PAI teacher role modeling shapes students' religious character and learning motivation. These strands cohere with AlSokkar et al. (2024) Expectation Confirmation Theory, which holds that satisfaction arises when experience meets or exceeds expectation. Taken together, they suggest that teachers who are both professionally competent and morally exemplary create experiences that surpass expectations, yielding satisfaction and, in turn, loyalty, a satisfaction-to-loyalty pathway that Sajjanit & Rompho (2025) confirmed within educational services.

Three gaps nonetheless persist. Earlier work has mostly treated teacher competence as a standalone predictor of satisfaction or learning outcomes without admitting teacher role modeling as a theoretically and empirically distinct variable in its own right. Loyalty research in education has clustered at the higher education level and around institutional loyalty, leaving learning loyalty at the school and madrasah level largely unexamined (Seow & Hussain, 2024). Few studies have tested student satisfaction as the mechanism that links both teacher competence and teacher role modeling to learning loyalty within a single structural model, and fewer still have done so in the PAI context (Hanaysha & Eli, 2025). Handayani et al. (2022) explicitly called for PAI learning frameworks that account at once for teachers' professional quality and their moral exemplarity, yet that call remains largely unanswered in the quantitative literature.

This study responds to those gaps by examining how teacher competence and teacher role modeling shape student learning loyalty, with student satisfaction as the mediating variable, among students of SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya. Its contribution is threefold. The study advances learning loyalty as an empirically testable construct at the junior high school level within an Islamic educational context, places teacher role modeling alongside teacher competence as a structurally equivalent predictor rather than a supplementary one, and tests student satisfaction as the pathway through which these antecedents convert into long-term learning commitment. The findings are

intended to enrich the literature on Islamic educational management and to give school leaders an evidence base for developing PAI teachers in a more holistic way.

The theoretical architecture of this study rests on two complementary frameworks. Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains how students internalize behavioral dispositions and learning commitments through observing teachers as credible role models in daily conduct (Virginia Koutroubas & Michael Galanakis, 2022). Pan et al. (2024) Expectation Confirmation Theory accounts for how the alignment between students' expectations and their actual learning experiences generates satisfaction or its absence. Read together, these frameworks suggest that learning loyalty in PAI is not simply a product of instructional quality but a cumulative outcome of how students perceive and internalize the totality of their teachers' presence, both professional and moral. The structural relationships derived from this theoretical synthesis are mapped in the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1, which serves as the empirical blueprint for the hypothesis testing undertaken in this study.

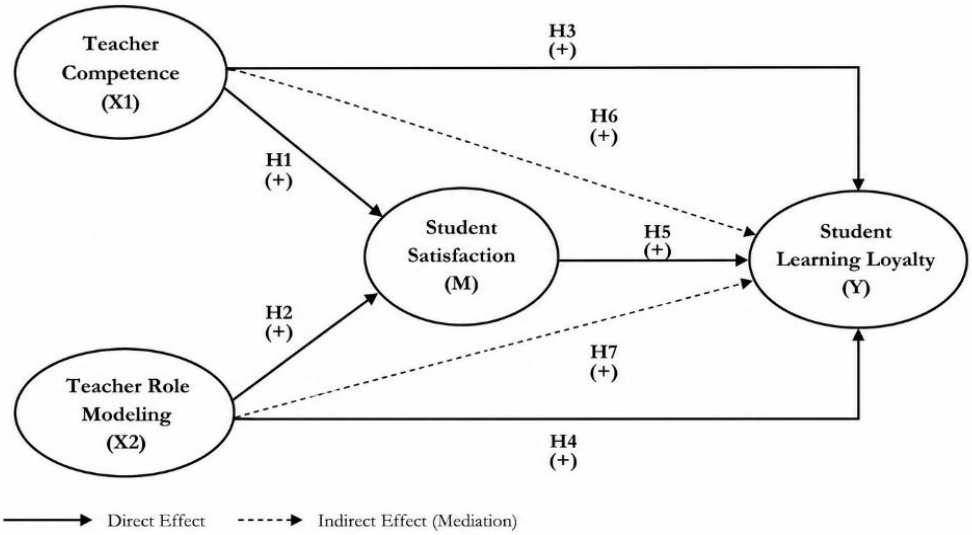

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

RESEARCHS METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, a choice grounded in the study's primary objective of empirically examining the causal structure underlying the relationships among teacher competence, teacher role modeling, student satisfaction, and student learning loyalty. Explanatory research is particularly suited to this purpose because it moves beyond mere description to interrogate the directional and predictive nature of inter-variable relationships (Dahan, 2024; González-Díaz & Bustamante-Cabrera, 2021; Toyon, 2021). The research was conducted at SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya, a junior high school operating within an Islamic educational framework in East Java, Indonesia. This setting was deliberately selected given its contextual relevance to the phenomenon under investigation, particularly the role of PAI teachers whose responsibilities extend well beyond content delivery to encompass moral guidance and character formation among adolescent learners.

The study's population comprised the entire student body of SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya, totaling 120 students. Rather than drawing a subset, this study applied a

saturated sampling technique, meaning all 120 students were enlisted as respondents. This decision was justified by the relatively compact and fully accessible nature of the population, a condition under which saturated sampling is not only permissible but methodologically advisable to maximize data representativeness and minimize sampling error (Al omari, 2021; Földváry, 2021; Pratama & Oktora, 2022). Data were gathered through a structured closed-ended questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale, anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire operationalized four latent constructs: teacher competence, whose indicators were adapted from (König et al., 2020); teacher role modeling, whose indicators were drawn from character education literature indexed in SINTA; student satisfaction, measured using the framework developed by (Negm, 2023); and student learning loyalty, operationalized based on the dimensions proposed by (Khan et al., 2023). Each indicator set was selected to reflect the construct's theoretical domain while remaining contextually grounded in the Indonesian educational setting.

Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS software. This analytical method was preferred for two principal reasons: its flexibility in handling non-normal data distributions and its well-established suitability for small to medium sample sizes, both of which characterize the present study's data conditions (Abu Arra & Şişman, 2025; Rajh-Weber et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). The analytical sequence followed a two-stage process. The outer model was evaluated first to establish measurement quality through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability assessments, with indicator retention decisions guided by the minimum loading threshold of 0.60 (Saeed et al., 2022). Once the measurement model was deemed adequate, the inner model was examined through path coefficient estimation, R^2 values, effect sizes, and predictive relevance indices. Mediation hypotheses were subsequently tested using the bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples, a procedure that generates bias-corrected confidence intervals and is widely regarded as the most robust approach for indirect effect testing within the PLS-SEM framework (Sarstedt et al., 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The evaluation of the measurement model was conducted in two sequential stages, beginning with the assessment of construct reliability and validity, followed by the examination of indicator validity through outer loading analysis. The first stage aimed to determine whether each latent construct in the model demonstrated sufficient internal consistency and convergent validity prior to structural path estimation. The results of this assessment are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	AVE
Student Satisfaction	0.890	0.891	0.919	0.695
Learning Loyalty	0.893	0.894	0.918	0.653
X1 Teacher Competence	0.862	0.884	0.889	0.574
X2 Teacher Role Modeling	0.686	0.866	0.725	0.415

Based on Table 1, the results of the construct reliability and validity test indicate that the variables of Student Satisfaction, Learning Loyalty, and Teacher Competence

have met the required reliability and validity criteria, as shown by Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70, as well as AVE values above 0.50. Meanwhile, the variable Teacher Role Modeling has a Composite Reliability value of 0.725, which still meets the acceptable threshold. However, its Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.686 and AVE value of 0.415 indicate that convergent validity has not yet reached an optimal level, suggesting the need for further evaluation of its measurement indicators. Overall, the measurement model can be considered adequate and suitable for further structural model testing.

Table 2. Outer Loading 1

Indicator	Student Satisfaction	Learning Loyalty	X1 Teacher Competence	X2 Teacher Role Modeling
M1	0.826			
M2	0.856			
M3	0.841			
M4	0.830			
M5	0.814			
X1.1			0.775	
X1.2			0.782	
X1.3			0.651	
X1.4			0.822	
X1.5			0.655	
X1.6			0.839	
X2.1				-0.072
X2.2				-0.192
X2.3				-0.234
X2.4				0.827
X2.5				0.774
X2.6				0.840
X2.7				0.793
X2.8				0.777
Y1		0.798		
Y2		0.808		
Y3		0.816		
Y4		0.824		
Y5		0.774		
Y6		0.826		

Based on the outer loading test results presented in Table 2, the initial measurement model shows that most indicators had loading values above 0.60 and were therefore considered valid according to Chin (1998). However, indicators X2.1, X2.2, and X2.3 had negative loading values, indicating that they did not meet the required criteria and were consequently removed from the model. The model was then re-estimated using only the valid indicators. To further illuminate the measurement structure at this initial stage, the path diagram generated from the first-stage PLS-SEM estimation is presented in Figure 1.

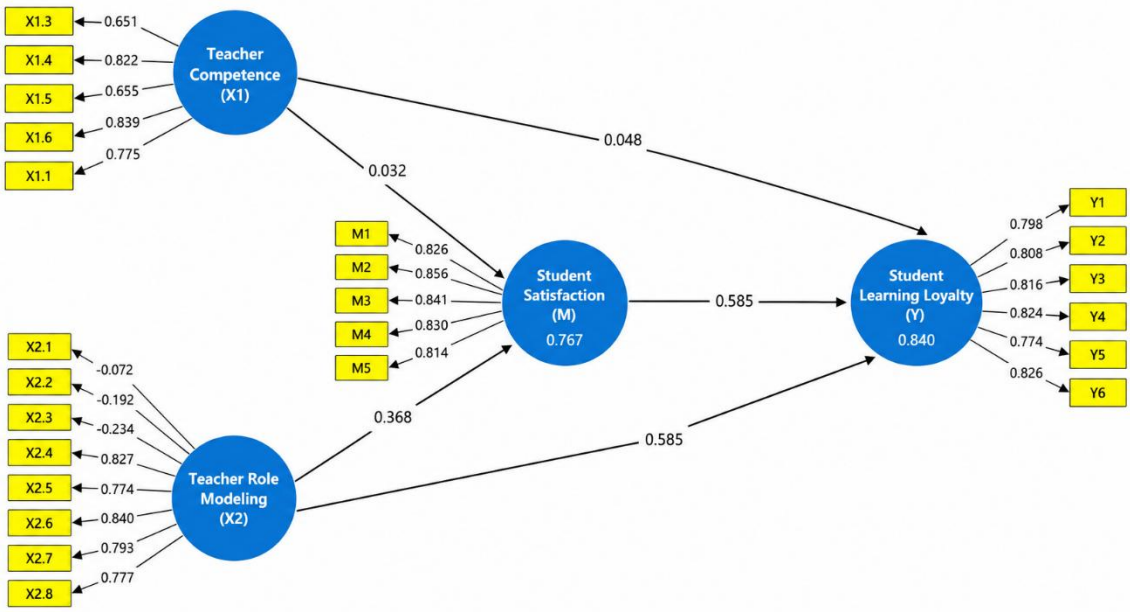

Figure 1. First-Stage Outer Loading

As illustrated in Figure 1, the negative loading values of indicators X2.1, X2.2, and X2.3 are clearly discernible, confirming their inconsistent directional relationship with the Teacher Role Modeling construct. Given that such negative loadings fundamentally undermine the construct's measurement integrity, these three indicators were systematically removed before proceeding to the second stage of model re-estimation.

Table 3. Outer Loading 2

Indicator	Student Satisfaction	Learning Loyalty	X1 Teacher Competence	X2 Teacher Role Modeling
M1	0.826			
M2	0.856			
M3	0.841			
M4	0.830			
M5	0.814			
X1.1			0.775	
X1.2			0.782	
X1.3			0.651	
X1.4			0.822	
X1.5			0.655	
X1.6			0.839	
X2.4				0.828
X2.5				0.779
X2.6				0.848
X2.7				0.793
X2.8				0.779
Y1		0.798		
Y2		0.808		
Y3		0.816		
Y4		0.824		
Y5		0.774		
Y6		0.826		

Based on the outer loading test results presented in Table 3, all indicators retained in the final model have loading values above 0.60 and therefore meet the

convergent validity requirement according to Chin (1998). Indicators with negative loading values in the initial test (X2.1, X2.2, and X2.3) were removed because they showed inconsistent relationships with the Teacher Role Modeling construct. After the model modification process, all remaining indicators were considered valid and appropriate for further analysis. Following the removal of the three invalid indicators, the measurement model was re-estimated to produce a refined structural configuration. The resulting path diagram from the second-stage PLS-SEM estimation is presented in Figure 2.

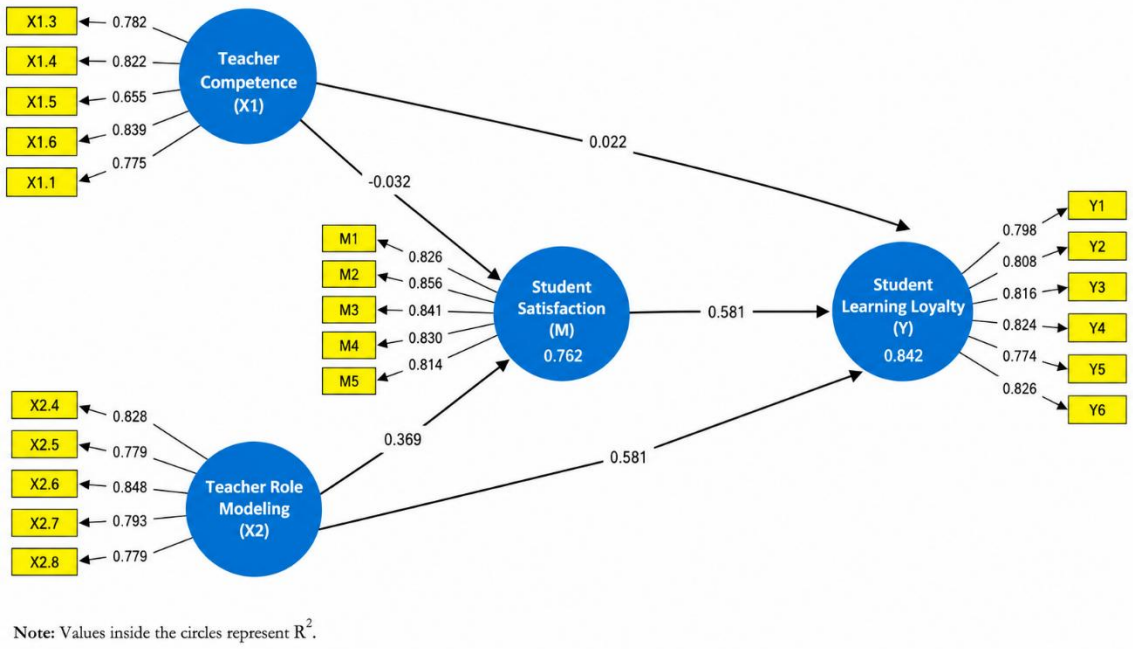

Figure 2. Second-Stage Outer Loading

As depicted in Figure 2, all remaining indicators now demonstrate positive and sufficiently robust loading values, confirming the improved validity and coherence of the refined measurement model. Of particular note, the path coefficient from Teacher Role Modeling to Student Satisfaction is remarkably strong (β = 0.867), while its direct path to Learning Loyalty also remains meaningful (β = 0.369). In contrast, the paths originating from Teacher Competence — both toward Student Satisfaction (β = -0.032) and Learning Loyalty (β = 0.022) — are negligibly small, visually reinforcing the statistical non-significance reported in the path coefficient analysis. The R-square values embedded within the diagram further confirm the model's strong explanatory capacity, with Student Satisfaction accounting for 76.2% of explained variance and Learning Loyalty reaching 84.2%, lending additional confidence to the overall structural model prior to hypothesis testing.

Based on Table 3, the outer loading values of all indicators for each variable are greater than 0.60, indicating sufficient validity to explain their respective latent constructs. The following presents the output of the outer loading factors.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Variable	Student Satisfaction	Learning Loyalty	X1 Teacher Competence	X2 Teacher Role Modeling
Student Satisfaction	**0.833**			
Learning Loyalty	0.899	**0.808**		

X1 Teacher Competence	-0.159	-0.125	**0.758**	
X2 Teacher Role Modeling	0.872	0.872	-0.146	**0.806**

Based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion test results in Table 4, the square root of the AVE values on the diagonal should be higher than the correlations with other constructs. The table shows that the Teacher Competence variable meets this criterion, as its diagonal value of 0.758 is higher than its correlations with other constructs. However, the variables Student Satisfaction (0.833), Learning Loyalty (0.808), and Teacher Role Modeling (0.806) do not fully meet the criterion because some inter-construct correlations are higher than the diagonal values. For example, the correlation between Student Satisfaction and Learning Loyalty is 0.899, while the correlation between Teacher Role Modeling and both Student Satisfaction and Learning Loyalty is 0.872.

These findings indicate that several constructs still share high conceptual similarity, meaning that discriminant validity has not been fully achieved. In other words, respondents may perceive some variables as closely related concepts. Therefore, further evaluation of overlapping indicators or additional testing using the HTMT criterion is recommended to ensure the model's discriminant validity.

Table 5. R-Square

Variable	R-square	Adjusted R-square
Student Satisfaction	0.762	0.758
Learning Loyalty	0.842	0.838

Based on Table 5 (R-Square), the R-square value for Student Satisfaction is 0.762, indicating that 76.2% of the variance in Student Satisfaction is explained by Teacher Competence and Teacher Role Modeling. Meanwhile, the R-square value for Learning Loyalty is 0.842, meaning that 84.2% of the variance in Learning Loyalty is explained by Teacher Competence, Teacher Role Modeling, and Student Satisfaction. These findings suggest that the model has strong explanatory power.

Table 6. Path Coefficients

Relationships Between Variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values
Student Satisfaction → Learning Loyalty	0.581	0.587	0.078	7.453	0.000
Teacher Competence (X1) → Student Satisfaction	-0.032	-0.041	0.046	0.706	0.480
Teacher Competence (X1) → Learning Loyalty	0.022	0.022	0.042	0.526	0.599
Teacher Role Modeling (X2) → Student Satisfaction	0.867	0.865	0.026	33.602	0.000
Teacher Role Modeling (X2) → Learning Loyalty	0.369	0.364	0.079	4.675	0.000

Based on the path coefficient test results in Table 6, Student Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on Learning Loyalty ($\beta = 0.581$; $p < 0.05$). Teacher Role Modeling also has a positive and significant effect on Student Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.867$; $p < 0.05$) and Learning Loyalty ($\beta = 0.369$; $p < 0.05$). Meanwhile, Teacher Competence does

not have a significant effect on Student Satisfaction (β = -0.032; p = 0.480) or Learning Loyalty (β = 0.022; p = 0.599). Therefore, in this study, Teacher Role Modeling is the dominant factor influencing both Student Satisfaction and Learning Loyalty.

Table 7. Indirect Effects

Mediation Relationships	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values
Teacher Competence (X1) → Student Satisfaction → Learning Loyalty	-0.019	-0.025	0.028	0.672	0.501
Teacher Role Modeling (X2) → Student Satisfaction → Learning Loyalty	0.504	0.508	0.069	7.348	0.000

Based on the results of the specific indirect effects test, Teacher Competence does not have a significant effect on Learning Loyalty through Student Satisfaction (β = -0.019; p = 0.501), indicating that Student Satisfaction does not mediate this relationship. In contrast, Teacher Role Modeling has a positive and significant effect on Learning Loyalty through Student Satisfaction (β = 0.504; p < 0.05), confirming that Student Satisfaction mediates the influence of Teacher Role Modeling on Learning Loyalty.

Discussion

Based on the hypothesis testing results, H1 was rejected because teacher competence did not have a significant effect on student satisfaction. This finding indicates that students at SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya do not evaluate learning satisfaction solely based on the teacher's mastery of subject matter, teaching methods, or assessment abilities, but also on the comfort of classroom interactions and the teacher's personal approach. At the early adolescent stage, students tend to need greater social attention and positive emotional relationships during the learning process. This result differs from the findings of Gehlbach et al. (2022) and Engels (2021), who identified teaching quality as an important determinant of student satisfaction.

Furthermore, H2 was accepted because teacher role modeling had a positive and significant effect on student satisfaction. This suggests that teachers who demonstrate honesty, discipline, politeness, fairness, and responsibility build positive student perceptions of Islamic Education learning at SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya. In the context of Islamic education, teachers are viewed not only as instructors but also as figures to be emulated (Virginia Koutroubas & Michael Galanakis, 2022). This finding is consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which explains that individuals learn through observing models considered worthy of imitation.

For H3, the hypothesis was rejected, as teacher competence did not significantly influence student learning loyalty. This indicates that learning loyalty does not automatically develop simply because teachers possess strong teaching skills. For students at SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya, learning loyalty appears to be shaped more by enjoyable learning experiences, close relationships with teachers, and a comfortable classroom atmosphere. Thus, teacher competence functions more as a basic prerequisite for instruction, whereas loyalty requires stronger emotional attachment. This finding differs from Pan (2024), who argued that academic quality can encourage student loyalty.

Meanwhile, H4 was accepted because teacher role modeling had a positive and significant effect on student learning loyalty. This means that the higher the exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers, the stronger students' commitment to remain

active and consistent in learning activities. In the context of SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya, teachers who serve as role models are more respected, trusted, and followed by students. Such conditions foster stronger attachment to both the subject matter and the learning process. This finding supports Rasa (2025), who stated that positive teacher–student relationships can enhance engagement and learning persistence.

Next, H5 was accepted because student satisfaction had a positive and significant effect on student learning loyalty. This indicates that students who feel satisfied with Islamic Education learning are more likely to participate enthusiastically in class, maintain learning commitment, and demonstrate positive attitudes toward the subject. At SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya, student satisfaction may emerge through a comfortable learning environment, positive teacher interactions, and instruction that meets student needs. This finding is in line with Supriyanto (2024), who emphasized that satisfaction is a major antecedent of loyalty.

In the mediation test, H6 was rejected because student satisfaction did not mediate the effect of teacher competence on student learning loyalty. This result suggests that teacher competence was not strong enough to substantially build student satisfaction, making its indirect effect on learning loyalty insignificant. In the context of SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya, students seem to value teacher attention, role modeling, and learning comfort more than technical teaching ability alone. This finding is consistent with Negm (2023), who explained that student satisfaction is more strongly influenced by communication, learning strategies, and teachers' personal characteristics than by technical competence alone.

Finally, H7 was accepted because student satisfaction was able to mediate the effect of teacher role modeling on student learning loyalty. This means that exemplary teacher behavior increases student satisfaction, which in turn promotes learning loyalty. For students at SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya, Islamic Education teachers who are friendly, disciplined, consistent, and positive role models create enjoyable learning experiences that make students satisfied and more committed to learning. This finding is supported by Virginia Koutroubas (2022), who emphasized the importance of role models in shaping behavior, and Rajh-Weber (2025), who explained that satisfaction serves as a bridge toward loyalty. Overall, this study confirms that in Islamic Education learning, teacher role modeling is more dominant than technical competence in fostering student learning loyalty.

Beyond the individual hypothesis findings reported above, this study offers a contribution that warrants explicit recognition within the broader landscape of Islamic educational management scholarship. The prevailing discourse in educational management has long privileged teacher competence as the primary lever of instructional quality and student outcomes, a position reflected in policy frameworks from UNESCO to OECD and embedded in teacher certification systems across Indonesia. What this study demonstrates, however, is that within the specific moral and relational ecology of Islamic Religious Education, technical competence operates as a necessary but insufficient condition for building student loyalty. The more decisive variable is one that educational management literature has historically treated as secondary or supplementary: teacher role modeling.

By positioning uswah hasanah not merely as a pedagogical ideal but as a structurally testable and empirically significant predictor of both student satisfaction and learning loyalty, this study introduces a framework that is simultaneously grounded in Islamic educational philosophy and amenable to quantitative verification. This dual grounding represents a genuine methodological and conceptual contribution, as it bridges the often-separate conversations between Islamic education values and modern

educational management science. Furthermore, the study's introduction of learning loyalty as a measurable construct at the junior high school level fills a concrete gap in a literature that has confined loyalty research almost exclusively to higher education institutions. For educational managers and school principals, the practical implication is consequential: teacher development programs designed around competency metrics alone are structurally incomplete, and meaningful improvement in student learning loyalty requires equal institutional investment in teachers' character formation, ethical conduct, and relational quality as professional standards in their own right.

CONCLUSION

The persistent challenge of sustaining student engagement and learning commitment in Islamic Religious Education ultimately points to a question that this study sought to answer: what truly drives students to remain loyal to the learning process? The findings offer a clear and somewhat sobering answer. Teacher competence, despite its theoretical prominence in educational quality frameworks, did not significantly shape either student satisfaction or learning loyalty at SMP Romly Tamim Surabaya. It was teacher role modeling that proved decisive, exerting strong direct effects on both outcomes and operating further through student satisfaction as a meaningful mediating pathway. Students, it appears, are not merely passive recipients of instructional technique; they are keen observers of who their teachers are as human beings. For school leaders and policymakers, the implication is both practical and urgent: teacher development programs must move beyond pedagogical training to cultivate character, integrity, and exemplary conduct as core professional standards, for it is through these qualities that genuine and lasting student learning loyalty is built.

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