

## **Influence of Cultural Communication Style on Marital Satisfaction among Muslim Couples on Malaysia's East Coast**

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**Abstract:** The Malaysian Family Declaration (LPPKN, 2019) emphasises family well-being based on justice, honesty, and love to strengthen family bonds. However, rising divorce rates among Muslim couples in Southeast Asia, particularly on Malaysia's East Coast, highlight the critical role of effective communication in marital stability. Recent data from the Majlis Keselamatan Negara (2023) indicates a nearly 20% increase in divorce cases among Muslim couples in Terengganu from 2022 to 2023, with communication issues identified as a major contributing factor. This study explores how cultural communication styles influence marital satisfaction among Muslim couples in Terengganu, focusing on the cultural factors that shape these dynamics in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. A quantitative survey of 191 married school teachers in Terengganu was conducted using purposive sampling and tools such as the Communication Questionnaire and Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale to assess communication patterns and marital satisfaction. Statistical analysis revealed that communication style accounts for 55.4% of marital satisfaction. The findings emphasise open communication and conflict avoidance in promoting marital harmony, reflecting broader Southeast Asian cultural trends. These insights contribute to the development of culturally tailored family modules that enhance empathy, communication, and marital satisfaction, serving as models for intercultural communication in diverse societies.

**Keywords:** Communication Styles, Marital Satisfaction, Muslim, Malaysia

### **INTRODUCTION**

Effective communication is crucial for marital stability across cultures. In Southeast Asia, particularly among Muslim communities, communication styles deeply rooted in cultural values play a significant role in shaping marital satisfaction and stability. Based on records from the Majlis Keselamatan Negara (2023), from 2020 until October 2021, a total of 6,565 divorce cases have occurred in Terengganu among Muslim couples. The highest number of cases was recorded in Kuala Terengganu (1,923 cases), followed by Kemaman (1,151 cases), and Dungun (1,003 cases). Couples identified in these cases range between the ages of 21 and 65, with communication issues cited as a primary contributing factor. Among the factors that lead to divorce in Terengganu, Malaysia, are irresponsible attitudes, lack of religiosity, communication problems between husband and wife, third-party interference, and various socioeconomic issues (MKN, 2023). Regarding communication issues, Suzana et al. (2020) claimed that communication apprehension significantly reduces marital satisfaction,

highlighting the importance of open dialogue. It is not surprising, then, that communication issues are reported as one of the primary factors triggering divorce due to misunderstandings between spouses (Nor Syaibah et al., 2016). A persistent concern is how, in the age of technology, excessive time spent on gadgets can affect communication style and marital satisfaction (Kılıçarslan & Parmaksız, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to explore how communication styles influence marital satisfaction among Muslim couples in Terengganu, in an effort to address the rising divorce rates.

The Malaysian Family Declaration (LPPKN, 2019) emphasizes values such as justice, honesty, and love as foundations of family well-being. Communication issues, however, remain a significant challenge, as shown by the 20% increase in divorce cases among Muslim couples in Terengganu from 2022 to 2023. This study examines communication styles and marital satisfaction levels among Muslim couples in Terengganu, focusing on cultural nuances that shape these dynamics within Malaysia and potentially across Southeast Asia. Using a quantitative approach, a survey was conducted with 191 married school teachers, employing purposive sampling and instruments like the Communication Questionnaire and Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale. Data analysis via SPSS revealed high levels of communication and marital satisfaction, with communication style accounting for a 55.4% influence on marital satisfaction. The findings underscore the significance of open communication and conflict avoidance in fostering marital harmony, reflecting broader Southeast Asian cultural trends where culturally adaptive communication styles enhance marital stability.

This study's findings are valuable for the community, the Terengganu Islamic Religious Affairs Department, and related ministries. They suggest a need for culturally tailored family modules to support empathy, understanding, and effective communication strategies. By exploring culturally embedded communication styles, this study also aims to contribute insights into intercultural understanding and global consciousness, offering models for intercultural communication efforts that could enhance marital satisfaction and stability in culturally diverse societies.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the influence of communication styles on the marital satisfaction of husbands and wives in Terengganu. Specifically, this article aims to:

1. Examine the communication styles and levels of marital satisfaction among husbands and wives in Terengganu.
2. Identify how communication styles impact marital satisfaction within this region.
3. Explore the constructs of communication styles and their effects on the marital satisfaction of couples in Terengganu.

## **COMMUNICATION STYLE AND MARITAL SATISFACTION**

Communication style refers to an individual's ability to effectively convey messages and meanings, both efficiently and symbolically. High-quality communication fosters closeness between couples, allowing them to share thoughts and feelings, thereby enhancing intimacy. Furthermore, effective communication can prevent misunderstandings during marital conflicts

(Baghipour, 2010). Communication styles can be categorized into two main strategies: open communication, which includes sharing feelings with one's partner, and positive communication, characterized by polite and cheerful interactions without criticism, often termed as conflict avoidance communication. This contrasts with negative communication styles that can exacerbate conflicts (Canary & Stafford, 1992). Liu (2021) posits that cultural communication styles are deeply influenced by underlying collective values and individualistic tendencies within a society. In the context of Muslim communities on Malaysia's East Coast, where collective values such as harmony, respect, and mutual understanding are emphasized, communication styles that prioritize conflict avoidance and consensus-building are essential for marital satisfaction. His research suggests that adopting culturally adaptive communication strategies fosters not only marital stability but also aligns with the global consciousness of understanding diverse cultural practices. In this study, communication style encompasses open communication and conflict avoidance among husbands and wives residing in Terengganu.

Marital satisfaction is defined as the degree to which a husband or wife perceives their relationship with their partner as fulfilling and conducive to building a functional family. It is often represented by two dimensions: personal factors, such as compatibility, intimacy, personality traits, and marital values, and functional family factors, which include effective communication, roles and responsibilities, and problem-solving. Research by Al-Darmaki et al. (2014) confirms that these dimensions are adequate for understanding the construct of marital satisfaction. In this study, marital satisfaction refers to the subjective feelings of contentment and happiness experienced by individuals in their marital relationship with their partner.

### **Theoretical Perspectives of Communication Style and Marital Satisfaction**

This study relies on *Canary and Stafford's Communication Theory* (1992), which emphasizes the significant role of communication strategies in relationship satisfaction. According to this theory, communication patterns, such as openness and conflict avoidance are key predictors of marital stability and satisfaction. Their work highlights that communication strategies can either build intimacy and trust or conversely, hinder relationship satisfaction if negative communication styles dominate.

In marital relationships, communication style can be categorized into two primary dimensions; open communication and conflict avoidance. Open communication, such as sharing feelings with a partner, is fundamental for emotional intimacy. Conflict avoidance, characterized by behaviours that minimize confrontation or criticism, is also crucial in sustaining marital peace (Canary & Stafford, 1992). In the context of this study, communication style refers specifically to these strategies; open communication and conflict avoidance employed by married couples in Terengganu. These dimensions directly relate to the theoretical framework outlined by Canary and Stafford, where communication practices determine the quality and satisfaction of the marital relationship. Marital satisfaction, as defined by Al-Darmaki et al. (2014), refers to the degree to which partners perceive their relationship as fulfilling their personal and family needs. The study draws on Al-Darmaki's Model of Marital Satisfaction (2014), which posits that satisfaction within a marriage is influenced by both personal factors (such as compatibility, intimacy, personality traits, and marriage values) and functional family factors (such as effective communication, role distribution, and problem-solving). Al-Darmaki's model

emphasizes that these two factors are sufficiently comprehensive to measure marital satisfaction. This theory reinforces the importance of communication as a functional component that contributes to overall marital happiness.

These theories underscore the critical role of communication strategies in fostering intimacy and resolving conflicts in a relationship. The study contributes to the growing literature on marital dynamics, especially in the context of Muslim couples in Southeast Asia, by highlighting the importance of effective communication and cultural factors in marital satisfaction. By integrating communication theories with the broader cultural and emotional context, the study offers deeper insights into marital relationships and how couples can navigate them effectively.

### **PREVIOUS STUDIES OF THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNICATION STYLE ON MARITAL SATISFACTION**

Research conducted by psychologists highlights that marital satisfaction is a critical component in measuring the happiness of married couples (Dinani et al., 2014; Williamson et al., 2015). The well-being of a marriage is closely tied to various aspects intrinsic to the institution itself, notably communication style, which significantly influences the emotions of both partners. These findings suggest that communication styles are fundamentally linked to marital satisfaction (Suzana et al., 2018; Yager, 2014). Furthermore, Siti Marziah et al. (2019) found that communication style plays a pivotal role in maintaining the quality of marital relationships, particularly in the first decade of marriage. Their research identifies marital satisfaction, stability, conflict, and happiness as essential dimensions in enhancing the quality of marriage over time. This illustrates how communication styles help establish relationship patterns and coping mechanisms that aim to achieve long-term marital satisfaction while mitigating the risk of divorce (Suzana et al., 2018; Siti Marziah et al., 2019).

Interestingly, a study by Kılıçarslan and Parmaksız (2023) indicates that even in the face of challenges posed by excessive gadget use at home, effective communication styles remain vital in providing satisfaction within marriages. Effective communication ensures that messages are conveyed and responded to appropriately, while ineffective interaction can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and limitations in daily life. Thus, positive communication—whether through open dialogue or conflict avoidance—enables couples to express appreciation and fosters a deeper connection, ultimately strengthening the marriage and reducing discontent towards partners (Ledermann et al., 2010; Suleyman, 2014).

Moreover, the study by Kielek-Rataj et al. (2020) found a strong relationship between couples' openness in communication and individual marital satisfaction. This is further supported by additional research indicating that communication style significantly influences marital satisfaction, especially among individuals who marry at a young age (Wicaksono & Indrijati, 2020; 2024). Collectively, these findings reinforce the conclusions of Lavner, Karney, and Bradbury (2016) and Suzana et al. (2020), affirming that communication is a crucial element in marriage and that communication skills are a primary predictor of marital satisfaction.

In the context of global consciousness, understanding these dynamics can enhance intercultural awareness and inform strategies for improving communication in diverse marital settings. By

exploring how cultural factors shape communication styles, we can gain insights that contribute to a broader understanding of relationship satisfaction across various cultural contexts.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a quantitative approach utilizing a cross-sectional survey method to explore the influence of cultural communication styles on marital satisfaction among Muslim couples in Terengganu, Malaysia's East Coast. The objective was to identify how these communication styles affected overall marital satisfaction, which was essential for understanding the dynamics of relationships in the context of global consciousness. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, which facilitated easy access and encouraged participation among respondents. This methodological choice was particularly relevant for examining how various communication styles, deeply rooted in cultural values, impacted marital satisfaction within the unique sociocultural context of Muslim couples in Terengganu.

The questionnaire encompassed items designed to evaluate key dimensions of communication styles, including openness, conflict avoidance, and overall communication quality, alongside measures of marital satisfaction. By focusing on these constructs, the study aimed to gain insights into the specific influences that communication styles exerted on marital satisfaction, aligning with the research objectives outlined earlier. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28. This analysis enabled the identification of significant relationships and patterns between communication styles and marital satisfaction, providing valuable insights into the intricacies of marital relationships. Ultimately, the findings of this study contributed to a broader understanding of how cultural factors shape communication practices, enhancing the discourse on global consciousness and intercultural understanding in marital contexts.

### **POPULATION AND SAMPLE STUDY**

The population for this study consisted of educators from several selected districts in Terengganu, including Kuala Terengganu, Dungun, Kuala Nerus, and Hulu Terengganu. These areas were chosen due to their representation of diverse communities within Malaysia's East Coast, which has distinct cultural and socio-economic dynamics, particularly among Muslim couples. A purposive sampling technique was employed, ensuring that the participants were relevant to the research focus on marital satisfaction within the cultural context of Muslim couples in Southeast Asia. This method allowed the researchers to target individuals whose experiences would provide deep insights into the relationship between communication styles and marital satisfaction. Specifically, the sample was drawn from Terengganu to explore how cultural practices influence communication behaviours within Muslim marriages.

A total of 191 respondents were selected for participation in the study. All of the respondents were married and currently in a partnership, making them suitable for the investigation of marital satisfaction. The purposive sampling method is often used in social science research when a targeted approach is needed to understand specific groups or phenomena (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2018). While the findings derived from this sampling method may not be generalizable to the entire population of educators, the technique provided valuable insights into the specific dynamics of marital satisfaction among Muslim couples in Terengganu.

By focusing on a targeted group, the study aimed to uncover the nuances of communication styles and their influence on marital satisfaction, which is critical for understanding broader cultural implications. The research targeted educators due to their relatively stable socioeconomic status and the fact that their professional backgrounds may influence how they approach communication and relationships. Additionally, educators are often seen as role models within the community, and their responses may offer valuable perspectives on the cultural factors influencing marital satisfaction. This approach not only highlighted the unique perspectives of Muslim couples in Southeast Asia, particularly on Malaysia's East Coast, but also provided a foundational understanding of how cultural factors shape communication practices and marital dynamics within this context.

Research has shown that the marital satisfaction of couples can be significantly influenced by cultural and contextual factors, particularly communication styles (Suzana et al., 2020). Moreover, by focusing on the specific cultural context of Terengganu, the study contributes to the growing body of literature that connects communication practices with marital dynamics across different cultural settings. According to Liu and Johnson (2022), individuals who develop a greater understanding of their cultural identity are better equipped to navigate interpersonal relationships and conflicts. This study's focus on Muslim couples on Malaysia's East Coast thus contributes to the broader discourse on global consciousness and intercultural understanding. It emphasizes how cultural contexts shape communication behaviours and marital satisfaction, particularly in Southeast Asian societies with strong familial and communal values.

Additionally, the purposive sampling method employed in this study aligns with the objectives of the research to examine communication dynamics within a specific cultural setting. The insights gathered from this focused sample not only contribute to a better understanding of marital satisfaction in Terengganu but also offer broader implications for similar cultural contexts. These findings are relevant not only to other Muslim communities in Southeast Asia but also to global efforts in promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding in marital relationships.

In conclusion, by selecting a targeted sample of married educators from Terengganu, the study provided a detailed examination of communication styles within the cultural context of Muslim couples in Southeast Asia. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how cultural factors influence marital satisfaction and communication practices, offering valuable insights for both academic research and practical applications in improving marital stability within culturally diverse communities.

## **INSTRUMENTS**

A set of questionnaires was used to collect all the necessary information for this study. As a research instrument, reliability needs to be examined to ensure the accuracy of the measurement of the variables being studied. So as a guide, a questionnaire can be trusted and adopted if the use of a questionnaire as a research instrument can help obtain the information desired by the researcher, in addition to the respondents' feedback on the statements of the items being stable from time to time (Cohen et al., 2018). Overall, the instruments employed in this study are standardized tools that have been developed and validated in various

international contexts. These instruments are designed to effectively capture the nuances of communication styles and marital satisfaction. The questionnaire is divided into three main parts:

- (1) Part A: Questionnaire related to respondents' demographic information (age, gender, length of marriage, and household income).
- (2) Part B: The Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMSS) questionnaire developed by AlDarmaki et al. (2014) was adapted to be used for measuring the marital satisfaction of respondents in Terengganu. This questionnaire contains 30 questions that include only one dimension (unidimensional), which is marital satisfaction.
- (3) Part B: The Communication Inventory developed by Kerkstra (1985) was adapted to be used for assessing the perceptions of respondents in Terengganu, whether husbands or wives, about how they and their partners communicate in marriage. This questionnaire contains 15 questions, which include two dimensions: open communication strategies and conflict avoidance strategies.

## RESULTS

This study involves married individuals, consisting of respondents who live around Terengganu. A total of 191 people involved were randomly selected by zone. To ensure that the number of returned questionnaires is sufficient for the purpose of the study, a total of 250 questionnaires were distributed online. This step successfully overcomes the problem of questionnaire dropouts, in addition to dealing with the problem of damaged questionnaires. The result of the demographic distribution of the study is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents**

	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<b>Ages</b>		
20-25	2	1.0
26-30	19	9.9
31-35	27	14.1
36-40	47	24.6
41-45	33	17.3
46-50	31	16.2
51-55	20	10.5
56-60	10	5.2
61 years old and above	2	1.0
Total	191	100.0
<b>Gender Male</b>		
	35	18.3

Female	156	81.7
Total	191	100.0
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<b>Length of Marriage</b> 0-5 years	31	16.2
6-10 years	38	19.9
11-15 years	39	20.4
16-20 years	36	18.8
21-25 years	21	11.0
26-30 years	18	9.4
31 years and above	8	4.2
Total	191	100.0
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<b>Household Income</b>		
RM2500 and below	38	19.9
RM2501-RM4850	28	14.7
RM4851-RM7100	46	24.1
RM7101-RM11000	48	25.1
RM11001-RM15000	26	13.6
RM15001 and above	5	2.6
Total	191	100.0
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Table 1 shows the demographic profile of respondents who are married and still have a partner in Terengganu. Based on the distribution in terms of age, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents involved are individuals aged 36–40 years old, which is 47 people (24.6%), followed by individuals aged 41–45 years old, totaling 33 people (17.3%), 46–50 years old, 31 people (16.2%), 31–35 years old, 27 people (14.1%), 51–55 years old, 20 people (10.5%), 26–30 years old, 19 people (9.9%), and 56–60 years old, 10 people (5.2%). Meanwhile, for respondents aged 20–25 years old and 61 years old and above, each showed a frequency distribution of 2 people (1.0%) involved in this study.

Next, the distribution of respondents in terms of gender was also shown, where female respondents were seen to be more numerous at 156 people (81.7%) compared to the number of male respondents at only 35 people (18.3%). If observed in terms of the distribution of the respondents' marriage period, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents involved are individuals who have sailed the marriage ark between 11 and 15 years, which is a total of 39 people (20.4%), followed by individuals who have sailed the marriage ark between 6 and 10 years, which is a total of 38 people (19.9%), 16-20 years, 36 people (18.8%), 0–5 years, 31 people (16.2%), 21– 25 years, 21 people (11.0%), 26–30 years, 18 people (9.4%), and finally,



among individuals who have sailed the ark of marriage between 31 years and above, which is a total of 8 people (4.2%), Based on the household income, it can be identified that the majority of the respondents involved are individuals with a household income between RM7,101 and RM11,000, which is a total of 48 people (25.1%), followed by respondents who have a household income between RM4,851 and RM7,100, which is a total of 46 people (24.1%), RM2,500 and below for a total of 38 people (19.9%), RM2,501 and RM4,850 for a total of 28 people (14.7%), and RM11,001-RM15,000 for a total of 26 people (13.6%). Meanwhile, the Minority of respondents, which is another 5 respondents (2.6%), are individuals with a household income of RM15,001 and above.

### Level of Communication and Marriage Satisfaction in Terengganu

In this study, some values will be displayed as a result of the descriptive analysis carried out, namely the percentage value (percent), average (mean), and standard deviation (SP). The reading of the variable's statistical level value includes mean score values from 1 to 5, as set by Pallant (2007, 2014), as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 Mean Score and Statistical Reading of Variables**

Mean Score	Level
3.67 to 5.00	High
2.34 to 3.66	Medium
1.00 to 2.33	Low

Source: Pallant (2007, 2014)

### Level of Communication between Husband and Wife in Terengganu

Table 3 explains the descriptive analysis results for the communication style variable, which consists of 15 items in total. The respondent's level of communication was assessed based on two constructs that were studied: open communication (6 items) and conflict avoidance (9 items). The results of the descriptive analysis show that overall, the mean score value for the communication style variable is at a high level ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SP = 0.49$ ). Both dimensions are also at a high level: the dimension of open communication ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SP = 0.52$ ) and the dimension of avoiding conflict ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SP = 0.60$ ).

**Table 3 Overall Level of Communication of Husband and Wife**

Dimension of	N	Item No.	Mean	SD	Level
<b>Communication</b>					
Conflict Avoidance	191	B1-B9	3.90	0.60	High
Open Communication	191	B10-B15	3.95	0.52	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>B1-B15</b>	<b>3.92</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>High</b>

### Level of Marriage Satisfaction in Terengganu

Table 4 displays the descriptive analysis results for the variable marital satisfaction. Overall, it can be observed that the mean score value for the marital satisfaction variable is at a high level ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SP = 0.42$ ). This explains that, in general, the satisfaction of husband and wife in Terengganu is at a good level.

**Table 4 Overall Level of Communication of Husband and Wife**

Marital Satisfaction	N	Item No.	Mean	SD	Level
Total	191	C1-C30	4.27	0.42	High

### The Influence of Communication Style Constructs on Marital Satisfaction

The analysis of this section is carried out to see if the communication style construct has a significant influence on the marital satisfaction of husband and wife in Terengganu. To make the results of this study more clearly understood, the outcomes of multiple regression analysis were conducted, as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5 Multiple Regression of Communication Style Construct on Marital Satisfaction**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Estimated Standard Deviation	Sis. F Change
1	.677 <sup>a</sup>	.459	.456	.423	<.001
2	.747 <sup>b</sup>	.559	.554	.383	<.001

a. Predictor: Open Communication

b. Predictor: Open Communication, Avoiding Conflict

Table 5 illustrates the results of a multiple regression analysis involving the construct of the independent variable of communication style, which is open communication and avoiding conflict, and the dependent variable, which is marital satisfaction. Thus, it can be observed that the findings of the analysis show that the constructs of open communication and avoiding conflict each have a significant influence on the respondents' marital satisfaction. In general, the  $R^2$  value that recorded a value of 0.554 has proven that both communication style constructs have an influence of 55.4% on the marital satisfaction of husband and wife in Terengganu, as well as being able to act as predictors that can influence marital satisfaction. It can also be seen that the open communication construct has the greatest influence with an  $R^2$  value of .459 (45.9%), while the conflict avoidance construct has a smaller influence with an  $R^2$  value of .100 (10.0%).

The results of this finding are reinforced by the display of Table 6 (Appendix 6) related to the ANOVA model of multiple regression of the communication style construct on marital satisfaction. It can be observed that for the communication styles of the two constructs, each

shows a significant difference in the value of influence, which is the open communication construct ( $F = 160.27$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and the avoiding conflict construct ( $F = 119.03$ ;  $p < .001$ ). So, it can be understood that both communication style constructs can have a significant influence on marital satisfaction. However, the construct of open communication is clearly more influential than the construct of avoiding conflict in the communication style of husband and wife in Terengganu.

**Table 6 Multiple Regression ANOVA of Communication Style Construct on Marital Satisfaction**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	28.729	1	28.729	160.269	<.001 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	33.879	189	.179		
Total	62.608	190			
Regression	34.982	2	17.491	119.029	<.001 <sup>c</sup>
Residual	27.626	188	.147		
Total	62.608	190			

a. Dependent variable: Marital Satisfaction

b. Predictor: (Constant), Open Communication

c. Predictor: (Constant), Open Communication, Avoiding Conflict

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that communication styles significantly influence marital satisfaction among Muslim couples in Terengganu, Malaysia. In particular, the study highlights the prevalence of both open communication and conflict avoidance as key communication strategies among respondents, and how these styles shape the marital satisfaction of couples. The importance of these communication practices is well-documented in existing literature, which consistently emphasizes the pivotal role of communication in fostering marital satisfaction (Kielek-Rataj et al., 2020; Kılıçarslan & Lavner, 2016; Ledermann et al., 2010; Kılıçarslan & Parmaksız, 2023; Siti Marziah et al., 2019; Suzana et al., 2020). However, the current study makes a novel contribution by specifically focusing on the dynamics of these communication styles in the context of Muslim couples in Southeast Asia, particularly in the East Coast region of Malaysia, which has its own unique cultural nuances that influence relationship dynamics.

This study's findings underscore the critical role that open communication plays in enhancing marital satisfaction. Couples who engage in open, honest dialogue about their feelings, needs,

and expectations are more likely to experience higher levels of emotional intimacy and satisfaction in their marriages. This is consistent with the findings of Suzana et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of open communication in sustaining marital harmony, particularly in urban settings. Open communication fosters an environment where couples can resolve conflicts constructively, express their emotions freely, and strengthen their emotional bonds over time. As Siti Marziah et al. (2019) argue, emotional intelligence—an essential component of effective communication—is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction. Individuals who can manage their emotions and communicate them appropriately are better able to navigate the complexities of marital life, leading to more fulfilling and stable relationships.

The significant impact of open communication on marital satisfaction in this study also supports previous research that found communication behaviours to be a central factor in determining relationship quality (Lavner et al., 2024). Open communication allows couples to discuss difficult topics, address underlying concerns, and maintain a level of transparency that is crucial for building trust and understanding. For Muslim couples in Terengganu, this form of communication is vital not only for maintaining emotional intimacy but also for fostering respect and mutual understanding, which are core values in Islamic marital relationships.

In contrast to open communication, the study found that conflict avoidance, while prevalent among respondents, had a comparatively weaker influence on marital satisfaction. This aligns with the work of Canary and Stafford (1992), who suggest that while avoiding conflict may temporarily preserve harmony, it can also prevent couples from addressing deeper issues that can undermine the relationship in the long term. Conflict avoidance may suppress important discussions that could otherwise lead to constructive solutions, and the avoidance of confrontation may cause frustration and emotional distance between partners over time. As the study indicates, while conflict avoidance can provide immediate relief, it is ultimately insufficient for fostering long-term marital satisfaction. Therefore, it is crucial for couples to develop the skills to engage in healthy conflict resolution, even while avoiding unnecessary or destructive arguments.

Key finding of this study is the impact of digital distractions on marital communication. The proliferation of smartphones, social media, and other digital technologies has made it increasingly difficult for couples to engage in meaningful face-to-face communication. In the context of marital relationships, this “digital distraction” can significantly hinder communication, leading to misunderstandings, emotional disconnection, and dissatisfaction. In line with this, the study emphasizes the need for couples to be intentional about their communication practices, ensuring that they prioritize quality time together and actively engage in open discussions. As technology continues to evolve, it is vital for couples to develop strategies to limit distractions during interactions and to foster intimacy through effective communication. This is particularly important in today’s fast-paced world, where technology can often become a barrier rather than a facilitator of connection.

Additionally, studies have consistently demonstrated that positive communication behaviours such as expressing appreciation, showing empathy, and demonstrating affection through both verbal and non-verbal cues—are critical in enhancing marital satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2024). These behaviours help to strengthen the emotional bond between partners, creating a

supportive and nurturing environment that allows both individuals to feel valued and understood. For Muslim couples, whose cultural and religious values emphasize mutual respect and harmony, these positive communication practices are particularly significant. Islamic teachings place a strong emphasis on kindness, compassion, and respect in marital relationships, making communication that incorporates these values even more important. By expressing love, gratitude, and appreciation, couples can foster a deeper sense of emotional intimacy and strengthen the foundations of their marriage.

Furthermore, the study also highlights the crucial role of effective communication in managing daily stressors that often affect marital relationships. Kılıçarslan & Parmaksız (2023), Ledermann et al. (2010), and Siti Marziah et al. (2019) have all demonstrated that unresolved stressors such as financial difficulties, work pressures, or family responsibilities—can erode marital satisfaction if not effectively addressed. Effective communication provides couples with the tools to navigate these stressors collaboratively, ensuring that they can manage challenges in a way that strengthens their relationship rather than causing it to deteriorate. When couples engage in open and supportive communication, they are better able to cope with the pressures of daily life and maintain a sense of unity and shared purpose.

This study also brings attention to the broader cultural implications of communication styles in marital satisfaction. Liu and Johnson (2022) argue that as individuals become more aware of cultural diversity and global interconnectedness, they develop greater skills in managing interpersonal conflicts that are rooted in cultural differences. For Muslim couples in Malaysia, an increased awareness of cultural diversity can play a vital role in promoting empathy and understanding within the relationship. Many Muslim couples in Malaysia must navigate the intersection of traditional family expectations and modern societal influences, which can create tension in their marital dynamics. By fostering open communication and developing cultural awareness, these couples can bridge potential gaps in understanding, leading to a more harmonious relationship.

The relevance of cultural awareness in marital communication is particularly important in Southeast Asian societies, where family values and community cohesion are highly emphasized. Couples in these societies often face the challenge of balancing traditional expectations with contemporary realities. This study shows that couples who understand and respect the cultural factors that influence their communication practices are better equipped to manage marital conflicts and resolve differences in a way that is consistent with both their personal values and societal norms. This contributes to the overall well-being of the community by promoting stable, healthy family dynamics that support social cohesion. In conclusion, this study reinforces the idea that fostering open communication and emotional intelligence is crucial for enhancing marital satisfaction, not only for individual couples but also for the broader goal of improving interpersonal relationships across diverse cultural contexts. By providing valuable insights into how communication styles influence marital satisfaction within the cultural context of Muslim couples in Terengganu, this research contributes to a growing body of literature on marital dynamics. The study suggests that enhancing communication skills among couples can lead to improved marital satisfaction, which in turn strengthens relationships and promotes healthier, more resilient families.

The findings of this research also emphasize the importance of cultural awareness in enhancing communication within marriages. As the world becomes more interconnected, fostering an understanding of cultural differences and similarities can help bridge gaps in marital relationships, ensuring that couples are able to communicate more effectively and with greater empathy. By offering practical tools, such as culturally tailored family modules focused on communication strategies, couples can benefit from improved relationship dynamics. Such resources would not only help couples to build stronger marriages but also contribute to the broader goal of global consciousness in marital relationships, ensuring that emotional intelligence and cultural understanding become key components of successful partnerships worldwide.

Ultimately, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how communication styles, shaped by cultural values, influence marital satisfaction. It offers critical insights for practitioners, policymakers, and educators in designing programs that enhance communication skills, promote emotional intelligence, and support healthier relationships. Through these efforts, individuals and communities worldwide can experience greater marital satisfaction and overall well-being, contributing to the strengthening of familial and social bonds across cultures.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that communication style significantly influences the marital satisfaction of respondents on Malaysia's East Coast, specifically in Terengganu. The findings align with previous research conducted both locally and internationally, which reinforces the idea that effective communication is crucial for the marital satisfaction of both partners. The study identifies two key communication styles that contribute to marital satisfaction: open communication and conflict avoidance. Both styles were found to be prevalent among the respondents, suggesting their importance in fostering strong marital relationships. Open communication allows couples to express their emotions, share their thoughts, and engage in problem-solving discussions, while conflict avoidance helps to prevent unnecessary arguments and preserve harmony in the relationship.

The study highlights that while both communication styles contribute to marital satisfaction, open communication was found to play a more substantial role than conflict avoidance in predicting marital satisfaction. This finding is particularly significant as it contributes to the existing literature by emphasizing the importance of open dialogue between couples. Open communication enables individuals to address underlying issues, express concerns, and maintain emotional intimacy, which are essential elements for sustaining long-term marital happiness. These results align with the work of Siti Marziah et al. (2019), who emphasized the role of emotional intelligence in managing marital relationships. Emotional intelligence is a critical skill that helps individuals navigate difficult conversations, regulate their emotions, and respond to their partner's emotional needs, all of which are crucial for maintaining a healthy relationship.

In addition to this, recent research by Suzana et al. (2024) has shown that couples who engage in open communication experience higher levels of marital satisfaction, particularly in urban environments. The study found that regular, honest conversations about feelings, expectations,

and conflicts significantly enhance the quality of the marital relationship. This finding is supported by Lavner, Karney, and Bradbury (2024), who argued that communication behaviours are one of the primary predictors of marital satisfaction. Their research highlighted that couples who communicate openly and constructively tend to have stronger emotional bonds and experience greater marital satisfaction over time. However, the study also found that conflict avoidance, while prevalent among the respondents, had a comparatively weaker influence on marital satisfaction. This suggests that avoiding conflict can provide temporary relief but may not be effective in resolving deeper issues. Canary and Stafford (1992) posited that conflict avoidance can sometimes obscure underlying problems in a marriage, leading to unaddressed concerns that may resurface later, potentially disrupting marital harmony. This highlights the importance of addressing issues head-on and finding healthy ways to manage conflict rather than relying solely on avoidance strategies.

In today's digital age, technology poses a unique challenge to marital communication. The prevalence of gadgets and social media platforms often distracts couples from engaging in meaningful, face-to-face interactions. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as "digital distraction," can negatively affect the quality of communication between partners. However, it is essential for couples to actively work on cultivating positive communication habits, even in the face of these technological distractions. By prioritizing communication strategies that foster intimacy and avoid conflict, couples can overcome the challenges posed by digital devices and strengthen their relationship. Positive communication behaviours, such as expressing appreciation, empathy, and affection, are key to promoting marital satisfaction. Verbal affirmations, physical touch, and acts of kindness all contribute to enhancing emotional intimacy and reducing stress in relationships (Lavner et al., 2024). For Muslim couples, who often face societal and cultural pressures related to marriage, maintaining positive communication is particularly important. Cultural and religious values in Muslim communities emphasize mutual respect, understanding, and harmony within marriages, making communication a key component in maintaining marital health. By fostering a communication style that incorporates love, appreciation, and respect, Muslim couples can create a stronger emotional bond and enhance marital satisfaction.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of effective communication in reducing daily stressors that can negatively impact marital relationships. Kılıçarslan and Parmaksız (2023), Ledermann et al. (2010), and Siti Marziah et al. (2019) all identified that unresolved stressors, such as financial problems, work pressures, and family responsibilities, can erode marital satisfaction if not effectively managed. In this regard, communication acts as a vital tool for addressing these stressors. When couples communicate effectively, they are better equipped to manage the stresses of daily life, which in turn contributes to the overall health of their relationship. The study also sheds light on the broader cultural implications of communication styles in marital satisfaction. Liu and Johnson (2022) emphasized that as individuals become more aware of cultural diversity and global interconnectedness, they are better able to manage interpersonal conflicts rooted in cultural differences. This global consciousness can help couples navigate relationship dynamics with greater empathy, understanding, and respect. In the context of Muslim couples in Malaysia, where cultural and familial expectations often shape relationship behaviours, fostering an awareness of global consciousness can provide

tools for couples to bridge cultural gaps and enhance their relationships. The ability to adapt communication styles in response to cultural influences is crucial in promoting marital satisfaction, especially for couples who may be navigating different cultural or generational expectations.

This research also has broader implications for Southeast Asian societies, where family values and social cohesion are highly emphasized. In these societies, couples who understand and appreciate the cultural factors that influence their communication patterns are better equipped to navigate the complexities of marital relationships. By recognizing these factors, couples can manage differences and resolve conflicts in a manner that aligns with both personal values and societal norms. This not only strengthens individual marriages but also contributes to the overall well-being of the community by fostering healthy family structures. Ultimately, this study reinforces the idea that fostering open communication and emotional intelligence is essential for enhancing marital satisfaction. By promoting communication skills and emotional awareness, couples can not only improve their own relationships but also contribute to the broader goal of creating harmonious communities. The insights gained from this research provide valuable guidance for the development of family-oriented programs and modules aimed at strengthening communication within marriages. These modules can serve as important resources for couples, offering strategies and tools to enhance marital satisfaction and improve overall family dynamics. By exploring the intersection of cultural communication and marital satisfaction, this study provides valuable insights into how these dynamics shape relationships across diverse cultural contexts, ultimately contributing to global consciousness in marital relationships.

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