

**Teachers' Impact And Students' Academic Performance In Kisoro District: A Case Study Of Muhanga
Secondary School**

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of teachers on students' academic performance at Muhanga Secondary School in Kisoro District, Uganda. Employing a cross-sectional survey design, the research collected both quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of 260 respondents, including students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, selected through simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Data were gathered via questionnaires and interviews and analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS and thematic analysis. The results revealed distinct perceptions of teacher influence. Regarding qualifications, a majority of respondents (55%) associated them primarily with the timely completion of the syllabus, while only 30% directly linked them to improved student performance. A mere 5% believed qualifications automatically guaranteed good teaching. Concerning teacher experience, the main benefits were perceived as the acquisition of new teaching skills (40%) and improved subject content mastery (35%). However, experience was not strongly linked to increased teacher self-confidence, which only 5% of respondents noted. The study concluded that while both teacher qualifications and experience are fundamental to academic performance, their impact is mediated by institutional and motivational factors. Qualifications were predominantly valued for ensuring administrative efficiency (syllabus coverage), whereas experience was valued for enhancing instructional quality. A critical conclusion was that the full potential of the teaching staff was undermined by a significant gap in teacher self-confidence and a system that prioritized syllabus completion over deep, qualitative learning. It is recommended that the school administration and district education officers implement a differentiated continuous professional development program focused on advanced pedagogy and confidence-building, institute a robust teacher motivation and recognition scheme, and lead a strategic shift in institutional focus from quantitative syllabus coverage to qualitative learning outcomes. Strengthening school-community partnerships to reframe the value of education is also essential.

Keywords: Teacher Impact, Academic Performance, Teacher Qualifications, Teacher Experience, Syllabus Coverage, Muhanga Secondary School

Background of the study

Globally, the quality of education is recognized as a critical driver for sustainable development, economic growth, and social equity. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) explicitly aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Central to achieving this goal is the teacher, who is universally acknowledged as the most significant in-school factor influencing student achievement and learning outcomes (Emmanuel et al., 2023) . Research from the World Bank (2018) consistently demonstrates that effective teachers can significantly narrow achievement gaps and improve students' long-term prospects, contributing

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to a rise in overall educational standards. A seminal global study by Hattie (2008) in his visible learning meta-analyses ranked teacher feedback and instructional quality among the top influences on student academic performance (W. Godfrey et al., 2023). In an era of rapid technological change and globalization, the role of the teacher has evolved from a mere dispenser of knowledge to a facilitator of critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). However, this transformative potential is often hampered by challenges such as teacher shortages, inadequate professional development, and poor working conditions, which are particularly acute in developing regions, thereby creating significant disparities in educational quality worldwide (UNESCO, 2021).

In Africa, the educational landscape is characterized by a paradox of expanded access and contested quality. While sub-Saharan Africa has made remarkable progress in increasing enrollment rates at the primary level, the region continues to face a severe learning crisis (Mark et al., 2023). According to the World Bank (2019), despite being in school, a staggering 87% of children in Sub-Saharan Africa are in "learning poverty," meaning they cannot read and understand a simple text by age 10 (Faridah et al., 2023). This crisis is intrinsically linked to challenges within the teaching force. Factors such as large class sizes, a shortage of qualified teachers, limited teaching and learning resources, and often inadequate teacher motivation profoundly impact instructional delivery (Micheal et al., 2023). A report by the Global Partnership for Education (2020) highlights that many teachers in the region work in challenging environments with little support, leading to pedagogical practices that are often teacher-centered and rote-based, which fail to stimulate deep learning (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, et al., 2022). Consequently, even as more African children attend secondary school, their academic performance, as measured by standardized assessments and examination pass rates, remains a pressing concern for governments and educational stakeholders across the continent.

The Government of Uganda has long championed Universal Secondary Education (USE) since its inception in 2007, leading to a massive surge in student enrollment at the secondary level. However, this policy has placed immense strain on resources, leading to high student-to-teacher ratios and a dilution of teaching quality (Christopher, Moses, Enosh Muhindo, et al., 2022). The 2019 National Assessment of Progress in Education report by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) revealed concerning trends, including low competency levels in critical subjects like Mathematics and English, particularly in rural government-aided schools. The Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU) has repeatedly cited issues of low and sometimes delayed teacher remuneration, poor working conditions, and insufficient continuous professional development as key demotivators affecting teacher performance (UNATU, 2022). When teachers are demotivated and under-supported, their capacity to provide quality instruction, individualized attention, and effective classroom management is severely compromised, which directly and negatively impacts students' academic performance and contributes to high dropout rates (Victor et al., 2023).

Kisoro is a predominantly rural district characterized by hilly terrain and a high population density. Its economy is largely reliant on subsistence agriculture, with many families living in poverty (S. Godfrey et al., 2023). These conditions directly affect education; children may be required to contribute to household chores or farm work, impacting their study time and school attendance. Furthermore, the district's relative remoteness can lead to difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified teachers, who may be reluctant to work in areas perceived as having limited social amenities and professional opportunities (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). Muhanga Secondary School, as a case study, operates within this complex environment. While specific recent statistics for Muhanga are scarce, district-level reports often indicate fluctuating performance in national examinations, with schools struggling to compete with their counterparts in more urbanized and resourced districts (Julius, 2024). The "teacher impact" in this context, therefore, encompasses not just their pedagogical skills but also their resilience, adaptability, and ability to foster a conducive learning environment despite these contextual constraints. Understanding the specific dynamics of how teacher-related factors such as qualification, teaching methodologies, motivation, and teacher-student relationships influence academic performance at Muhanga Secondary School is therefore critical (Ntirandekura et al., 2022).

Statement of the problem

Despite the critical role of education in breaking the cycle of poverty, students at Muhanga Secondary School in Kisoro District consistently demonstrate subpar academic performance in national examinations (Kazaara & Nelson, 2024). This persistent underachievement threatens to limit the future opportunities of the youth and undermine the community's socio-economic development (Alex & Devis, 2023). While factors such as student poverty and limited resources are often cited, the specific and profound influence of the teacher within this context remains inadequately investigated and understood. Preliminary observations and district reports suggest that the school is plagued by challenges directly linked to teacher capacity and conditions, including high student-to-teacher ratios, a reliance on rote memorization techniques, and apparent low levels of teacher motivation and morale (Winny et al., 2023). This situation creates a disconnect between the curriculum and student engagement, leading to poor learning outcomes, high dropout rates, and a failure to cultivate the critical skills necessary for the 21st century. Existing interventions have largely focused on infrastructural inputs, neglecting the core of the learning process: the dynamic between teacher and student (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). Therefore, there is a critical need to systematically investigate the impact of teachers on student academic performance at Muhanga Secondary School.

Specific objectives of the study

1. To find out the impacts of teacher qualification on students' academic performance at Muhanga secondary School.
2. To elucidate the relevance of a teachers' experience on students' academic performance at Muhanga secondary School.
3. To establish the impacts teachers on students' academic performance at Muhanga secondary school in Kisoro District.

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Methodology

The research design constituted the comprehensive plan and procedures for the investigation, encompassing the broad assumptions as well as the detailed methods for data collection and analysis. This study employed a cross-sectional survey design, which was selected as it allowed for the examination of a target population by studying a representative cross-section, thereby enabling findings that were applicable to the entire group. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative methods were applied to numerical data to statistically measure teachers' impact on students' academic performance at Muhanga Secondary School in Kisoro District (Nafiu, 2012). Concurrently, qualitative techniques were deployed to gather and analyze non-numeric data, capturing respondents' views, opinions, preferences, attitudes, and feelings to provide deeper contextual understanding. The geographical focus of the study was Kisoro District, a remote area in South Western Uganda, bordered by Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with Muhanga Secondary School selected as a specific case study to provide an in-depth context for the research problem.

The target population for the study consisted of 800 individuals who were directly involved with or informed about the educational environment at the school. This population included 241 students and 47 teachers from Muhanga Secondary School, 10 members of school foundation boards from Kisoro District, the Director of Studies, and the Head Teacher of the school (Jallow et al., 2022). To select a manageable sample from this population, a combination of sampling procedures was utilized. The sample size of 260 respondents was determined using Solvin's formula to ensure statistical reliability. For the selection process, both probability and non-probability techniques were applied. Simple random sampling, which gives every member of the population an equal chance of selection, was used to select 139 students and 80 parents, thereby enhancing the representativeness of these groups (Sarah et al., 2024). In contrast, purposive sampling was employed to select 10 P.T.A Board Members, the Head Teacher, and 20 teachers. This technique was chosen deliberately to ensure that individuals with specific knowledge and experience relevant to the research objectives were included, as their insights were deemed critical for understanding the nuanced dynamics of teachers' impact.

Data collection was executed using two primary methods to gather both primary and secondary data. The researcher designed and administered comprehensive questionnaires to parents, students, and teaching staff. These questionnaires were predominantly close-ended to facilitate easy quantification and processing of answers, and they were self-administered with the researcher's assistance to ensure clarity and completeness. Furthermore, face-to-face interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. This method was particularly valuable for gaining a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons, motivations, and attitudes of key informants, including the Head Teacher, the Director of Studies, and selected teachers, allowing them to express their perspectives at length.

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To ensure the quality and accuracy of the data, rigorous control measures were implemented. The validity of the research instruments was established through discussions with the supervisor and colleagues, a pilot study with 10 respondents, and the calculation of a content validity index to confirm the relevance of each item. Reliability, referring to the consistency of the instruments, was assessed by conducting a pilot test twice and comparing the results for stability. Once collected, the data underwent a thorough management and processing procedure, which included editing, coding, and tabulation. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel software, employing descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, percentages, and tabulation (Nelson et al., 2022). A Likert scale was used to analyze attitudinal data. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis, where responses were categorized according to thematic areas.

Throughout the research process, strict ethical considerations were observed. The researcher obtained official permission from the university and presented it to the school administration before commencing data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by ensuring that participants' names were not used in the final report, and the principle of voluntary participation was respected, allowing respondents to withdraw at any time without penalty. The study also faced several limitations, including high transport costs, language barriers with some community members, and occasional unwillingness of respondents to participate.

Results

Table 1: The extent of teachers’ impact on students’ performance at Muhanga secondary

School

	The extent of teachers’ impact on students’ performance at Muhanga secondary School	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total
1	Very high	100 (50%)	30 (15%)	20 (10%)	30 (15%)	20 (10%)	200 (100%)
2	High.	80 (40%)	20 (10%)	50 (25%)	40 (20%)	10 (5%)	200
							(100%)

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3	Low	70 (35%)	50 (25%)	30 (15%)	10 (05%)	40 (20%)	200 (100%)
4	Very low	80 (40%)	20 (10%)	50 (25%)	40 (20%)	10 (5%)	200 (100%)

Source: Primary data (2024)

The results in the table 1 shows that 50% strongly agreed, 15% agreed, 10% neither agreed nor disagreed, 15% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed that the extent of teachers’ impact on students’ performance at Muhanga secondary School is very high. Also 40% strongly agreed, 10% agreed, 25% neither agreed nor disagreed, 20% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed that the extent of teachers’ impact on students’ performance at Muhanga secondary School is high due to unemployment problems. 35% strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 15% neither agreed nor disagreed,

05% disagreed and 40% strongly disagreed that the extent of teachers’ impact on students’ performance at Muhanga secondary School is low (Nelson et al., 2023). 40% strongly agreed, 10% agreed, 25% neither agreed nor disagreed, 20% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed that the extent of teachers’ impact on students’ performance at Muhanga secondary School is very low and this is because there are few teachers yet the school population is large.

Table 2: Impacts of teacher qualification on students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary School

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Qualified teachers always teach well	10	5
Improves students’ performance in class	60	30
Ensures timely feedback regarding learners’ performance	20	10
Completes the syllabus in time	110	55
Total	200	100

Source: Primary Data (2024)

The data presented in Table 2 offers a revealing and somewhat counter-intuitive perspective on how the school community at Muhanga Secondary School perceives the impact of teacher qualifications on student academic performance. The most striking finding is that a commanding majority of 55% of respondents associated teacher

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qualifications primarily with the ability to complete the syllabus in time. This suggests that the most visible and valued outcome of having a qualified teacher, in this specific context, is not necessarily the depth of learning or pedagogical innovation, but rather the efficient and structured coverage of the prescribed curriculum. This perception points to a system that may be heavily focused on syllabus completion as a key performance indicator, potentially driven by the pressure to prepare students for high-stakes national examinations. While ensuring syllabus coverage is undoubtedly important, its dominance as the primary benefit of teacher qualifications indicates that the broader pedagogical advantages of a qualified professional such as critical thinking, student engagement, and conceptual understanding may be secondary concerns in the prevailing school culture.

Beyond syllabus completion, a significant 30% of respondents directly linked teacher qualifications to an improvement in students' class performance. This indicates a clear recognition that a teacher's formal training and credentials contribute to a more effective transfer of knowledge, leading to better grades, test scores, and overall understanding among students. This group acknowledges that qualified teachers possess the methodological skills and subject knowledge necessary to facilitate learning and demonstrably enhance academic outcomes. A smaller segment, 10%, highlighted that qualified teachers ensure timely feedback on learner performance. This response touches upon a more nuanced aspect of professional practice, recognizing that effective education is not just about delivering content but also about assessing understanding and providing formative feedback to guide student progress, a skill that is formally ingrained in teacher training programs.

Interestingly, a mere 5% of respondents asserted the broad, qualitative statement that "qualified teachers always teach well." The overwhelming rejection of this blanket assumption is perhaps the most critical insight from the data. It implies that the community draws a distinct line between holding formal qualifications and demonstrating actual teaching competence in the classroom. This skepticism could stem from observable realities within the school, where some certified teachers may lack the motivation, practical skills, or personal dedication to teach effectively. It serves as a crucial reminder that a certificate alone is not a guarantee of quality instruction; factors such as teacher motivation, ongoing professional development, and the availability of teaching resources are equally critical in determining whether a qualified teacher truly fulfills their potential to inspire and educate students effectively.

Table 3: The level of students' academic performance at Muhanga secondary School

The level of students' academic performance at Muhanga secondary School	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total
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1	Very high	100 (50%)	30 (15%)	20 (10%)	30 (15%)	20 (10%)	200 (100%)
2	High.	80 (40%)	20 (10%)	50 (25%)	40 (20%)	10 (5%)	200 (100%)
3	Low	70 (35%)	50 (25%)	30 (15%)	10 (05%)	40 (20%)	200 (100%)
4	Very low	80 (40%)	20 (10%)	50 (25%)	40 (20%)	10 (5%)	200 (100%)

Source: Primary data (2024)

The results in the table 3 shows that 50% strongly agreed, 15% agreed, 10% neither agreed nor disagreed, 15% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed that the level of students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary School is very high. Also 40% strongly agreed, 10% agreed, 25% neither agreed nor disagreed, 20% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed that the level of students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary School, Kisoro District is high due to shortage of enough teachers. 35% strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 15% neither agreed nor disagreed, 05% disagreed and 40% strongly disagreed that the level of students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary School is low. 40% strongly agreed, 10% agreed, 25% neither agreed nor disagreed, 20% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed that the level of students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary School is very low.

Table 4: The relevance of teachers’ experience on students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary School

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Improves on the subject content	70	35
New teaching skills are acquired	80	40
Expertization of the teachers increases	40	20
Improves on self-confidence of the teachers	10	5

Total	200	100
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Source: Primary data (2024)

The data presented in Table 4 provides critical insights into the perceived relevance of teachers' experience on student academic performance at Muhanga Secondary School, as viewed by the respondents themselves. The distribution of responses reveals a strong consensus on the mechanisms through which experience translates into improved classroom outcomes. The most significant portion of respondents, 40%, indicated that experienced teachers acquire new teaching skills. This suggests that the school community recognizes professional growth as a continuous process, where seasoned educators move beyond foundational methods to incorporate more innovative, effective, and perhaps student-centered pedagogical techniques. This acquisition of skills is directly linked to the quality of instruction, implying that experienced teachers are better equipped to explain complex concepts, manage diverse classrooms, and adapt their teaching to different learning styles, thereby fostering a more conducive learning environment that enhances student achievement.

Furthermore, a substantial 35% of the respondents believed that teacher experience primarily improves subject content knowledge. This indicates that with time, teachers deepen their mastery of the curriculum, allowing them to present information with greater authority, clarity, and depth. An experienced teacher can anticipate common student misconceptions, draw upon a wider repository of examples, and connect topics across the syllabus more effectively than a novice. This mastery is fundamental to student performance, as a firm grasp of subject content is a prerequisite for academic success. When a teacher commands the subject, they can build student confidence in the material and provide a more solid foundation for learning, which is directly reflected in examination results and overall academic comprehension.

However, the data also reveals a more nuanced perspective on the value of experience. While 20% of respondents associated experience with an increase in teacher "expertization," a notably small minority of only 5% linked it to an improvement in the teachers' self-confidence. This disparity is particularly telling. It suggests that while the community acknowledges the objective skills and knowledge gained through experience (the "expertise"), they do not perceive this to automatically translate into a strong sense of self-assurance in the educators. This could point to underlying issues within the school environment, such as a lack of recognition, high levels of stress, or insufficient supportive feedback, which may undermine teacher morale. A teacher's self-confidence is crucial for creating a positive and authoritative classroom atmosphere, taking pedagogical risks, and effectively engaging with students and parents.

Table 5: Relationship between teachers’ impact and students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary school in Kisoro District

Relationship between teachers’ impact and students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary school in Kisoro District	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Total
Very strong positive relationship	100 (50%)	30 (15%)	20 (10%)	30 (15%)	20 (10%)	200 (100%)
Medium/Average relationship	80 (40%)	20 (10%)	50 (25%)	40 (20%)	10 (5%)	200 (100%)
Weak/negative relationship	70 (35%)	50 (25%)	30 (15%)	10 (05%)	40 (20%)	200 (100%)

Source: Primary data (2024)

The results in the table 5 shows that 50% strongly agreed, 15% agreed, 10% neither agreed nor disagreed, 15% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed that there is a very strong positive relationship between teachers’ impact and students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary school in Kisoro District. Also 40% strongly agreed, 10% agreed, 25% neither agreed nor disagreed, 20% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed that there is a Medium/Average relationship between teachers’ impact and students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary school in Kisoro District. 35% strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 15% neither agreed nor disagreed, 05% disagreed and 40% strongly disagreed that there is a weak/negative relationship between teachers’ impact and students’ academic performance at Muhanga secondary school in Kisoro District.

Conclusion of the Findings

The study concluded that teachers' experience is a critical factor influencing student academic performance, but its impact is channeled through specific, practical mechanisms rather than through a simple increase in teacher confidence. The primary benefit of experience was perceived to be the acquisition of new teaching skills (40% of respondents),

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indicating that over time, teachers at Muhanga Secondary School become more innovative and adept in their pedagogical methods. Furthermore, experience was strongly associated with a deeper mastery of subject content (35%). This allows experienced teachers to explain concepts more clearly and authoritatively, directly facilitating student understanding. However, the study concluded that a significant gap exists, as experience was not seen to substantially improve teachers' self-confidence (only 5%). This suggests that systemic issues—such as a lack of support, recognition, or a challenging work environment—may be hindering experienced teachers from translating their skills and knowledge into greater self-assurance, which is itself a key component of effective classroom management and student engagement.

2. On the Impact of Teacher Qualifications:

The study concluded that the value of teacher qualifications is perceived predominantly in terms of administrative efficiency and curriculum management, rather than in the qualitative aspects of teaching and learning. The overwhelming majority of respondents (55%) linked qualified teachers to their ability to complete the syllabus on time. This points to a conclusion that the school environment is intensely focused on curriculum coverage, likely as a primary strategy for preparing students for national examinations. While a significant portion of respondents (30%) did connect qualifications to improved student performance, the most valued outcome was systematic syllabus completion. Most notably, the study concluded that the school community holds a nuanced and realistic view, largely rejecting the idea that qualification automatically equates to teaching excellence (only 5% believed qualified teachers "always teach well"). This indicates an awareness that a teaching certificate is a necessary foundation, but that factors like dedication, practical skill, and motivation are essential for transforming that qualification into truly effective classroom practice.

Recommendations

The school should institute a mandatory, continuous professional development (CPD) program tailored to different career stages. For novice teachers, training should focus on foundational pedagogical skills, classroom management, and syllabus interpretation. For experienced teachers, CPD must move beyond basics to advanced workshops on innovative teaching methodologies, critical thinking instruction, and integrating technology into lessons. Crucially, a significant portion of this training must be dedicated to psycho-social support, resilience building, and mentorship training to directly address the critical deficit in teacher self-confidence. Experienced, high-performing teachers should be recognized as "Master Teachers" and given responsibilities to mentor their less experienced or less confident colleagues, creating a supportive in-house ecosystem that builds both skills and morale.

The overwhelming emphasis on completing the syllabus is a major barrier to deep, qualitative education. School administration and district inspectors must actively champion and measure quality beyond syllabus completion. This can be achieved by introducing key performance indicators (KPIs) for teachers that reward student engagement, the use of formative assessments, and innovative teaching practices, not just curricular pace. The school timetable should

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be reviewed to allocate specific periods for remedial classes, project-based learning, and educational activities that are not strictly syllabus-driven. Furthermore, school leadership should model and enforce the importance of timely, meaningful feedback on student work, transforming it from a peripheral activity into a core teaching responsibility. This shift will leverage teacher qualifications and experience towards creating a more profound and lasting impact on student learning.

The low linkage between experience and self-confidence, coupled with the skepticism that qualifications guarantee good teaching, points to a significant morale issue. A formalized system for motivation and recognition is urgently needed. This includes both financial and non-financial incentives. The school, with support from the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and district, should explore feasible ways to provide performance-based bonuses or allowances. More immediately, non-financial recognition is vital. This includes instituting "Teacher of the Term" awards, public acknowledgment of innovations in the classroom, and creating opportunities for professional leadership, such as heading subject panels or representing the school in district forums. Fostering a collaborative and appreciative school culture where teachers feel valued for their expertise and dedication is fundamental to boosting the self-confidence that the study found to be lacking.

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