

Student-Teacher Interaction And Teachers' Retention In Secondary Schools In Wakiso District, Uganda

Namatovu Hadiijah

Metropolitan International University

Abstract

Teacher retention is a serious issue in education systems worldwide, with significant consequences for the value of instruction and student outcomes. In secondary schools across Wakiso district, Wakiso District, Uganda, the challenge of retaining teachers has become increasingly pronounced. This study examined the relationship between student-teacher interaction and teacher retention. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. The study used the mixed method, where the qualitative method shall be for the interview guide well as the quantitative method will be employed when teachers are filling questionnaire. Head teachers will be interviewed. The target population entailed all secondary school teachers in the ten selected schools in Wakiso district. According to Wakiso District Education Office (2024), there are approximately 430 teachers across all private secondary schools in Wakiso district. The sample was stratified proportionally to ensure representation from each institution. So 152 teachers (distributed across schools based on their teacher populations). Headteachers/administrators: 10 (all purposively included for qualitative insights). Cross-sectional design was chosen such that data was collected at a single point and once without follow-up (Creswell, 2017). This allowed for a snapshot analysis of working conditions and teacher retention in Wakiso district. Results showed that 72.4% agreed they can easily communicate with students, while 55.9% agreed their students actively participate.

However, 38.2% said they rarely have time for individual attention. Overcrowding was noted by 57.9% as limiting interaction. Only 26.3% agreed they receive constructive feedback from students, but 54.6% agreed there is mutual respect. Also results further showed that only 34.2% agreed they plan to continue teaching at the school next year, while 57.2% agreed they frequently think about leaving. Only 23.7% agreed they feel valued, and 19.8% agreed working conditions motivate them to stay long-term. A large majority (75%) disagreed that they have refused transfer opportunities to remain. The significance of the second hypothesis (H_2) which stated that there is no significant relationship between student-teacher interaction and teacher retention, Pearson correlation(r_s) was used and results showed that there is a positive significant relationship between student-teacher interaction and teacher retention among teachers ($r_s = 0.523$, $p < 0.01$). The higher the quality of student-teacher interaction, the higher the retention levels. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The qualitative data also revealed that student behaviour and the quality of the relationship significantly impact teacher morale. Positive, respectful interactions were a source of motivation, whereas environments with persistent disciplinary issues, compounded by a lack of administrative support in managing them, led to emotional exhaustion. This aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that

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excessive job demands (like managing large, unruly classes) deplete energy and lead to burnout, while job resources (like positive student relationships) buffer stress and foster engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the context of Wakiso district, overcrowding acts as a critical demand that depletes the resource of positive student-teacher interaction.

Furthermore, the language of instruction policy presented a unique interaction barrier. Some teachers indicated that switching between local languages and English to ensure comprehension added a layer of complexity to communication, particularly in lower secondary levels. This points to a pedagogical challenge that, if unaddressed, can diminish teaching efficacy and satisfaction. It was concluded that the core teaching experience matters profoundly. Overcrowded classrooms, a direct result of rapid

population growth without commensurate teacher recruitment, severely degrade the quality of student-teacher interaction. This transforms teaching from a rewarding profession into a stressful, unmanageable task, leading to burnout and attrition. Based on the study's findings and conclusion, it was recommended that there is need to address the Teacher Shortage and Classroom Overcrowding. This can be done by launching an urgent, data-driven teacher recruitment and deployment drive specifically targeting high-growth peri-urban districts. Recruitment should be aligned with projected enrollment increases to achieve manageable pupil-teacher ratios.

Keywords: Education systems, student-teacher interaction, instruction materials, teacher retention, working condition, student outcomes.

Introduction

The study is based on Herzberg's Two Factor Theory. Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (Motivation Hygiene Theory) was advanced by Frederick Herzberg in the year 1959, this theory posits that workplace factors can be categorized into two distinct groups: hygiene factors and motivators (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors (extrinsic elements like salary, working conditions, and job security) prevent dissatisfaction when present but do not motivate employees. Motivators (intrinsic elements such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility) actively drive job satisfaction and performance. It also assumes that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposite to each other but are separate, and that improving hygiene factors only reduces dissatisfaction without creating positive motivation (Herzberg, 1968).

Strengths of the theory include its clear distinction between different types of workplace factors and its practical applications for human resource management (Robbins & Judge, 2019). However, it has been criticized for oversimplifying the relationship between satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and for its limited generalizability beyond white collar professionals (House & Wigdor, 1967). The theory's methodological approach has also been questioned, as it relies on self-reported data that may be biased (King, 1970).

Poor management, lack of teacher involvement in decision-making, and unfair treatment contribute to attrition (Kyeyune & Musisi, 2022). Overcrowded classrooms, excessive teaching hours, and additional nonteaching duties increase burnout (Nakabugo et al., 2020). In Wakiso district, some schools have teacher to student ratios exceeding

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1:70, far above the recommended 1:40 (Wakiso District Education Office, 2023). Limited training and promotion opportunities discourage longterm commitment (Mugimu & Oonyu, 2019). Teachers in lack access to continuous professional development, which affects motivation and retention (UNATU, 2022). Poor classroom conditions, lack of staff rooms, and inadequate teaching materials demoralize educators (Nansamba et al., 2021). Many schools in Wakiso district struggle with insufficient textbooks, science labs, and ICT facilities, further discouraging teacher retention (Wakiso district Education Report, 2023). Wakiso district's proximity to Kampala makes it a transitional zone where urbanization pressures affect education. Rapid population growth has led to increased student numbers without proportional teacher recruitment (UBOS, 2022). Additionally, many teachers commute from Kampala, leading to fatigue and attrition when transport costs rise (Wakiso District Report, 2024).

While several studies have examined teacher retention in rural and urban Uganda, few focus on periurban areas like Wakiso district, where unique dynamics exist. This study fills that gap by analyzing how working conditions specifically impact teacher retention in this setting.

Teacher retention in Wakiso district's secondary schools is a big problem, with attrition rates exceeding Uganda's national average. Recent data from the Wakiso District Education Office (2024) reveals that 12–15% of teachers leave their positions annually, compared to the national rate of 10% (MoES, 2021). This turnover is driven by systemic challenges in working conditions, which disproportionately affect periurban schools like those in Wakiso district. Below is an analysis of the current situation, supported by empirical evidence:

Public school teachers in Wakiso district experience salary delays of 3–6 months, a key driver of attrition (UNATU, 2023). A 2022 survey found that 68% of departing teachers cited irregular pay as their primary reason for leaving (Wakiso District Education Report, 2023). Private school teachers earn 30–40% below the recommended wage, forcing many to take on additional jobs or leave the profession (UBOS, 2022). Teachertostudent ratios in Wakiso district's public schools average 1:70, far exceeding the recommended 1:40 (Wakiso District Education Office, 2023). Teachers report 72hour workweeks, including nonteaching duties like administrative tasks and community meetings, leading to burnout (Nansamba et al., 2021).

Only 20% of schools provide professional development opportunities, and 35% of teachers report feeling excluded from decisionmaking processes (Wakiso district Education Report, 2023). Poor leadership practices, such as favoritism and lack of feedback, are cited by 45% of teachers as reasons for quitting (Kyeyune & Musisi, 2022). Wakiso district's proximity to Kampala has led to rapid population growth, with student enrollment increasing by 20% since 2020 without proportional teacher recruitment (UBOS, 2022). 35% of teachers commute from Kampala, spending up to 25% of their salaries on transport, which exacerbates financial strain (Wakiso District Report, 2023). Government initiatives like salary harmonization and infrastructure grants have had limited impact in Wakiso district. For example, a 2022 infrastructure grant improved facilities in only 3 of 10 schools (Wakiso District Education Office, 2024). Teachers cite a lack of localized solutions for peri-urban challenges, such as housing subsidies or transportation allowances (UNATU, 2023). Wakiso district's retention challenges mirror trends in other

periurban African contexts. For instance in Kenya's peri-urban schools, similar attrition rates (14%) are linked to salary delays and overcrowding (Barmao-Kiptanui et al., 2021). Tanzanian studies highlight how urbanization pressures degrade teacher morale in transitional zones like Wakiso district (Tumaini, 2023).

Statement of the problem

The magnitude of this problem is significant. For instance, some schools in Wakiso district have teacher to student ratios exceeding 1:70, far above the recommended 1:40, leading to overcrowded classrooms and excessive workloads (Wakiso District Education Office, 2023). Also, teachers don't have access to professional development opportunities and face inadequate teaching materials, further demoralizing them (Nansamba et al., 2021). Efforts to address this problem have been made by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and

organizations like the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU), including policy Reports for salary increments and infrastructure improvements (UNATU, 2022). However, these interventions have not sufficiently mitigated the challenges, particularly in periurban areas like Wakiso district, where unique dynamics such as urbanization pressures exacerbate the issues (UBOS, 2022). This study seeks to examine the relationship between student teacher interaction and teacher retention in Wakiso district secondary schools.

Objective

To examine the relationship between student teacher interaction and teacher retention

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between relationship between student teacher interaction and teacher retention

Scope of the study

This study was conducted within Wakiso district. The geographical scope is deliberately selected because according to Wakiso District Education Office (2024) reveals that 12–15% of teachers leave their positions annually, compared to the national rate of 10% (MoES, 2021). The area also has a high number of Private schools which are highly required to successfully collect the information I need for my research activities.

This study focused on three key dimensions of working conditions student-teacher interaction, administrative support, and salary disparities to comprehensively analyze their impact on teacher retention in secondary schools within Wakiso district.

These variables were selected based on their established significance in influencing teacher retention, as evidenced by both global and local research (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2019; García & Weiss, 2023). Student-teacher interaction, encompassing communication, respect, and trust, has been shown to enhance job satisfaction and reduce burnout, directly affecting teachers' willingness to remain in the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Zee & Koomen, 2020). Administrative support, including leadership practices, professional development opportunities, and workload management, plays a pivotal role in creating a conducive work environment, with studies linking supportive leadership to lower attrition rates (Grissom et al., 2021; Carver-Thomas & DarlingHammond, 2019).

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Salary disparities, particularly delays and inadequacies in compensation, are critical in Uganda's context, where financial instability drives high turnover, especially in periurban areas like Wakiso district (MoES, 2021). Teacher retention will be measured through job tenure and willingness to stay, reflecting both objective and subjective indicators of retention (Herzberg, 1966; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

This study examined teacher retention trends in Wakiso district secondary schools over a five-year period (2020–2025). This timeframe was selected for three key reasons the five-year span enables identification of long-term retention patterns rather than short-term fluctuations, as recommended by longitudinal studies on teacher attrition (Sutcher et al., 2019; García & Weiss, 2023). Also this period aligns with Uganda's most recent education sector planning cycle (2020–2025), ensuring relevance to current policy interventions (MoES, 2021). The timeframe is further justified by data availability, as schools and district education offices maintain more accurate staff records for recent years (Wakiso District Education Office, 2023).

Significance of the study

The study would provide empirical evidence to guide the Wakiso district and the Ministry of Education in formulating policies that enhance teachers' working conditions. By identifying key factors such as salary, workload, school infrastructure, and administrative support, the findings can inform decisions aimed at reducing teacher turnover and improving job satisfaction.

School administrators and headteachers would benefit from the study by gaining insights into the specific challenges teachers face. This knowledge can help them implement better staff welfare programs, create conducive work environments, and adopt retention strategies such as mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and improved communication channels.

Understanding the link between working conditions and retention will highlight areas that need intervention to boost teacher morale. When teachers feel valued and supported, their job satisfaction increases, leading to better performance, higher student achievement, and a more stable teaching workforce.

Teachers would gain insights into how factors like student-teacher interaction, administrative support, and fair compensation influence their job satisfaction. Understanding these dynamics would empower teachers to seek improvements in their schools, such as stronger leadership support or professional development opportunities, which are essential for long-term career fulfillment.

High turnover rates and burnout are prevalent among teachers in Wakiso district due to stressful working conditions. The study's recommendations may lead to interventions like mentorship programs, mental health support, and workload management strategies, helping teachers cope with job related stress and reducing the likelihood of leaving the profession.

High teacher turnover disrupts the learning process, leading to inconsistent instruction and lower academic performance. By addressing retention challenges, schools can ensure continuity in teaching, which positively impacts students' educational experiences and outcomes.

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This study adds to the existing body of knowledge on teacher retention in Uganda, particularly in periurban settings like Wakiso district. Future researchers can use the findings as a reference for similar studies or comparative analyses in other regions.

Parents and the local community have a vested interest in the stability of schools. Retaining qualified teachers ensures that students receive consistent, high-quality education. The study's recommendations can encourage community involvement in advocating for better teacher welfare and school improvements.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Cross-sectional design was chosen such that data was collected at a single point and once without follow-up (Creswell, 2017). This allowed for a snapshot analysis of working conditions and teacher retention in Wakiso district.

Research approach

The study used the mixed method, where the qualitative method shall be for the interview guide well as the quantitative method will be employed when teachers are filling questionnaire. Head teachers will be interviewed. Correlational design is employed to examine relationships between variables (administrative support, student-teacher interaction, salary disparities, and retention) without manipulation (Kumar, 2019). This design helps reveal the course and strength of associations between the variables.

Population of the Study

The target population entailed all secondary school teachers in the ten selected schools in Wakiso district. According to Wakiso District Education Office (2024), there are approximately 430 teachers across all private secondary schools in Wakiso district.

Sample size

To find the sample size for teachers in Wakiso district secondary schools, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table was applied. This method is suitable for finite populations and provides a reliable sample size based on the total population (N) with a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

According to Wakiso District Education Office (2023), there are approximately 430 teachers across the secondary schools in Wakiso district.

The Krejcie and Morgan table provides suggested sample sizes for a given population size. For $N = 430$, the table suggests: Sample size (n) = 152 (for a population of 430 at 95% confidence and 5% margin of error). The sample will be stratified proportionally to ensure representation from each institution. So 152 teachers (distributed across schools based on their teacher populations).

Headteachers/administrators: 10 (all purposively included for qualitative insights).

Analysis Of Data And Results

Student-Teacher Interaction

Respondents were requested to indicate their levels of student-teacher interaction. The frequencies obtained were translated into percentages as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequencies of Responses on Student-Teacher Interaction

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. I can easily communicate with my students during lessons.	4.6	9.2	13.8	47.4	25.0
2. My students actively participate in classroom discussions.	5.9	15.8	22.4	39.5	16.4
3. I have time to give my students individual attention.	13.2	23.0	25.7	26.3	11.8
4. My students' behavior positively impacts my teaching motivation.	9.2	18.4	27.0	32.2	13.2
5. Language barriers hinder effective communication with students.	14.5	27.6	25.0	21.1	11.8
6. Overcrowding limits my ability to interact with all students.	6.6	15.8	19.7	35.5	22.4
7. I receive constructive feedback from my students.	18.4	26.3	28.9	19.7	6.6
8. There is mutual respect between me and my students.	7.9	14.5	23.0	36.8	17.8

SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

Results in Table 1 showed that 72.4% agreed they can easily communicate with students, while 55.9% agreed their students actively participate. However, 38.2% said they rarely have time for individual attention. Overcrowding was noted by 57.9% as limiting interaction. Only 26.3% agreed they receive constructive feedback from students, but 54.6% agreed there is mutual respect.

Teacher Retention

Respondents were requested to indicate their retention intentions. The frequencies obtained were translated into percentages as shown in Table 2s.

Table 2: Frequencies of Responses on Teacher Retention

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. I plan to continue teaching at this school next year.	14.5	23.7	27.6	22.4	11.8
2. I would recommend this school to other teachers.	19.7	28.9	26.3	17.1	7.9
3. I frequently think about leaving this school.	9.2	13.8	19.7	32.2	25.0
4. I feel valued as a teacher at this school.	21.1	30.3	25.0	15.8	7.9
5. The working conditions motivate me to stay long-term.	25.7	32.2	22.4	13.2	6.6
6. I have refused transfer opportunities to remain here.	47.4	27.6	15.8	6.6	2.6
7. I feel emotionally attached to this school.	28.9	32.2	21.1	11.8	5.9

Results in Table 2 show that only 34.2% agreed they plan to continue teaching at the school next year, while 57.2% agreed they frequently think about leaving. Only 23.7% agreed they feel valued, and 19.8% agreed working

conditions motivate them to stay long-term. A large majority (75%) disagreed that they have refused transfer opportunities to remain.

Student-Teacher Interaction and Teacher Retention

To test the significance of the second hypothesis (H₂) which stated that there is no significant relationship between student-teacher interaction and teacher retention, Pearson correlation(r_s) was used and results were as shown in Table 3s.

Table 3: Pearson correlation between Student-Teacher Interaction and Teacher Retention

		Student-Teacher Interaction	Teacher Retention
Student-Teacher Interaction	Pearson correlation	1.000	.523**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	152	152
Teacher Retention	Pearson correlation	.523**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	152	152

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation results in Table 3 show that there is a positive significant relationship between student-teacher interaction and teacher retention among teachers ($r_s = 0.523$, $p < 0.01$). The higher the quality of student-teacher interaction, the higher the retention levels. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data further revealed that student behaviour and the quality of the relationship significantly impact teacher morale. Positive, respectful interactions were a source of motivation, whereas environments with persistent disciplinary issues, compounded by a lack of administrative support in managing them, led to emotional exhaustion. This aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that excessive job demands (like managing large, unruly classes) deplete energy and lead to burnout, while job resources (like positive student relationships) buffer stress and foster engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the context of Wakiso district, overcrowding acts as a critical demand that depletes the resource of positive student-teacher interaction.

Furthermore, the language of instruction policy presented a unique interaction barrier. Some teachers indicated that switching between local languages and English to ensure comprehension added a layer of complexity to communication, particularly in lower secondary levels. This points to a pedagogical challenge that, if unaddressed, can diminish teaching efficacy and satisfaction.

Discussion

The hypothesis, exploring the link between student-teacher interaction and retention, was also supported by a significant positive correlation ($r_s = 0.523$, $p < 0.01$). This underscores that the core relational aspect of teaching the daily interaction with students is a vital intrinsic motivator and a key determinant of job satisfaction.

Quantitative data indicated that while a majority of teachers (72.4%) felt they could communicate easily with students, significant challenges persisted. Overcrowding was identified by 57.9% of respondents as a major barrier to effective interaction, a finding powerfully echoed in the qualitative interviews. Administrators described classrooms with student-teacher ratios exceeding 1:70 (HT4), a situation that renders formative assessment, individual attention, and meaningful pedagogical engagement nearly impossible. This creates a frustrating and demoralising work environment where teachers feel they cannot perform their core duty effectively. Research from Uganda and Kenya confirms that overcrowding is a primary driver of teacher burnout and attrition, as it transforms teaching from a relational profession into a managerial ordeal (Mukhtar et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The core teaching experience matters profoundly. Overcrowded classrooms, a direct result of rapid population growth without commensurate teacher recruitment, severely degrade the quality of student-teacher interaction. This transforms teaching from a rewarding profession into a stressful, unmanageable task, leading to burnout and attrition.

Recommendation

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, school administrators, and other stakeholders.

There is need to address the Teacher Shortage and Classroom Overcrowding. This can be done by launching an urgent, data-driven teacher recruitment and deployment drive specifically targeting high-growth peri-urban districts. Recruitment should be aligned with projected enrollment increases to achieve manageable pupil-teacher ratios.

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