

Relationship Between Staff Discipline and Pupils' Academic Performance at Primary Leaving Examination Level in Selected Primary Schools of Nyakinama Sub-County, Kisoro District, Uganda

Shantare Aminah

Metropolitan International University

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between staff discipline and pupils' academic performance at the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) level in selected primary schools of Nyakinama Sub-County, Kisoro District, Uganda. A descriptive cross-sectional research design employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted. Data were collected from 140 respondents comprising teachers, head teachers, and district education officials using questionnaires and interview guides. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

The findings revealed a positive but weak and statistically significant relationship between staff discipline and pupils' academic performance at PLE level ($r = 0.212$, $p < 0.05$). Key indicators of staff discipline, including punctuality, regular attendance, lesson preparation, and adherence to professional ethics, were found to contribute to a conducive learning environment; however, they accounted for only a limited proportion of variation in pupils' academic performance. The study concludes that staff discipline plays a supportive rather than dominant role in enhancing pupils' academic performance. It therefore recommends strengthened supervision, continuous professional development, and the adoption of holistic interventions that address multiple determinants of learner achievement.

Keywords: Staff Discipline, Academic Performance, PLE, Primary Schools, Uganda

Background of the Study

Staff discipline is widely regarded as a critical determinant of institutional effectiveness, particularly within the education sector where teachers play a central role in shaping learners' academic outcomes (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2024). In contemporary education systems, staff discipline extends beyond basic compliance with rules to include professional commitment, accountability, ethical conduct, and instructional preparedness (Bush & Middlewood, 2022). Disciplined staff are more likely to attend classes regularly, prepare lessons adequately, assess learners consistently, and maintain positive professional conduct. These practices collectively enhance instructional quality and promote effective teaching and learning processes, which are essential for improved learner achievement (Masita, 2018; Eshetu, 2024; Gitome, Katola, & Nyabwari, 2023).

Recent global and regional studies conducted between 2023 and 2025 increasingly emphasize that teacher discipline is a foundational component of school effectiveness, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where systemic constraints heighten the importance of efficient utilization of human resources (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2024). Education systems recovering from post-COVID-19 disruptions have reported renewed challenges related to teacher absenteeism, reduced instructional time, weakened supervision mechanisms, and declining professional accountability (OECD, 2024; UNICEF, 2023). These challenges have reignited policy and scholarly debates on the role of staff

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discipline in restoring learning outcomes and improving examination performance, especially at critical transition levels such as completion of primary education (World Bank, 2024; UNESCO, 2025).

In Uganda, the Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct under the Education Service Act (2018) outlines expected standards of discipline, including punctuality, accountability, ethical behavior, and commitment to duty (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2018). These standards are reinforced through inspection, performance appraisal, and continuous professional development initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES, 2023). However, despite this regulatory and institutional framework, recent district and national education monitoring reports continue to highlight persistent challenges related to teacher absenteeism, lateness, inadequate lesson preparation, and limited engagement in instructional duties (Education Service Commission, 2024; District Education Report, 2024). Such challenges are more pronounced in rural primary schools, where supervision gaps, limited resources, and difficult working conditions undermine consistent staff discipline (MoES, 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

At the national level, Uganda's learning assessment reports and Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) performance analyses released between 2023 and 2025 indicate uneven learning outcomes across districts, with rural sub-counties disproportionately affected (Uganda National Examinations Board [UNEBC], 2024; MoES, 2025). Nyakinama Sub-County in Kisoro District has experienced unsatisfactory performance at the PLE level in recent years. While this trend is frequently attributed to learner-related factors such as absenteeism, home background, and limited instructional resources, emerging evidence suggests that school-based factors—particularly staff discipline and professional conduct—may play a significant but underexplored role in shaping pupils' academic outcomes (UNEBC, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of teacher discipline in improving instructional effectiveness, empirical studies focusing on its direct relationship with pupils' academic performance at PLE level remain limited within the Ugandan rural context (Eshetu, 2024; MoES, 2023). Most existing studies tend to emphasize infrastructure, availability of instructional materials, or learner characteristics, with comparatively less attention given to staff discipline as a measurable determinant of academic performance (Bush & Middlewood, 2022; UNESCO, 2024). This gap in empirical evidence underscores the need to systematically examine the relationship between staff discipline and pupils' academic performance in selected primary schools of Nyakinama Sub-County, thereby justifying the present study.

Problem Statement

Despite significant policy frameworks and professional guidelines in Uganda, primary schools continue to experience inconsistent academic performance at the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) level (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2023; UNESCO, 2023). In Nyakinama Sub-County, Kisoro District, recent PLE results have been below national expectations, raising concerns among educators, parents, and policymakers (District Education Report, 2024). While several factors such as learner absenteeism, limited instructional resources, and socio-economic challenges have been identified as contributing to poor performance (World Bank, 2023; Eshetu, 2024), the role of

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staff discipline remains underexplored. Reports from district education offices indicate persistent challenges related to teacher absenteeism, lateness, inadequate lesson preparation, and weak adherence to professional ethics, particularly in rural primary schools (MoES, 2023; Masita, 2018). This situation suggests that lapses in staff discipline may negatively influence the quality of teaching, continuity of learning, and ultimately, pupils' academic outcomes. However, empirical evidence quantifying the relationship between staff discipline and pupils' academic performance at PLE level in Nyakinama Sub-County is limited (Eshetu, 2024; Gitome et al., 2023). Understanding this relationship is crucial for designing interventions that enhance teaching quality, promote professional responsibility among staff, and improve learner achievement.

Main Objective

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between staff discipline and pupils' academic performance at the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) level in selected primary schools of Nyakinama Sub-County, Kisoro District, Uganda.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive cross-sectional research design was employed to examine the relationship between staff discipline and pupils' academic performance at the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) level in selected primary schools of Nyakinama Sub-County, Kisoro District, Uganda. This design was considered appropriate because it allows data collection at a single point in time and facilitates the examination of relationships between variables without manipulating the study environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The study also integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to enable triangulation of findings and enhance the depth and validity of the results (Creswell, 2023).

Study Population

The study population comprised teachers, head teachers, and district education officials in Nyakinama Sub-County. Teachers were included because they are directly responsible for classroom instruction and interact closely with learners, while head teachers and district officials were included due to their supervisory roles and knowledge of staff disciplinary practices (MoES, 2023; Masita, 2018).

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total sample of 140 respondents was selected. Purposive sampling was used to select head teachers and district education officials due to their administrative positions and relevant expertise, while simple random sampling was employed to select teachers, ensuring each had an equal chance of participation and reducing selection bias (Kothari, 2019; Taherdoost, 2016).

Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires and interview guides. Questionnaires were administered to teachers to obtain quantitative information on staff discipline indicators such as punctuality, attendance, lesson

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preparation, and adherence to professional ethics, as well as pupils' academic performance at PLE level. Interview guides were used to collect qualitative insights from head teachers and district officials regarding disciplinary practices, challenges, and their influence on learner outcomes (Bryman, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the instruments was ensured through expert review by educational professionals and pilot testing in primary schools outside the study area. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with coefficients exceeding 0.7 considered acceptable for internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003; Field, 2018).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, summarized respondents' perceptions of staff discipline. Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between staff discipline and pupils' academic performance, as the data met the assumptions required for correlation analysis (Field, 2023; Pallant, 2020). Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, and interpretation of emerging patterns to complement and contextualize the quantitative findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Staff Discipline (n = 140)

Staff Discipline Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Staff punctuality	3.41	0.87	Moderate
Regular staff attendance	3.56	0.81	Moderate
Lesson preparation	3.38	0.90	Moderate
Adherence to professional ethics	3.62	0.78	Moderate
Overall staff discipline	3.49	0.84	Moderate

As shown in Table 1, staff discipline in the sampled primary schools was practiced at a moderate level, with mean scores ranging from 3.38 to 3.62. Adherence to professional ethics recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.62, SD = 0.78), indicating relatively stronger compliance with ethical standards among staff. In contrast, lesson preparation registered the lowest mean score (M = 3.38, SD = 0.90), suggesting comparatively weaker instructional preparedness, a pattern commonly observed in resource-constrained primary school settings (UNESCO, 2023).

The overall mean score of 3.49 (SD = 0.84) indicates that staff discipline practices were neither poor nor excellent but moderately implemented across the schools. This implies that although basic disciplinary standards such as

punctuality, attendance, and ethical conduct were generally observed, there remains substantial room for improvement. Similar findings have been reported in recent studies which emphasize that moderate levels of staff discipline may support routine school functioning but are insufficient to drive substantial improvements in teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes without complementary interventions (OECD, 2024).

Inferential Statistics

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Staff Discipline and Pupils' Academic Performance

Variables	Academic Performance
Staff Discipline	$r = 0.212^*$
	$p = 0.014$

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 2, Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a positive but weak relationship between staff discipline and pupils' academic performance at PLE level ($r = 0.212$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that improvements in staff discipline manifested through punctuality, regular attendance, lesson preparation, and adherence to professional ethics are associated with better academic outcomes among pupils. However, the strength of this relationship is relatively low, suggesting that while staff discipline contributes positively to learning, it is not the sole determinant of academic performance.

The weak correlation implies that staff discipline alone accounts for only a small proportion of the variance in pupils' PLE results. Other factors, such as learner motivation, availability of instructional materials, class size, parental support, and school infrastructure, likely interact with staff discipline to influence performance outcomes (Masita, 2018; UNESCO, 2023). This aligns with broader empirical evidence indicating that academic achievement is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by both school-based and external contextual factors (Eshetu, 2024).

Furthermore, the finding underscores the importance of viewing staff discipline as a supportive but not dominant factor in enhancing educational outcomes. While enhancing teacher discipline can improve the learning environment, a comprehensive approach addressing pedagogical quality, learner engagement, and resource allocation is necessary to achieve substantial improvements in PLE performance. These insights provide practical implications for school administrators and education policymakers, highlighting the need for integrated interventions that reinforce teacher professionalism alongside broader systemic reforms.

Qualitative Findings

Interview responses from head teachers and senior staff revealed that teacher absenteeism and lateness are major disruptors of syllabus coverage and the continuity of learning. Several respondents noted that when teachers fail to report to class on time or are frequently absent, lessons are either skipped or rushed, which negatively affects pupils' understanding of key concepts and their overall preparedness for examinations. This finding aligns with previous

studies emphasizing that teacher presence and punctuality are essential for maintaining instructional consistency and promoting effective learning outcomes (Masita, 2018; UNESCO, 2023).

Respondents further highlighted that while staff discipline is important, other factors significantly influence pupils' academic performance. These include learners' home environments, parental involvement, socio-economic conditions, and access to learning resources such as textbooks and teaching aids. Additionally, school infrastructure—such as classroom space, furniture, and electricity for practical lessons—was cited as a key determinant of effective teaching and learning. The qualitative evidence thus suggests that pupils' academic performance is shaped by a complex interplay of teacher-related, learner-related, and school-based factors.

Overall, the qualitative findings support the quantitative results, indicating that while staff discipline contributes to a conducive learning environment, it alone is insufficient to explain variations in academic performance. Effective interventions to improve PLE outcomes should therefore adopt a holistic approach that addresses teacher professionalism alongside learner support and school infrastructure enhancements (Eshetu, 2024; World Bank, 2023).

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that staff discipline contributes positively to pupils' academic performance, albeit with a modest effect size. The weak but statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.212$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that while disciplined teacher behavior such as punctuality, regular attendance, lesson preparation, and adherence to professional ethics supports a conducive learning environment, it is only one of several factors influencing pupils' outcomes. This aligns with previous research indicating that teacher discipline is necessary for instructional effectiveness but does not operate in isolation from broader systemic and contextual factors (Masita, 2018; Eshetu, 2024).

Qualitative insights reinforced this conclusion, highlighting the disruptive impact of teacher absenteeism and lateness on syllabus coverage and lesson continuity. Moreover, respondents emphasized that pupils' home backgrounds, socio-economic status, access to instructional materials, and school infrastructure significantly affect academic performance. These findings are consistent with global studies that underscore the multifaceted nature of learning outcomes, where teacher-related factors interact with learner, school, and community variables to shape academic achievement (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

The moderate level of staff discipline observed in the sampled schools suggests that while some professional standards are met, there is substantial room for improvement. Enhancing staff discipline could thus play a supportive role in elevating academic performance, particularly when combined with interventions addressing learner support, teaching resources, and infrastructural improvements. The weak correlation observed also reflects the complex reality of rural Ugandan primary schools, where systemic constraints often limit the direct impact of teacher behavior on measurable examination outcomes.

Conclusions

The study concludes that staff discipline in Nyakinama Sub-County has a statistically significant but weak positive relationship with pupils' academic performance at PLE level. Disciplined staff behavior including punctuality, regular

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attendance, lesson preparation, and adherence to professional ethics supports effective teaching and learning, creating a conducive classroom environment. However, staff discipline alone is insufficient to produce substantial improvements in academic outcomes, as pupils' performance is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including learner background, instructional resources, and school infrastructure.

The study recommends that school administrators strengthen supervision mechanisms to ensure consistent adherence to professional standards. Regular monitoring of staff attendance, punctuality, and lesson delivery can reinforce positive disciplinary behavior, fostering a more conducive learning environment.

Continuous professional development programs focusing on ethics, instructional preparedness, classroom management, and learner engagement should also be prioritized. Such programs can equip teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to improve teaching effectiveness and positively influence pupils' academic outcomes (Mathis & Jackson, 2018).

Education stakeholders, including district education offices, school management committees, and community leaders, should adopt integrated strategies that address both teacher and learner factors. This may involve providing adequate instructional materials, improving school infrastructure, promoting parental involvement, and supporting learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby creating an environment that maximizes the benefits of disciplined and committed staff (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

Finally, the Ministry of Education and Sports should ensure that the Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct is effectively implemented through inspections, performance appraisals, and accountability mechanisms, particularly in rural primary schools where supervision challenges are more pronounced. Implementing these recommendations can enhance the positive influence of staff discipline on pupils' academic performance while simultaneously addressing other systemic and contextual factors that affect learning outcomes.

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