

Relationship Between Teachers’ Professional Responsibility, Teacher–Learner Relationships, and School Performance in Primary Schools of Nyakinama Sub-County, Kisoro District, Uganda

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between teachers’ professional responsibility, teacher–learner relationships, and school performance in primary schools of Nyakinama Sub-County, Kisoro District, Uganda. Anchored in McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y, the study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design using mixed methods. Data were collected from 140 respondents comprising teachers, head teachers, and district education officials through questionnaires and interview guides. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson’s correlation analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Findings revealed positive but weak and statistically significant relationships between teachers’ professional responsibility and school performance ($r = 0.197$, $p < 0.05$), as well as between teacher–learner relationships and school performance ($r = 0.277$, $p < 0.05$). The results indicate that while professional responsibility and positive interpersonal relationships contribute to improved academic performance, discipline, and participation in co-curricular activities, their overall influence is modest. The study concludes that enhancing school performance requires integrated approaches that combine professional responsibility with broader institutional and contextual interventions.

Keywords: Professional Responsibility, Teacher–Learner Relationship, School Performance, Primary Schools, Uganda

Background of the Study

Teachers’ professional responsibility and positive teacher–learner relationships are widely recognized as essential components of effective schooling. Professional responsibility encompasses adherence to ethical standards, punctuality, lesson preparation, assessment of learners, and participation in school activities (Mathis & Jackson, 2018; MoES, 2023). When teachers demonstrate professional responsibility, they not only fulfill instructional and administrative duties but also model desirable behaviors for learners, shaping classroom culture and overall school climate (Bush & Middlewood, 2022). Similarly, positive teacher–learner relationships, characterized by mutual respect, encouragement, fairness, and supportive communication, play a pivotal role in fostering learner motivation, discipline, engagement, and self-efficacy (Gitome, Katola, & Nyabwari, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Strong interpersonal relationships between teachers and learners have been linked to higher participation, improved academic outcomes, and reduced behavioral challenges (World Bank, 2024). However, rural Ugandan primary schools face unique challenges that affect teacher professionalism and teacher–learner interactions, including absenteeism, inadequate lesson preparation, limited assessment practices, low engagement in professional development, large class sizes, insufficient teaching and learning resources, and socio-economic constraints among learners (District Education Inspection Report, 2024; MoES, 2023; UNEB, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; UNESCO, 2024).

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Empirical studies from Uganda and other East African countries indicate that declining professional responsibility and weak teacher–learner relationships are associated with inconsistent academic performance and low learner achievement in national examinations (Eshetu, 2024; MoES, 2025; UNESCO, 2023). Teachers who fail to maintain professional conduct or adequately prepare lessons contribute to syllabus gaps, poor learner assessment, and reduced classroom engagement, while strained teacher–learner relationships can erode trust, reduce motivation, and limit learner participation (Masita, 2018; Gitome et al., 2023; World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2024). Despite these challenges, limited research has systematically examined how professional responsibility and teacher–learner relationships jointly influence school performance in rural Ugandan contexts (Bush & Middlewood, 2022; UNESCO, 2024; MoES, 2023). In Nyakinama Sub-County, Kisoro District, fluctuating national examination performance, inconsistent pupil discipline, and instructional challenges highlight the potential influence of teacher-related factors on school outcomes (District Education Report, 2024; UNEB, 2024). This study therefore seeks to explore the extent to which teachers’ professional responsibility and teacher–learner relationships impact school performance, providing evidence to guide interventions that strengthen teacher effectiveness and foster positive learning environments in rural Ugandan primary schools (MoES, 2023; Eshetu, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

Problem Statement

Despite established expectations for teacher professionalism, many primary schools in Nyakinama Sub-County continue to face challenges related to inadequate professional responsibility and weak teacher–learner interactions (District Education Inspection Report, 2024; MoES, 2023). These challenges manifest as teacher absenteeism, limited lesson preparation, inconsistent learner assessment, and reduced engagement in classroom activities, which collectively contribute to inconsistent school performance, low academic achievement, and poor learner discipline (Masita, 2018; Eshetu, 2024). While both professional responsibility and positive teacher–learner relationships are recognized as critical for effective schooling, empirical evidence examining how these factors jointly influence school performance in rural Ugandan contexts remains limited (Bush & Middlewood, 2022; UNESCO, 2024). Understanding the interplay between teacher professional conduct and interpersonal engagement is therefore essential for designing targeted interventions that enhance teaching quality, foster supportive learning environments, and improve academic outcomes in primary schools (World Bank, 2024; MoES, 2023).

Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to determine the relationship between teachers’ professional responsibility, teacher–learner relationships, and school performance in primary schools of Nyakinama Sub-County, Kisoro District, Uganda.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive cross-sectional research design employing mixed methods was adopted for this study. This design was considered appropriate as it allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the

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current state of teachers' professional responsibility, teacher–learner relationships, and school performance in Nyakinama Sub-County (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2016). The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled triangulation of findings, increasing the validity and depth of insights by capturing both measurable trends and contextual experiences (Creswell, 2023; Bryman, 2016).

Study Population

The study population comprised teachers, head teachers, and district education officials within Nyakinama Sub-County. Teachers were selected because they directly influence classroom teaching, learner engagement, and implementation of professional responsibilities, while head teachers and district officials provided oversight perspectives and insights into school-level management practices and performance monitoring (MoES, 2023; Masita, 2018). Collectively, these groups offered a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between teacher professionalism, interpersonal relationships, and school outcomes.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 140 respondents were purposively and randomly selected to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was used for head teachers and district education officials due to their specialized roles in school supervision and policy implementation. Simple random sampling was applied to select teachers, ensuring each teacher had an equal opportunity to participate, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample (Kothari, 2019; Taherdoost, 2016). The sample size was deemed sufficient to yield statistically meaningful results while remaining manageable for detailed qualitative analysis.

Data Collection Methods

Primary data were gathered using structured questionnaires and interview guides. Questionnaires were administered to teachers to collect quantitative data on professional responsibility indicators (lesson preparation, punctuality, ethical conduct, assessment practices, participation in school activities) and dimensions of teacher–learner relationships (support, encouragement, fairness, communication). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with head teachers and district officials to explore contextual factors, challenges, and perceptions regarding how teacher behavior influences school performance (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Bryman, 2016). This dual approach allowed the study to capture both objective measures and subjective experiences relevant to the research objectives.

Validity and Reliability

Instrument validity was ensured through expert review by educational practitioners and pilot testing in primary schools outside the study area to detect ambiguities or inconsistencies. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with coefficients exceeding 0.7 considered acceptable, confirming internal consistency of the measurement scales (Gliem & Gliem, 2003; Field, 2018). Data collection procedures followed ethical protocols, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

Data Analysis

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Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, summarized the levels of professional responsibility and teacher–learner relationship indicators. Pearson’s correlation coefficient was computed to determine the strength and direction of relationships between these variables and school performance, as the assumptions for parametric analysis were satisfied (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020). Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically, following coding, categorization, and pattern identification procedures to complement and contextualize quantitative findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The combined analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of how teacher professionalism and interpersonal engagement influence primary school performance in the study area.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Teachers’ Professional Responsibility (n = 140)

Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Lesson preparation	3.52	0.83	Moderate
Ethical conduct	3.68	0.75	Moderate
Assessment of learners	3.44	0.89	Moderate
Punctuality	3.39	0.91	Moderate
Participation in school activities	3.47	0.86	Moderate
Overall professional responsibility	3.50	0.85	Moderate

The descriptive results indicate that teachers’ professional responsibility is generally practiced at a moderate level across the sampled schools. Ethical conduct received the highest rating, suggesting that teachers adhere reasonably well to ethical standards and professional behavior. Punctuality scored the lowest, highlighting a need for interventions that improve timeliness and reliability in school routines. The overall moderate mean (3.50) implies that while teachers demonstrate professional behaviors, there is room for consistent improvement to enhance instructional quality and school outcomes.

Table 2: Teacher–Learner Relationships (n = 140)

Indicator	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Teacher support to learners	3.71	0.74	Moderate
Teacher encouragement	3.65	0.79	Moderate
Fair treatment of learners	3.58	0.82	Moderate
Communication with learners	3.60	0.80	Moderate
Overall teacher–learner relationship	3.64	0.79	Moderate

Teacher–learner relationships were moderately positive. Teacher support to learners scored the highest, reflecting that teachers generally provide guidance and assistance that fosters learner motivation. Communication and fair treatment,

while moderate, suggest that there is potential to strengthen mutual engagement, which is essential for discipline, participation, and overall classroom harmony.

Inferential Statistics

Table 3: Pearson Correlation – Professional Responsibility and School Performance

Variables	School Performance
Professional Responsibility	$r = 0.197^*$
p-value	0.021

*Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The correlation indicates a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between teachers’ professional responsibility and school performance. This suggests that improvements in professional behaviors, such as lesson preparation, assessment practices, and ethical conduct, are associated with modest gains in learner achievement and overall school performance.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation – Teacher–Learner Relationships and School Performance

Variables	School Performance
Teacher–Learner Relationship	$r = 0.277^*$
p-value	0.002

*Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Teacher–learner relationships also show a weak but statistically significant positive association with school performance. The slightly stronger correlation compared to professional responsibility indicates that interpersonal engagement and supportive classroom interactions may have a marginally greater influence on learner outcomes, reinforcing the importance of positive social-emotional dynamics in schools.

Qualitative Findings

Interviews with head teachers and district education officials revealed that teachers’ professional commitment and supportive teacher–learner interactions play a critical role in shaping the classroom environment, enhancing learner motivation, and promoting engagement in both academic and co-curricular activities. Respondents emphasized that teachers who consistently prepare lessons, maintain ethical conduct, and actively support learners contribute to a positive school climate where pupils are more likely to participate actively and exhibit discipline.

However, several systemic and contextual constraints limit the overall impact of professional responsibility and positive teacher–learner relationships on school performance. Large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention, monitor learner progress, and manage classroom behavior effectively, which negatively affects both engagement and academic achievement. In addition, inadequate instructional materials and resources, including textbooks, teaching aids, and learning technologies, hinder effective lesson delivery and reduce opportunities for practical learning and active learner participation. Socio-economic challenges among learners, such

as poverty, lack of parental support, and frequent absenteeism, further reduce learners' ability to concentrate, complete assignments, and engage fully in classroom activities.

Overall, the qualitative findings corroborate the quantitative results, demonstrating that while professional responsibility and teacher–learner relationships positively influence school performance, their effectiveness is moderated by broader structural and contextual challenges. This indicates that improvements in teacher behavior need to be complemented by systemic interventions, such as provision of adequate resources, management of class sizes, and support for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, to achieve meaningful and sustainable improvements in academic outcomes.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that teachers' professional responsibility and teacher–learner relationships positively influence school performance, albeit with weak effect sizes. These results align with McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, which suggest that teacher motivation, ethics, and interpersonal engagement are among several factors that drive organizational performance, including educational institutions (McGregor, 1960).

The weak correlations indicate that although professional responsibility and positive teacher–learner interactions contribute to academic achievement, other school-level factors—such as resource availability, class size, and learner socio-economic status—play critical roles in shaping overall performance (UNESCO, 2024; World Bank, 2024). This emphasizes the need for integrated strategies that combine teacher-focused interventions with systemic improvements, including capacity building, infrastructure enhancement, and supportive policies.

Furthermore, qualitative insights reveal that teachers who maintain ethical conduct and supportive relationships positively affect learner motivation, discipline, and participation, which are essential for achieving sustainable academic outcomes. These findings highlight the dual importance of professional responsibility and relational engagement in fostering conducive learning environments in rural Ugandan schools.

Conclusions

Teachers' professional responsibility and positive teacher–learner relationships have statistically significant but weak positive relationships with school performance in Nyakinama Sub-County. While these factors support a conducive learning environment, they are insufficient on their own to account for substantial variations in school outcomes. Enhancing academic performance requires a combination of teacher-focused strategies and systemic interventions addressing resources, learner welfare, and school infrastructure.

Recommendations

School administrators should strengthen continuous professional development programs that emphasize ethics, learner-centered pedagogy, effective assessment techniques, and communication skills to reinforce teachers' professional responsibility. Enhancing teacher competence through structured training ensures that educators are better equipped to deliver quality instruction, maintain ethical standards, and manage classroom activities effectively. In addition, schools should implement mentorship and peer support initiatives aimed at fostering positive teacher–

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learner interactions. Encouraging collaborative practices and promoting teacher responsiveness to learner needs can improve classroom climate, motivation, and engagement, thereby supporting overall school performance.

Education authorities should prioritize the allocation of adequate teaching and learning resources, ensure manageable class sizes, and provide access to instructional materials to complement improvements in teacher professionalism and relational practices. Policy interventions aimed at improving school performance should integrate teacher-focused initiatives with broader systemic strategies, such as active community involvement, learner support programs, and enhancement of school infrastructure. Finally, district education offices should conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of teacher performance and school climate. Continuous assessment allows for the identification of gaps, provision of targeted support, and reinforcement of both professional responsibility and positive teacher–learner relationships, ensuring sustainable improvements in academic outcomes.

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