

## **Teacher competence and performance in primary schools in Nwoya District, Northern Uganda**

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### **Abstract**

This study brings to light the fact that the poor performance of pupils in primary schools is a pedagogical issue, which requires pedagogical approaches to improving teacher performance. The study sought to investigate the role of teacher competence in enhancing teacher's performance in primary schools in Uganda. A sample of 217 respondents was chosen and the findings indicated a correlation coefficient of ( $r = .575$ ). The study therefore recommended that teachers be encouraged to develop their pedagogical skills for effective delivery in the classroom, Performance appraisals should take care of pedagogical skill development for improved teacher performance. Teachers should pay attention to issues like classroom organization, time management and receiving telephone calls during class time. Teachers who work their best to promote a co-existence between the school and the community should be recognized and rewarded for their effort. Teachers should improve on their approach to absenteeism and should also be encouraged to build and work in teams to bring out the best of themselves and their pupils too.

**Keywords:** teacher competence, pedagogical competence, professional competence, teacher performance

### **1. Introduction**

Making sure that primary teachers have the essential competencies they require in order to be effective in the classroom is key in raising levels of pupil attainment; encouraging teachers to continue developing and extending their competencies is vital in a fast-changing world <sup>[4]</sup>. Becoming a committed professional is more than just meeting a set of technical criteria and achieving prominent levels of work-related competence. Good teachers are recognized for their love and care for children, their passion for "subject knowledge" they teach and their support and encouragement in helping students to achieve their best, and perhaps above all, their wholesome personality <sup>[10]</sup>. Competence is one of the leadership qualities needed in professional development to produce teachers who are change-agents. Not to be confused with executive leadership of school administration, competence is a leadership quality by which a teacher builds up a collegial culture of professional learning and sharing. While there is no consensus on the terminology, there is no denial of the fact that the changing global needs do not only demand education systems that provide learners with more than just the knowledge to succeed but must provide the tools to allow learners to use and apply knowledge and the tools to enable them to become productive and integral members of society <sup>[25]</sup>.

#### **1.1 Problem statement**

The education system in Uganda has been under scrutiny where the learners in primary schools cannot read and write in English. The failure rates in national examinations have grown high and most schools in up country stations have been performing poorly as seen in the release of results by Uganda

National Examinations Board, (Ministry of Education 2017) with Nwoya District being amongst the worst performing district. The government on its part claim to be providing all the basic scholastic materials needed to facilitate learning, which included training of teachers, paying their salaries, provision of all teaching and learning materials timely to mention but a few. However, the performances of the learners have continued to decline according to the data from the District education office Nwoya, there was a 5% decline in pass rate in 2017 examination series. Teacher's competences have been questioned including their Pedagogical and Professional Competence. It is wondered if they had the required skills which could improve on the performance of the learners. It is on this basis that the researcher investigated the role of teacher competence in enhancing the performance in primary schools in Uganda and come up with recommendations which could be used to improve on the situation at hand.

#### **1.2 Objective of the study**

The objective of the study was to investigate the role of teacher competence in enhancing the performance in primary schools in Uganda.

### **2. Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Teacher competence**

To be fully effective in teaching and capable of adjusting to the changing needs of learners in a world of rapid social, cultural, economic and technological change, teachers themselves need to reflect on their own learning requirements in the context of their particular school environment <sup>[5]</sup>. A competence is described as a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and

desires which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world, in a domain <sup>[4]</sup>. Possessing a competence means that one not only possesses the component resources, but is also able to mobilize such resources properly and to orchestrate them, at an appropriate time, in a complex situation <sup>[18]</sup>. In the context of teaching, competence encompasses tacit and explicit knowledge, cognitive and practical skills as well as disposition. Since the primary customers of educational organizations are the learners, teacher competence enables the teacher to remain committed to learners and their learning goals <sup>[3]</sup>. The teacher can use a variety of instructional methods in their classroom to meet students' learning needs, create a relaxing environment and cater for the needs of the learners regarding language, motivation and interests. The teacher is the person who facilitate learning, his duty is to take advantage of a variety of teaching methods and techniques to organize learning experiences and assess whether the desired behavior has been achieved by the learners or not <sup>[6]</sup>. As used by <sup>[14]</sup>, competence is asset of organized activities, which act on content in a given category of situations in order to solve a problem. Competence is hereby described as an ability to carry out a specific task or activity to predetermined standards of attainment. As used by <sup>[19]</sup>, teacher competence would mean all observable teacher behaviors that bring about desired pupil outcomes. Thus, in the competencies for teaching system, competency is used to describe professional ability, including both the ability to perform specific functions and the ability to demonstrate acquired knowledge and conceptualization

In Uganda, the key competences required by a teacher to be effective are knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and professional ethics. This is categorized in to knowledge competence and further into content pedagogical, professional and contemporary knowledge. In assessing the relationship between teaching competence and teaching style of primary teachers, <sup>[26]</sup> observed a positive correlation between teacher competence and teaching style. Though the results differed from person to person in case of primary teachers, the correlation was positive. Competence is a significant determinant of a person's intrinsic motivation and actual competence to carry out future tasks <sup>[11]</sup>. The competencies that are needed by teachers include pedagogic, personal, professional and social competence <sup>[8]</sup>. In an environment where resources are very limited and where many factors contribute to the inadequate performance of pupils, teacher competence comes to the front <sup>[17]</sup>. As noted in some studies, how better a method of teaching is depending largely on the user (the teacher) and it requires competencies, which may be viewed from knowledge, skills and behavior <sup>[1]</sup>.

## 2.2 Pedagogical competence

Pedagogical competence refers to educational and teaching qualifications. The type of competence is related to learning processes and teaching methods and how to adapt these to match the needs of the learners <sup>[16]</sup>. Pedagogical competence is based on sound, broad and current knowledge within the subject area, as well as knowledge of students' learning and subject-based teaching and learning issues. As learners find it hard to choose from the vast information they receive, increasing pedagogical competence allows teachers to take individuality into account and meeting the needs of different learners. For example, <sup>[20]</sup> observed that most teachers exhibit incompetence in handling learners with "special

needs" as well as "adult learners". This is because many teacher training programs do not include courses about these competencies. Pedagogic competence is the ability of a teacher to manage the learning of learners including understanding of learners, instructional design and implementation, evaluation of learning outcomes, and the development of learners to actualize their potential <sup>[8]</sup>. In a study on investigating classroom teaching competencies of pre- service elementary mathematics teachers, prospective teachers were more competent in measurement and evaluation but highly incompetent in managing the teaching activities <sup>[6]</sup>. This was attributed to the fact that the amount of the subject area courses prospective teachers take are less than the amount of practice lessons. Pedagogical creativity can enhance learners' abilities to understand and utilize the skills in the classroom setting <sup>[25]</sup>. The report noted that most of the seminars and workshops intended to improve classroom effectiveness render little attention to pedagogical guidance. The key to distinguishing the knowledge base of teaching lies in the intersection of content and pedagogy, in the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variation in the ability of students <sup>[7]</sup>.

## 2.3 Professional competence

The field requires a diverse range of teachers and a wide variety of skills, which means that teachers are also expected to participate in lifelong training to remain innovative in the world of work <sup>[16]</sup>. Teacher's professional competence includes knowledge and understanding of the children and their learning, subject knowledge, curriculum, the education system and the teacher's role <sup>[3]</sup>. Professional competence is the mastery of learning materials in broad and deep, covering the mastery of curriculum content and substance of scientific subjects philosophically <sup>[8]</sup>. If teachers acquire professional competencies and commitment and are empowered to perform their multiple tasks in the classroom as well as in the community in a genuinely professional manner, high quality learning among learners may result in cognitive, affective and psychomotor areas of human development <sup>[21]</sup>. Professional competence explains the standard of academic qualifications. It includes developing of teaching learning materials creatively; utilizing information and communication technology to develop professionals and professionalism in a sustainable manner by taking reflective action <sup>[24]</sup>.

## 2.4 Teacher performance

Teacher performance relates to how a teacher behaves in the process of teaching. Performance in this case is measured in terms of the teacher's subject knowledge and their ability to plan the structure of the content <sup>[3]</sup>. The quality of education is increasingly judged by focusing on pupil performance, what pupils learn, and how well they learn it <sup>[17]</sup>; and the quality of teachers, particularly in the initial stages of education when the pupils are at an early age is so crucial. The quality of education is normally measured by pupil performance in tests, and pupil's performance is related to teacher competence and teacher performance in the classroom. Subject-matter knowledge has been found to be a key factor in teacher effectiveness. However, measures of pedagogical knowledge including knowledge learning, teaching methods and curriculum have more often been found to influence teaching performance, and frequently used

to exert even stronger effects than subject matter content <sup>[13]</sup>. Although many researchers and policy makers argue for creating a single weighted composite of different measures of teachers' effectiveness <sup>[2]</sup>, placing teachers into a single category wherever possible may over simplify the complex nature of teaching. Traditional human capital measures like teacher intelligence, subject knowledge and teaching skills in mathematics, while personality traits like motivation and enthusiasm are associated with high productivity among reading teachers <sup>[9]</sup>. Interpersonal interaction, virtues, knowledge and skill significantly predict teacher performance <sup>[27]</sup>. Teacher performance can be measured in three key domains: subject knowledge, teacher practices and time-on-task <sup>[22]</sup>. The notion of teacher performance is quite distinct. Sometimes teacher performance is evaluated on "what the teacher does", and sometimes in terms of "how successful the teacher is". Dismissing teachers, therefore based on students' achievement is simply a bizarre <sup>[23]</sup>. It should be noted that though teacher performance is influenced by the level of his/her pedagogical knowledge, as different from his knowledge of the subject matter, pedagogical knowledge is not the same thing as knowledge of the subject matter. However, they are intimately linked.

**3. Methodology**

The study was conducted based on correlation study design, with both descriptive and analytical analysis. The target population included all registered primary schools officially recognized by the office of District education officer Nwoya. A sample of 217 respondents was chosen, simple random sampling and stratified sampling method was conducted during the data collection that cut across the District. Self-administered questionnaires were used to enable the respondents to have adequate time to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5 where 1(Strongly disagree), 2(disagree), 3(Not sure), 4(agree), 5 (strongly agree) was used to gather data.

**4. Results and Interpretations**

The study established the extent to which teachers responded to the claims that were raised in the study. Descriptive measures, particularly the mean and standard deviation were tested.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pedagogical competence	217	3.5714	.69684
Professional competence	217	3.4092	.70006
Teacher performance	217	3.4737	.55323
Valid N (leastwise)	217		

In view of the descriptive, a comparison of the mean indicates a moderate response on all the study variables, however, a critical look at the respective standard deviations indicates that respondents were more consistent in responding to variable indicators on teacher performance (*Std* = .5532) than they were on professional competence (*Std* = .7000) and pedagogical competence (*Std* = .6968). These statistics further indicate that the teachers who participated clearly understood the claims raised on teacher performance than

those on pedagogical competences and professional competences.

To understand teachers' positions on the various indicators presented in the study, levels of significant differences were established.

**Table 2:** Significant differences in pedagogical competences

Variable indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation
Behavior management	3.86	1.154
Continuous assessment	3.53	1.247
Classroom instructions	3.7	1.257
Localization of teaching	3.89	1.264
Questioning skills	3.8	1.279
Promotion of critical thinking	3.49	1.284
Sequence of lessons	3.72	1.346
Learning environment	3.51	1.381
Subject knowledge	3.39	1.407
Clarity of course outline	3.32	1.429
Learning process	3.32	1.442
Teaching needs	3.6	1.444
Group tasks	3.52	1.447
Time management	3.17	1.486
Classroom organization	3.75	1.495

Considering the measurable indicators of pedagogical competences, teachers indicated low significant differences in using appropriate positive strategies to manage pupil's behavior (*Std* = 1.154), using a range of continuous assessments to check for pupil's understanding (*Std* = 1.247), and putting a lot of emphasis on instructions in class (*Std* = 1.247). On the contrary however, there were slightly higher significant differences in the way teachers ensure their classrooms are organized before a lesson begins (*Std* = 1.495) and how they manage time (*Std* = 1.486).

**Table 3:** Significant differences professional competences

Telephoning in class	3.52	1.259
Pupil encouragement	3.47	1.269
Remedial teaching	3.56	1.294
Pupil strength	3.27	1.318
Subject matter	3.58	1.318
Permission for absence	3.71	1.323
Demonstration of knowledge	3.45	1.326
Pupil excellence	3.51	1.334
Pupils' feelings	2.9	1.36
Rewarding performance	3.38	1.363
Divergent opinions	3.46	1.364
Teaching attitude	3.36	1.378
Mastery of content	3.54	1.391
Non-discriminative teaching	3.29	1.415
Updating notes	3.15	1.437

Considering the measurable indicators of professional competences, there was a disagreement on how teachers care for the needs of their pupils ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.90) and a high agreement on their seeking permission to be absent ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.71). However, slightly high significant difference can be observed in their positions on updating their notes regularly (*Std* = 1.437) and a low significant difference on receiving telephone calls during class time (*Std* = 1.259).

**Table 4:** Significant differences teacher performance

Variable indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation
Community-school engagement	3.87	1.153
Linking teaching to real world	3.75	1.184
Suitability of teaching resource	3.76	1.244
Community relationships	3.71	1.251
Participation in community activities	3.66	1.274
Effectiveness of communication	3.7	1.298
Collaboration with stakeholders	3.53	1.305
Pupil-teacher relationships	3.51	1.337
Interpersonal interactions	3.79	1.353
Respect for colleagues	3.13	1.358
Information sharing	3.71	1.38
Personal accountability	3.52	1.381
Progress of learners	3.36	1.385
Developing pupils' life skills	3.62	1.439
Classroom discussion	3.03	1.443
Teamwork	3.47	1.447
Application of life skills	2.92	1.475
Parents' expectations	3.29	1.516
Guidance and counseling	3.07	1.532
Working relationships	3.08	1.56

The study indicates a moderate response on teachers' performance in Nwoya district. Highest mean pointed to teachers promoting community-school engagements ( $\bar{x} = 3.87, Std = 1.153$ ); using teaching tactics that are in line with the real world ( $\bar{x} = 3.75, Std = 1.184$ ); and using teaching resources that are suitable for pupils to learn ( $\bar{x} = 3.76, Std = 1.244$ ). On the other hand, low mean pointed to supporting learners to develop in life skills during class time ( $\bar{x} = 2.92, Std = 1.475$ ), promoting good working

relationships within the colleagues to promote learning ( $\bar{x} = 3.08, Std = 1.56$ ) and seeking the right balance between guidance and counseling ( $\bar{x} = 3.07, Std = 1.532$ ). The above statistics imply consistent efforts by all teachers who participated to link their schools to the community, and inconsistent efforts in fostering working relationships that promote learning.

To understand how much of teacher performance is explained by teacher competences, regression tests were examined.

**Table 5:** Regression Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	1.874	.173		10.813	.000
	Pedagogical competence	.039	.058	.049	.661	.509
	Professional competence	.429	.058	.543	7.389	.000
	R	.575(a)				
	R Square	.331				
	Adjusted R Square	.325				
	Std. Error of the Estimate	.45465				

a Predictors: (Constant), Professional competence, Pedagogical competence

A correlation coefficient of ( $r = .575$ ) indicates a moderate association between teacher competences (pedagogical and professional) and teacher performance in Nwoya district. The (Adjusted R Square = .325) indicate a 32.5% influence of pedagogical and professional competences on teacher performance. Retrospective of actual influence of each predictor variable, pedagogical competence ( $\beta = .049, p > .05$ ) and professional competence ( $\beta = .543, p < .05$ ) explain 4.9% and 54.3% respectively of the total variation in teacher performance. In addition, significant values indicate that only professional competence is linearly significant in this model, leaving pedagogical competence insignificant.

**5. Discussion**

The study indicated that teachers understood performance more than their competences to perform. Understanding performance more than teacher competences is in line with [23] who pointed out that teachers are evaluated on "what the teacher does" more than "how successful the teacher is". The

same author noted that dismissing teachers based on students' achievement is simply a bizarre. The study confirmed using appropriate positive strategies to manage pupils' behavior, which disagrees with [19]. According to him, the aspect of behavior is viewed from the teachers' behavior to bring out the desired outcomes. The study revealed a moderate association between teacher competencies and teacher performance. This agrees with [26] who observed a positive correlation between teacher competence and teaching style. In a similar view, [16] further noted that the quality of education is judged on pupil performance, what pupils learn, and how well they learnt it, which demonstrates teachers' performance. The study indicated divergent stand view points on their efforts to support learners in developing life skills during class time. Teachers' viewpoints are quite different from [16] who noted further that teachers are expected to participate in training to remain innovative in helping learners to develop skills for work. The study indicated using a range of continuous assessments to check for pupils' understanding. This agrees with [17] who asserted that teacher

performance and teacher competence in the classroom are measured by how pupils perform in tests in class. The study further indicated that performing teacher link their schools with the community. The results support <sup>[27]</sup> who indicated that interpersonal interaction, virtues, knowledge and skills significantly predict teacher performance. The study also revealed that teachers rarely receive telephone calls during class time. The findings agree with <sup>[3]</sup> who noted that teacher performance relates to how a teacher behave in the process of teaching.

## 6. Conclusion

The study indicated how teachers understand performance more than the competences required of a teacher. The indifference is partly ascribed to the performance appraisals that are conducted almost yearly as a human resource practice but not for personal improvement. In line with pedagogical competences, teachers disclosed using appropriate positive strategies to manage pupils' behavior; using a range of continuous assessments to check for pupils' understanding; and stressing classroom instructions. The changes that take place in the way pupils conduct themselves and achieve cognitively elucidate the manner of instruction engaged by the teacher. However, the change in the pupils has no correlation with how the classroom is arranged or how much the teacher manages his time. Profoundly however, teachers pointed out seeking permission to be absent and rarely receiving telephone call during classroom. Absenteeism and receiving calls in class are minor practices but quite disruptive of the learning progress. While this reinforces teachers' professional competences, it is obvious, they don't. Promoting community-school engagements, using teaching tactics that are in line with the real world and using resources that are suitable for pupils to learn appeared to be better measures of teacher performance. Promoting the co-existence of schools and community is everyone's social responsibility. Schools and teachers who engage in such a sensitive concern are highly commendable. However, these are mere claims on their side as many differed in their opinions on supporting learners to develop life skills during class time, promoting working relationships that support pupils' learning and seeking a balance between guidance and counseling. The moderate association between teacher competences and teacher performance inclines more on professional competence than pedagogical competence. Teachers are professionally competent than they are pedagogically because of where such competences are most required. Professional competences take shape outside the classroom while pedagogical competences occur within the classroom, and like the pupils would be the assessors. This study brings to light a fact that the deficient performance of pupils in primary schools is a pedagogical issue, which requires pedagogical approaches to improving teacher performance in Nwoya district.

## 7. Recommendations

The study highlighted less emphasis on pedagogical competences than professional competences. The department of education at the district should encourage teachers to develop their pedagogical skills for effective delivery in the classroom. Performance appraisals should take care of pedagogical skills development for improved teacher performance. Teachers should pay attention to issues like classroom organization, time management and receiving

telephone during class time. Though these may seem minor, they disrupt the entire teaching process. Teachers who work their best to promote a co-existence between the school and the community should be recognized and rewarded for the effort. Teachers should improve on their approach to absenteeism. While they indicated seeking permission to be absent, evidence has it that more teachers absent themselves, particularly in afternoons and on market days, which leaves pupils unattended to. Teachers' performance fell short in fostering working relationships that promotes pupils to learn. Teachers should be encouraged to build and work in teams to bring out the best of themselves and their pupils to.

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