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Relation	



Teacher Professionalism in Uganda: An Outcome of a Myriad of Factors

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Abstract

This study examined primary school teachers' reasons for choosing teaching as a profession, their current attitudes toward teaching, and the support they receive and obstacles and opportunities they encounter during teaching during their work. A descriptive survey design guided the study. 240 Participants from Eastern Central, and Western regions of Uganda were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The findings indicate that, the assurance of a job (irrespective of its unattractive salary) was the main reason for joining teacher education colleges. Some teachers have positive attitudes resulting from intrinsic motivation such as regarding teaching as a calling or enjoying working with children while others were extrinsically motivated by the salary and chances for further studies. Poor salary, heavy work-load and low-status accounted for teachers' negative attitudes. Teachers appreciated the support they get from head teachers but expressed dissatisfaction with the Government's support services. The main obstacles to teachers' professional development are insufficient salary and negative attitudes towards teaching. The head teacher's support (85%) was identified as the biggest opportunity. A detailed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis needs to be done as one of the strategies of promoting teacher professional development.

1. Introduction

The main cohort of this study was primary school teachers. The current minimum qualification for one to be registered by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) as a primary school teacher is a Grade III teachers' certificate. This certificate is obtained after a two-year primary teacher education course following a four-year secondary school education course. Generally, students with mediocre grades in the final secondary school exams and those from humble home backgrounds are the ones, who join Primary Teachers Colleges (PTCs) to train as Grade III teachers.

The significance of the quality of teachers is summarized in the 1992 Government White Paper on Education (MoES,1992) where it states that;

“The quality of national development depends on the quality of its education system, and the quality of the education system depends on the quality of its teachers”.

The quality of teachers is reflection of teacher professionalism. Teacher professionalism is the behavior and practice of an individual by virtue of having been trained, certified and registered as a teacher. Despite going through same PTC programme, teachers vary so much on many aspects (Botha & Onwu, 2013). Such aspects include academic and pedagogical competences in addition to differences in attitudes to teaching. Teachers also vary in home backgrounds, personal income

and personal engagements in politics and religion. They also vary in gender, culture and age. The teacher factor is therefore more complex than it is usually understood (Hawes, 1979).

In an attempt to put teachers at par as far as teacher professionalism is concerned, government, “once in a while” organizes continuous professional development workshops (CPDs) for them. Field – based PTC Tutors (Centre-Coordinating Tutors – CCTs)) also assist teachers within their catchment areas on selected primary school-related aspects of the teaching –learning process. This is a better approach (helping teachers) than threats and condemnation of teachers by district authorities whenever the released final and national Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) results are poor.

Despite initial training, CPDs and threats, teachers still continue to dissatisfy the public on the different aspects that constitute their professionalism. The phrase *Teachers of these days* is used whenever people want to express their dissatisfaction with teachers’ behavior and performance. Research-evidenced strategies are therefore inevitable if teachers’ attitudes, morals, academic competence and teaching skills are to improve. This study endeavored to contribute to the required evidence.

Statement of the Problem

Details of Ugandan Teachers’ Code of Conduct amount to “teacher professionalism”, (Education Act, 2008). The code indicates that such a teacher should be academically strong enough to implement primary school curriculum. He/she should plan and use correct methods to teach and assess learners. He/she should behave well in relation to learners, staff and community. Many factors, forces and stakeholders contribute to teachers’ professionalism

While some teachers are meeting the expectations of a professional teacher, many others are deficient in many aspects that constitute teacher professionalism such as academic and pedagogical competences, and moral tenets expected of a teacher. Among the stakeholders to remedy this problem are teachers themselves. To help teachers do their part, there is need to establish their attitudes and reactions towards factors that affect their behavior and performance. From teachers’ perspective, this study delved into teacher professionalism within the Ugandan context. Understanding teachers’ attitudes towards different aspects of the teaching profession helps concerned stakeholders to develop relevant teacher-support packages.

General objective

Identify strategies for enhancing teacher professionalism

Specific Objectives

The objectives of this study were to;

- 1) Establish initial reasons why teachers chose teaching as a career.
- 2) Explore teachers’ current attitudes towards teaching as a profession.
- 3) Assess support that teachers receive to enhance their professionalism.
- 4) Identify obstacles to and opportunities for teachers’ professional development.

2. Literature Review

Teaching is a demanding task (Mcber, 2000) and a polymorphous activity (Goe et al, 2008) to the extent that what people expect of teacher is usually an infinite list. Unlike other professionals, teachers' personal and private lives are factored in the analysis of teacher professionalism. Educationists agree that a competent professional teacher must have the following attributes: academic competence (in the subjects that he/she teaches), subject related pedagogical competence (methods of teaching), generic pedagogical competences and a personality that inspires learners and society (McBer; 2000).

Teachers attitude towards the teaching profession affect their behavior and performance (Kinyera et al, 2004). It is important to trace teachers' attitude to the period before they actually start training as teachers. Adeosun et al (2013) observed that 61.8% who joined teacher training institutions had failed to get grades that would have enabled them to join other courses of other professions. The lack of interest and willingness for students to train as teachers is observed in many countries (Pearce & Morrison, 2011; Aggarwal, 2005). Some of the causes for this negative attitude is the low salary coupled with few or no fringe benefits (Adeosun et al, 2013; Kinyera,2004).

Some student teachers' (53.7%) negative attitude to teaching decreased as they went through teacher-education course, (Adeosun et al 2013). If students choose teaching as a last resort (Kinyera et al, 2004; Jaiyeoba, 2008) and their entry mark to teachers' college is low, then it becomes more imperative for teacher education colleges to do more if society is to get competent teachers. The incidents where in Nigeria and Uganda teachers failed tests meant for their pupils can be avoided if teacher education programmes are strengthened (www.bbc.com-news-Africa; www.dailymonitor.co.ug).

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Teaching

Many qualified and practicing teachers still have negative attitudes towards the teaching profession (Pearce et al, 2011). This negative attitude affects their behavior and performance (Good & Brophy, 2008). There is low self-esteem (Jaiyeoba, 2008) and a lot of self-pity among teachers (Kinyera, 2004; Jaiyeoba, 2008) to the extent that some of them vent their anger and uncalled- for frustration on to the learners in form of corporal punishment and "verbal" violence. This behavior is unprofessional because a teacher is supposed to relate well with his/her learners (Kouraogo&Ouedraogo, 2009; Adeosun et al, 2013; MoES, 2008). The effects of teachers' negative attitude on teacher professionalism are enormous (Aggarwal, 2005). In addition to what is shown above some teachers do not prepare adequately (Bishop, 1985; MoES, 2007),. Absenteeism and late-coming are common (Ssebbunga et al, 2013). Other weaknesses include lack of creativity and innovation (Kouraogo &Oueddraogo,2009) professional stunted growth (Aggrawal, 2005; Good&Brophy, 2008) and attrition (MoES, 2007).

However, it should be noted that due to positive attitude and resilience some teachers still attract trust and admiration of society to the extent that they are voted for, seconded or recommended for important posts and offices in society (Aggarwal, 2005: Kinyera et al, 2004).

Teacher support systems

Many education scholars agree that the teacher education colleges cannot offer “all” that the student teacher will need when he/she qualifies (Kellough & Carjuzaa, 2009). Effective teacher-support systems are needed to concretize and improve teacher-professionalism. Novice teachers need mentorship to improve their confidence, skills and weed out any lingering negative attitudes to teaching (Good & Brophy, 2008). Senior teachers need support to avert teacher burnout and cope with the ever-changing curricular demands and characteristics of learners ((Otaala, 2018); McBer, 2000; MoES, 2007).

Teacher support can come from peers (peer support), from heads of department, school head teachers, and CCTs (Farrant,1985; Bishop,1985). These school- based support systems have the advantages of flexibility, affordability and appropriateness (Ssebunga et al, 2013). Externally sourced support systems through the District Education Office and those from central government, government and UN Agencies, and NGOs do also contribute immensely to the improvement of teacher –professionalism (Kinyera et al, 2004). The overarching principle is that a supported teacher will deliver more than a neglected one

Hindering and supportive factors for Teachers’ Professional Development

Some teachers do not exhibit any signs of professional development even after staying in the field for twenty years (Good & Brophy, 2008). They still lack confidence, creativity and competence in the academic content and subject-related methods (Jaiyeoba, 2008). Therefore, it is no wonder that at one time some teachers (in Uganda and Nigeria) failed the academic tests designed for their pupils. It is not only evil but also a sign of professional immaturity that even senior teachers and head teachers defile school (and non-school) girls. Therefore, professional development is more than accumulation of more academic qualifications (Babalola, 2011; Desta et al, 2013).

Factors that affect teachers’ professional development include attitudes, self-efficacy, domestic factors, and teacher- support systems (Kirby, 2011; Babalola, 2011; MoES, 2007). Government policies also affect teacher professional development. It is now government policy not to offer study leave with pay to many of its employees, teachers inclusive. This policy hits teachers hardest because of their meager resources. The distance education mode is becoming popular with teachers as a strategy for their professional development without risking their jobs (IEC, 2002). On its part, government, in partnership with Kyambogo University, regularly reviews teacher –education curricula (at various levels) as one of the strategies for teacher professional development

3. Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used to guide the study. Such a design helps researchers to get information on the realities on the ground and where applicable suggest solutions (Kombo& Tromp, 2006). Both qualitative and quantitative data were obtained by the use of questionnaires with both closed and open-ended items.

Documentary analysis was also used to analyze teacher professionalism. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to get 240 Primary School teachers as respondents in the study; spread in the eastern, southern (central) and western regions of Uganda. Because of the centralized nature of the Uganda education system, the respondents were assumed generally homogenous because they went through the similar PTCs (teacher-education), same curriculum, earn same salary and implement same curriculum (in the primary schools). As already indicated most of them come from low income families and join colleges at a low entry mark.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study only involved 240 primary school teachers, whose gender composition was 139 (58%) males and 101 (42 %) females. Most of them (143 i.e. 60%) had a teaching experience of more than ten years. The Grade III formed the majority, that is 50 (%)

The rest of the details about the respondents are in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Teachers' qualification

Qualifications	N	%
Licensed(non-qualified)	0	0
Certificate (Grade III)	120	50
Diploma	90	38
Degree	13	5
Degree with Diploma	17	7
Post Graduate-Masters	0	0
PhD	0	0

Table 2: Teachers' teaching experience

Years' experience	N	%
≤ 5 years	33	14
6-10 years	68	28
11-15 years	48	20
16-20 years	41	17
>20 years	50	21

Although Government does not adjust (increase) teachers' salaries when they upgrade from GIII Certificate to Diploma and beyond, many teachers still sponsor themselves for further studies. The only main advantage of further studies is that for one to be appointed a Head teacher of a primary school he/she must have a bachelor's degree (in Education).

4.1 Initial Reasons for Choosing Teaching as a Profession

The first objective was to establish why students choose or (find themselves doing a teacher

education course). A discourse on teacher professionalism should begin by exploring why students choose or find themselves in PTCs to train as teachers in the first place. Some students who harbor negative attitudes to the teaching profession may complete the course without “change of heart”. This deep-rooted negative attitude may negatively affect their performance (Adeosun et al, 2013).

Teachers’ reasons for choosing a teaching profession are, on face-value, good; depicting a high self-esteem and pride in the profession. Teachers’ salary is not a very decisive factor in attracting students to train as teachers as per 52 % the respondents. However, due to the high degree of unemployment in Uganda, 81% of teachers had chosen the teaching profession because of “assurance of a job”. Once teachers treasure their job then most likely they will endeavor to perform well (MoES, 2007). Other reasons for choosing the teaching profession which can boost teacher professionalism is viewing teaching as a “calling”. This was supported by 54 % of teachers. Similarly, 59 % of teachers said that they “enjoy working with children”. This behavior is one of the characteristics of effective teachers (McBer, 2000; Kouraogo & Ouedraogo, 2009).

However, other reasons for choosing the teaching profession leave a lot to be desired. These include; choice basing on other people recommendations. Teaching needs personal commitment; a commitment which is compromised if people choose teaching as a stepping stone for further studies as expressed by 48% of the teachers. “Further studies” is an important component of professional development but should not be at the expense of the learner (MES, 2008).

It is common knowledge in Uganda that some senior four leavers join PTCs because their marks cannot allow them to proceed to “Advanced Level i.e. Senior 5. Secondly, government aided PTCs do not charge tuition fees and therefore a consolation for students from low income families. These circumstances “force” them to choose the teaching career. The positive reasons for choosing the teaching profession shown above are actually adopted in the college and in the field other than being the original pushers/determinants. *N.B. The best senior four candidates score aggregate 8 (8 Distinction 1’s) and the worst score aggregate 72 i.e. F(failure) 9Fsx8 subjects. Students with marks as low as 50 aggregates also join Grade Three PTCs.*

4.2 Teacher’s Current Attitudes towards Teaching Profession

The second objective of the study endeavored to establish teachers’ current attitude towards the teaching profession. Since most respondents (58 %) had been teaching for more than ten years then by now they must have formed and concretized certain attitudes towards teaching and teaching profession. This contrasts with novice teachers who are still weighing the options of leaving or staying in the profession (Pearce & Morrison, 2011).

Three major items were used to solicit for teachers’ attitude towards the profession. Teachers were divided in their response to the item “If you were to choose a profession again would you choose the teaching profession again with 141 (59 %) saying “Yes” and 99 (41%) saying “No”. This is not strange because fundamentally, teachers like other human beings have different perceptions, aspirations and reactions to different issues that affect their lives. Similar studies give different reasons for teacher retention and attrition (Babalola, 2011).

Reasons given for choosing the teaching profession again can be put in two categories, the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation related factors. The extrinsic factor most cited by teachers was *increased opportunities for further studies*. This was followed by the appreciation of the salary they receive coupled with job security as deduced from one who said that.

I have managed to take care of my family, while I am a teacher

Extrinsic motivation is not good enough for teacher professionalism because should greener pasture (a better job) arise somewhere such teachers abandon teaching immediately (Aggarwal,2005; Kinyera et al,2004)

The other category of teachers would choose teaching again because they are intrinsically motivated. Most teachers in this category regard teaching as a “calling”, some added that it is a calling from God. The joy of working with children attracted the second highest number. Others said that they would want to see other people become happy. This observation agrees with studies done by Jaiyeoba, (2008) which showed that part of teachers’ job satisfaction is modelling young children into prosperous adults. This sounds altruistic – but it is real for teachers, though few. One teacher summarized it this way;

“Teaching professions makes me proud especially when I meet those I taught at a higher level

Other teachers were more down to earth by combining both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons as to why they love teaching and would choose it again. This is represented by a teacher who said;

I have managed to take care of my family while I am a teacher and I am proud of children I have helped to be successful.

Stakeholders who want to help teachers perform better should also be realistic by handling both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation –related factors.

Reasons given by teachers who would not choose teaching again can be put in five categories. The most cited reason was the low salary (the financial factor) as voiced by this teacher;

Teachers are always indebted due to poor payments as their income is greater than their expenditure.

The second category of reasons for rejecting teaching is heavy work load, to the extent that teachers described teaching as “tire-some and demanding”; one teacher complained;

You spend most of your time buried in books and sometimes fail to do your personal duties

In Uganda, at primary school level, the “class system” officially demands that a teacher teaches all the lessons (implying all the subjects) as per the time-table. With big classes (over 100 pupils in some infant classes) a teacher maybe “over-worked” if he/she teaches and assesses pupils’

exercises in several lessons. (NB: At school level and without official backing, teachers are specializing” in certain subjects – especially upper classes (pp.5 – 7). Teachers echoed the same point when they were asked to suggest ways of improving the teaching profession by citing the need to reduce the official teacher: pupil ratio of 1:55 to 1:40

The third category is related to the second one. Teaching in primary schools, according to the respondents, restricts you to the classroom the whole day, as voiced by one who said, “too much work, no time to do something else”. This attitude reflects the envy primary school teachers have for their secondary school counterparts summarized by a teacher who said;

“I would choose to teach but at another level of education like secondary, tertiary or any other institution where they work less hours and earn much”.

Primary school teachers cannot moonlight without compromising their effectiveness. In some government aided primary school where there is laxity in supervision male teachers abandon classes for some few hours to raise more income through *boda boda* (motorcycle) riding. This violets teachers’ code of conduct (MoES, 2008; Farrant, 1985)

Teachers would rather complain of other factors but not working hours because public service standing orders expect all government employees to work 8 hours x 5 days a week notwithstanding the fact that teachers’ work extends beyond official working hours. However, other people argue that three end-of-term holidays amounting to four months compensate teachers’ over load during the working days.

The fourth reason for refusing to choose teaching again, according to teachers, is the low status attached to the teaching profession by society and government itself as explained by one teacher that he would not choose teaching again because;

*“Not valued in this country
Taken as a profession for failures
All issues are solved using politics”.*

Other similar phrases used by teachers included; *teaching is regarded a low-level job; government does not appreciate, value, respect teachers; it is a very poor job.*

Teachers themselves have worsened the situation by having a low or negative teacher professional identity. Some of them do not want to be identified with the profession. This is not unique to Uganda. It is a global teacher professional issue (Babalola, 2011) In one workshop someone introduced herself as a “mere teacher”! This kind of attitude has serious repercussion on teacher professionalism. Lack of self-esteem and self-efficacy hamper their ability to perform well (Kirby, 2011). Self-pity may justify unprofessional behavior with the conviction that society will understand and sympathize (MoES, 2007). Such teachers need to be referred to their counterparts who are progressive and resilient (Pearce & Morrison, 2011). Mentorship (not well formulated and formalized in Uganda) and guidance and counseling services are needed to help such teachers. It is ironic that some teachers who are expected to guide and counsel pupils need the same themselves!

4.3 Teacher–support Services and Teacher Professionalism

The third objective was about teacher support services. Even if they were well trained and have served for many years teachers still need support because *Teaching is a demanding role and the pace of change rapid* (McBer & 2000: p.23). One way to guard against teacher burn-out is to organize and implement regular teacher support services (Good & Brophy, 2008). One of such services can come from head teachers because one of the job descriptions of the head teacher is to support teachers on his /her staff (MOES,2007).

In this study teachers were asked:

“Do you get support from your head teacher or head of department in the following aspects to make your job easier”?

Their responses are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Head teachers’ Support for Teachers

Head teachers’ support on:	Definitely	To a certain extent	In part	Not at all
Content Knowledge	25%	60%	11%	04%
Classroom management	31%	53%	10%	06%
Teacher-professional-development (TPD)	30%	55%	11%	04%

Table 3 shows that teachers get a lot of support from head teachers. However, apart from schemes of work having been endorsed by head teachers there were no teachers’ journals, reports, minutes, among others, to prove that there was any formal assistance from head teachers.

Eighty-six percent of teachers indicated that head teachers valued and supported their professional development. Support from school management was recognized by 73% of the teachers.

On the other hand, only 36% of teachers indicated that government supports staff capacity development. There could be a grain of truth, because, to avoid unmanageable teachers wage bill government does not adjust teachers’ salaries when they upgrade from Grade III certificate to a diploma or a degree in education. This implies that government may not support teachers to upgrade because of fear of increase in wage bill.

As earlier indicated, teachers sponsor themselves to upgrade to another level. In-service training according to 61% teachers takes place . This may be the holiday face-to-face sessions of the Diploma in Education course and /or short workshops organized by NGOs, agencies, district education offices and CCTs .Of late, there is massive training , sponsored by USAID, on Early Grade Reading methodologies for ECD teachers (P.1 to P.3) and P.4 as a transition class (between infant and upper primary classes).Teachers (71%) appreciated whatever in service training they received or were receiving. In a nut shell, most teachers are eager to learn more despite the demotivating conditions in which they work.

Teacher support system “adds value” to “teacher professionalism as posited by Desta et al, (2013:78) *CPD embraces the idea that individuals aim for continuous improvement in their*

professional skills and knowledge beyond the basic training initially required to carry out the job. To help teacher avoid professional stunted growth teacher-support service providers should be inspired by McBer's (2000:25) observation that:

Effective teachers show a high degree of flexibility. Not only are they open to new approaches and able to adapt procedures to meet the demands of a situation and they are also flexible in the class room and outside.

As already mentioned, threats and intimidation by district authorities and politicization of teacher issues, according to teachers, may not improve teacher professionalism. Well-developed and consistently implemented teacher support systems may be the answer to the ever-waning teacher professionalism in Uganda.

5. Teacher Professional Development: Obstacles and Opportunities

The fourth objective explored the obstacles and opportunities for Teacher Professional Development. This objective recapitulates many of the issues handled in the other objectives. Professional development, as earlier explained, is not only accumulation of academic papers (more qualifications) but also improvement in subject- specific and generic pedagogical teaching skills. It includes improvement in all that is expected of a teacher in addition to his/her personality

Teachers identified the following as obstacles to their professional development: insufficient salary (60%), denial of study leave with pay (48%), low prospects for promotion (60%), poor quality of ICT (48%) realistic, too much work (56%), having too big classes (55%) and conflict with school management (34%). To be realistic, teachers' salary in Uganda (equivalent to US \$ =120) is not enough for teachers to sponsor their own studies and maintain their families. This is compounded by the government policy of not granting teachers study leave with pay

A major obstacle to teachers' professional development already implied in the previous discussion is their negative attitude to the profession itself. In response to the item "Where do you see yourself in ten years' time?", 38% replied "Not in the teaching profession." Such teachers wouldn't be interested in professional development. Those who would want to stay in the profession because they aspire to become head teachers were 31%. Other teachers openly declared that given a chance they would not choose teaching again as their profession; citing low salary and low status among other reasons.

There are many opportunities for teacher professional development for those who are serious and resilient (Kinyera et al, 2004). Firstly, as already indicated, 85% of teachers said that they get support from their head teachers for their professional development. Secondly, contrary to what some teachers and other people think or say, 53% of teachers agreed with the statement "My community holds teacher in high regard". This opinion about the attitude of the community towards the teacher boosts teacher's self-esteem and teacher professional identity for both pre-service and in-service teachers (Kirby, 2011; MoES, 2007)

The trend now is for the pre-and in-service teachers to be exposed to entrepreneurial skills including membership and participation in SACCOs as a method of topping up their "meager"

salaries.

In conclusion, both obstacles and opportunities exist. A detailed SWOT analysis would unravel more factors that affect teachers' professional development. While teachers need a lot of support but, at the end of the day the ball is in their court. The authors of this paper were themselves, primary school teachers in harder times than present but due to determination and resilience they also handle teacher professional issues at university level.

Teachers generated good suggestions on "how the status of the teaching profession in Uganda can be improved upon." As expected "salary increment" attracted the highest response of 77% followed by infrastructural development in schools such as classrooms and staff houses (57%). The need to recruit more teachers and reduce teacher: pupil ratio (43%) explains teachers' discomfort with big classes. Other notable suggestions were provision of lunch (33%) instructional materials (20%), refresher courses (26%) and inspection/support supervision (05%). Promotion of teachers (11%) and urging government, parents and community to improve their attitudes towards the teaching profession and teachers (13%) also featured. It should be noted that some of the suggestions are not ego-centric but a wake-up call for many other stakeholders to play their roles very well.

Some of the suggestion by teachers like "Admit good grade students into teachers' colleges" are being handed by Government for example beginning with 2016 only students with a minimum of a credit 6 in mathematics and in English, among other requirements could be admitted training as a Grade III teacher. Incidentally, teachers were silent on the possible contribution of Uganda National Teachers' Union. This raises fears about its relevance to teacher professionalism; one of the litmus tests for occupations that claim to be professions (Farrant, 1985). Using the Whole-School Approach (MoES,2007), many more players should do their part to promote teacher-professionalism in Uganda, because ultimately teacher competence impacts all aspects of life.

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