

# The Influence of the Teachers Professional Competency on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools: A Study of Ifakara Town Council

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**Abstract:** This study aims at examining the influence of the teacher's professional competency on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ifakara Town Council. The targeted population for this study consists of head of schools, teachers with more than six years of experience teaching basic subjects, and students across these schools. Sample size was 301 respondents. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used in selection of respondents. Questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions were used in data collection. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings of the study reveals that high levels of subject knowledge, diverse instructional strategies, timely feedback, and a commitment to professional growth are crucial factors in enhancing student performance. The findings underline that teachers who demonstrate strong subject expertise and employ varied teaching methods effectively engage students, fostering a deeper understanding of the material. Additionally, teachers who provide constructive feedback and continuously develop their skills contribute to a positive learning environment, which is essential for academic success. Collaboration among educators, a solid grasp of pedagogical practices, and the ability to differentiate instruction further support improved student outcomes. Creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere and engaging in regular reflective practices are also vital for maximizing educational impact.

**Keywords:** Teachers Professional Competency, Students' Academic Performance, Secondary Schools.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is universally acknowledged as a cornerstone for both personal and societal progress, with teachers playing an indispensable role in this transformative journey (UNESCO, 2018). In Tanzania, the Education Act of 1978 establishes the legal foundation for the educational system, delineating the roles and responsibilities of educators, including the necessity for teachers to possess the requisite qualifications and professional skills to perform their duties effectively (The National Education Act, 1978). Complementing this, the Teachers' Service Commission Act of 2021 created the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC), tasked with the recruitment, deployment, promotion, and disciplinary oversight of teachers, thereby ensuring adherence to professional standards (Teachers' Service Commission Act, 2021). Additionally, the Tanzania Teachers' Professional Board Act of 2020 further refines these standards by providing comprehensive guidelines for assessing and ensuring teachers' professional competence. This board defines the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes for teachers, and establishes protocols for evaluating their performance and professional growth (Teachers' Professional Competence and Ethics Regulations, 2020).

Research underscores the critical link between teachers' professional competence and student academic performance. Nbina (2012) highlights that teachers' pedagogical skills, subject expertise, and ability to foster a positive learning environment are crucial for student success. Similarly, Khan et al. (2017) stress that effective teachers, who possess strong

pedagogical and communication skills, can significantly enhance students' intellectual curiosity and development. The role of the TSC in maintaining teacher accountability and promoting professional growth is further supported by Matete (2021), who notes that the commission's functions are vital for ensuring and advancing teachers' professional competencies. Ongoing professional development, as emphasized by Rajendran et al. (2023), is essential for teachers to stay current with educational trends and improve their instructional practices.

The interplay between teachers' professional competence and student performance is intricate and multifaceted. Research consistently shows that effective teaching correlates with improved student outcomes, including higher academic achievement and better socio-emotional skills (Heck, 2009). A study by Paschal and Mkulu (2020) in Tanzania found a positive relationship between teachers' professional competence and students' academic performance, indicating that educators with robust pedagogical skills and effective classroom management strategies positively influence student achievement.

Understanding how teachers' professional competence affects student performance is crucial for policymakers, administrators, and educators. Such insights can drive the development of strategies to enhance teaching effectiveness, improve educational experiences, and foster the holistic development of individuals and societies. This study aims to explore the impact of teachers' professional competency on student performance in Ifakara Town Council. Addressing this concern is pivotal for advancing teacher training programs, educational policies, and school practices to boost academic success in secondary education settings, as emphasized by Darling-Hammond (2006) and Hattie (2009). Despite the recognized importance of teacher quality, there remains a need to clarify which specific competencies and instructional practices most strongly influence student achievement, as highlighted by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008). This study seeks to bridge these gaps, providing valuable insights for enhancing educational outcomes in Ifakara Town Council.

## II. THEORETICAL UNDERPININGS

This study was guided by the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT). Developed by Eccles (1983), this theory focuses on individuals' beliefs about their own abilities and the value they place on a particular task or goal. According to this theory, individuals are motivated to engage in activities or pursue goals when they expect to succeed and when they find the activity or goal personally meaningful and valuable.

The EVT offers a comprehensive framework for understanding motivation in educational settings by emphasizing two key components: expectancy beliefs (the perceived likelihood of success in a task) and task value (the perceived importance or utility of completing the task). According to Wigfield and Eccles (2000), EVT posits that individuals are motivated to engage in tasks when they believe they can succeed (expectancy) and when they perceive the task as valuable or relevant to their goals (value). This dual-focus approach makes EVT versatile in explaining a wide range of behaviors, from academic achievement to career choices. By considering both the perceived likelihood of success and the personal significance of tasks, teachers can tailor interventions to enhance student motivation and engagement.

However, EVT has its limitations. One critique is its emphasis on individual perceptions, which may overlook broader contextual factors such as socio-economic background or institutional support (Eccles, 2009). Moreover, while EVT acknowledges the importance of values, it does not comprehensively address how these values are developed or change over time, potentially oversimplifying the complexity of motivational processes (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). Additionally, the theory's application can be challenging in diverse educational settings where students may vary significantly in their cultural backgrounds and interpretations of task value. Despite these criticisms, EVT remains a valuable tool for understanding motivational dynamics in education, providing a foundational basis for designing strategies that enhance student engagement and achievement.

In the context of teachers' professional competency on students' performance, the Expectancy-Value Theory can provide insights into teachers' motivation and behavior. The theory suggests that teachers' expectations of their own abilities as teachers and their beliefs about the value of their role in students' learning can influence their level of effort and commitment to their teaching responsibilities.

Teachers who have high expectations of their own abilities are more likely to exert greater effort to improve their professional skills and knowledge. They are also more likely to set challenging goals for their students and provide them with the necessary support and guidance to achieve those goals (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). On the other hand, teachers who have low expectations of their own abilities may be less motivated to invest in their professional development or may set lower expectations for their students, which can negatively impact students' performance.

Furthermore, the Expectancy-Value Theory emphasizes the importance of teachers' beliefs about the value of their role in students' learning. When teachers perceive their work as meaningful and valuable, they are more likely to engage in effective instructional practices, provide a supportive classroom environment, and take responsibility for their students' learning outcomes (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

In the study on teachers' professional competency on students' performance in Ifakara Town Council, the Expectancy-Value Theory can provide a framework for understanding the factors that contribute to teachers' motivation and commitment to their teaching responsibilities. By examining teachers' expectations of their own abilities and their beliefs about the value of their role in students' learning, the study can explore how these factors influence teachers' professional behaviours, instructional practices, and ultimately, students' academic performance.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Ifakara, Kilombero District, Morogoro Region, Tanzania. The study utilized a mixed research approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the impact of teachers' professional competency on student performance. A descriptive survey design facilitated the collection of both numerical and descriptive data from a sample of seven schools, involving 301 participants. Data collection involved structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The study emphasized validity and reliability through rigorous measures and ethical considerations, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and participant rights throughout the research process.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The influence of the teacher's professional competency on students' academic performance in public secondary schools is a critical area of study in the education sector. Understanding how teachers' skills, knowledge, and effectiveness impact student performance is essential for developing strategies to improve educational outcomes. Table 1 present results on the influence of the teachers professional competency on students' academic performance in public secondary schools is a critical area of study in the education sector.

**Table 1: The Influence of the Teachers Professional Competency on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools**

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe that teachers at our school demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge.	20 (40%)	18 (36%)	7 (14%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)
Teachers effectively utilize a variety of instructional strategies to engage students in learning.	15 (30%)	25 (50%)	5 (10%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)
Teachers consistently provide timely and constructive feedback on students' work.	18 (36%)	20 (40%)	8 (16%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)
I observe that teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to their own professional growth.	22 (44%)	15 (30%)	8 (16%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)
Teachers collaborate effectively with colleagues to enhance our teaching practices.	20 (40%)	19 (38%)	6 (12%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)
Teachers possess a deep understanding of pedagogical practices.	21 (42%)	17 (34%)	8 (16%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)
Teachers adeptly differentiate instruction to cater to individual student needs.	14 (28%)	24 (48%)	7 (14%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)
Teachers create a positive and inclusive classroom environment.	19 (38%)	20 (40%)	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)
Teachers regularly engage in reflection to refine their teaching practices and enhance student learning.	17 (34%)	22 (44%)	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)

Source: Field Data (2024)

A significant number of respondents believe that teachers demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge, with 40% strongly agreeing and 36% agreeing. Subject knowledge is fundamental for effective teaching, as it ensures that teachers can deliver content accurately and confidently, which in turn fosters a deeper understanding among students and enhances their academic performance. The findings were supported by students in a focus group discussion who agreed that a teacher's strong subject knowledge is essential for effective teaching. They highlighted that when teachers have a deep understanding of the content, they can explain concepts clearly, answer questions confidently, and provide insightful connections to real-world applications. This expertise not only builds students' trust in their teachers but also enhances their own comprehension and interest in the subject, leading to a more enriching educational experience.

The utilization of a variety of instructional strategies is also highlighted, with 30% strongly agreeing and 50% agreeing. When teachers employ diverse teaching methods, they can cater to different learning styles and keep students engaged. Engaged students are more likely to absorb and retain information, which positively impacts their academic achievements.

Providing timely and constructive feedback is another key competency, with 36% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing that teachers consistently do so. Feedback is essential for student growth, as it helps students understand their strengths and areas for improvement. Constructive feedback guides students in their learning process, enabling them to make necessary adjustments and improve their academic performance.

The commitment to professional growth among teachers is also notable, with 44% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing. Teachers who are dedicated to their own continuous improvement are likely to stay updated with the latest educational practices and methodologies. This ongoing professional development ensures that they can provide high-quality education, which directly benefits student learning and achievement. A head of school resonated the teachers' findings by stating, "*Our commitment to ongoing professional development is pivotal. When teachers continually improve their skills, they're better equipped to offer high-quality education. This dedication to growth directly translates to enhanced student learning and achievement.*" This finding highlights the critical link between teacher development and student success, highlighting that investing in teachers' continuous learning is essential for maintaining and elevating educational standards.

Effective collaboration among teachers is another important aspect, with 40% strongly agreeing and 38% agreeing. Collaboration allows teachers to share best practices, resources, and strategies, which can enhance their teaching practices. A collaborative teaching environment fosters a culture of continuous improvement and collective efficacy, leading to better educational outcomes for students.

The possession of a deep understanding of pedagogical practices is highlighted by 42% strongly agreeing and 34% agreeing. Pedagogical knowledge enables teachers to design and implement effective instructional strategies that facilitate student learning. When teachers have a strong grasp of pedagogy, they can create lessons that are both engaging and educationally sound, thereby enhancing student academic achievement. One head of school revealed the following, "*Our teachers, through continuous professional development, have been able to adopt innovative teaching strategies that not only captivate students' interest but also solidify their understanding of the material.*" This indicates that a deep understanding of teaching methods enables teachers to design effective and stimulating lessons, ultimately leading to better student performance and higher academic achievement.

The ability to differentiate instruction is another critical competency, with 28% strongly agreeing and 48% agreeing that teachers adeptly cater to individual student needs. Differentiated instruction ensures that all students, regardless of their abilities, receive the support they need to succeed. By tailoring their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of their students, teachers can provide more effective instruction, leading to improved academic performance.

Creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment is also deemed important, with 38% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing. A supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere encourages students to participate actively and take risks in their learning. When students feel safe and valued, they are more likely to engage with the material and perform better academically.

Finally, the practice of regular reflection among teachers is acknowledged, with 34% strongly agreeing and 44% agreeing. Reflective practice allows teachers to critically evaluate their teaching methods and make necessary adjustments to improve student learning. This continuous cycle of reflection and improvement ensures that teaching practices remain effective and responsive to student needs.

## V. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveals that high levels of subject knowledge, diverse instructional strategies, timely feedback, and a commitment to professional growth are crucial factors in enhancing student performance. The findings underline that teachers who demonstrate strong subject expertise and employ varied teaching methods effectively engage students, fostering a deeper understanding of the material. Additionally, teachers who provide constructive feedback and continuously develop their skills contribute to a positive learning environment, which is essential for academic success. Collaboration among educators, a solid grasp of pedagogical practices, and the ability to differentiate instruction further support improved student outcomes. Creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere and engaging in regular reflective practices are also vital for maximizing educational impact. Overall, these competencies are interlinked with better academic achievements, emphasizing the need for ongoing support and development of teachers to elevate educational standards and student success.

## VI. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study offer valuable practical implications for educational stakeholders. Ensuring that teachers possess high levels of subject knowledge and employ diverse instructional strategies is crucial for enhancing student outcomes. Schools should prioritize professional development programs that focus on these competencies, providing teachers with the tools and knowledge to effectively engage students and address their individual needs. Additionally, implementing regular feedback mechanisms and fostering a culture of continuous improvement can further support teachers in refining their practices. Encouraging collaboration among educators and promoting reflective practices will enhance teaching quality and create a more dynamic learning environment. By investing in these areas, educational institutions can improve teaching effectiveness, ultimately leading to better academic performance and a more supportive educational experience for students.

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