



An assessment of the role of teachers in the academic performance of pupils in the national primary school examinations (NPSE) Yoni Mamaila Chiefdom, Tonkolili District

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Abstract

The role of teachers in students' academic achievements in schools is key to the students' success and the evaluation of teachers in Sierra Leone. The objectives of this research are 1) Evaluate the contributions made by teachers towards students' performance in the NPSE at selected primary schools in Yoni Mamaila Chiefdom; 2) Identify the factors leading to the success or failure of students in the NPSE; 3) Uncover the obstacles limiting students' performance in schools. This study utilizes a mixed-method approach and a descriptive survey with a cross-sectional design. Data collection techniques included interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. The study was conducted in 4 selected schools with a research population of 200 individuals. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, resulting in 60 respondents. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive data analysis. From the data analysis results, the conclusions drawn were 1) Teachers play an integral role in enhancing students' academic performance in the National Primary School Examination (NPSE); 2) Factors leading to the success or failure of students in the NPSE include the economic background of the family, the level of family education, and teachers' commitment to teaching; 3) There is a lack of support from stakeholders to assist students in obtaining necessary information. This study's findings indicate that learning based on dual representation significantly influences middle school students' academic achievements in single-variable linear equations.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers worldwide form the foundation of robust teaching and learning experiences in all educational establishments. Teachers, akin to architects, meticulously design comprehensive lesson plans based on specific lesson objectives. These include activity types aimed at meeting said objectives, sequencing activities, organizing necessary materials, estimating activity duration, and determining student groupings (Finlinson, 2016). Sometimes addressed as "Loco Parents", they assume parental roles for all students, not merely within their serving schools but across all

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educational institutions. As influential role models and societal change agents, teachers are highly regarded by students who seek their guidance, support, inspiration, transformational leadership, and expert knowledge (Dzimińska, 2023). Hence, despite receiving modest salaries, teachers form the bedrock of societal development and are instrumental in nation-building.

Noteworthy professionals including bankers, doctors, lawyers, politicians, police, and military officers, among others, have been nurtured by teachers. Many public and private sector leaders have served as educators. Even politicians, including several incumbent presidents, have a history of teaching. Consequently, teachers are considered irreplaceable assets whose value cannot be fully compensated by individuals, groups, governments, or ministries; only divine intervention can truly reward their dedicated service. Students' education needs constant innovation to foster knowledge, independence, creativity, confidence, and democratic citizenship (Tawafak et al., 2021, 2023). Therefore, it is concluded that teachers play a critical role in enhancing students' academic performance (Hendrawijaya, 2020).

Improvement of primary education is a widely debated national issue, echoed in the Education Sector Plan (Ekpe et al., 2014) which emphasizes quality teaching and learning, with access and retention being paramount. The Global Partnership in Education (GPE) has incorporated early childhood education development for children aged three to six years. However, the 2018-2020 ESP reveals many unqualified teachers, with 41% of male and 28% of female teachers in 2016 not meeting the required standard (Global Partnership for Education, 2023). The development goals for 2018-2023 thus include increasing equitable access to education and enhancing learning outcomes for all pre-primary and elementary students. One aspect of the program's intervention involves providing in-service teacher training for grades 1-3, a strategy expected to significantly improve teachers' performance.

Over the years, both governmental and non-governmental organizations have introduced programs for pre-service and in-service teacher training on Continuous Professional Development (CPD), with the intention of enhancing lesson delivery skills. However, despite curriculum updates and development, teacher performance has been on the decline. Partners like CODE and EDT are currently implementing training and coaching programs in various districts, supported by GPE, to augment government efforts for in-service teacher training (UNICEF, 2021).

There have been recent advancements with the introduction of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative, which emphasizes "Child Centered Teaching Techniques" (CCTT) (UNICEF Sierra Leone, 2019). This approach is adopted across all primary schools in the country, and there's potential willingness among all Sierra Leonean teachers to adopt CCTT methods. Understanding the cultural context of these techniques is critical to boosting their effectiveness, though this cultural understanding might evolve over time, demonstrating potential for gradual change. It's also recognized that school decisions can greatly impact students' prospects, opportunities, and national test results. Consequently, any assessment system heavily reliant on test results may have its shortcomings, especially in providing a valid and reliable account of students' learning. Thus, the negative implications of summative assessment for teaching and learning can be mitigated by more appropriate utilization of teacher judgment.

The West African Examination Council (WAEC) in collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education (MBSSE) is conducting this all-important examination (Abarrie, 2022). The MBSSE reports a noteworthy augmentation in the percentage of passes in the NPSE like never before. With around 161,524 candidates engaging in this year's examination, an 81 percent pass rate was chronicled, establishing an all-time high combined pass rate (Kargbo, 2022). The pivotal role teachers play in pupils' performance in the national primary school examination (NPSE) over the years is considerably significant. Reports reveal that over 80% of students undertaking the exam accomplish a successful transition to the next level, namely the Junior Secondary School (JSS). This feat closely intertwines with the quintessential roles of a teacher in enhancing academic performance and students' personal development, namely, 1) educators as the primary conveyors of knowledge; (2) teachers functioning as care-givers; (3) provision of pedagogical care; (4) teachers adopting the role of advice-givers, and 5) teachers acting as role models (Lee & Yuen, 2019). Hence, the teacher's role in pupils' performance in public examinations, particularly the NPSE, is

instrumental as the bedrock of learning. If neglected, it has the potential to mar a child's future prospects.

Students' performance is a decisive factor in the cultivation of quality graduates, which consequently fuels economic growth and solidifies the nation (Rani et al., 2021). Arora & Singh (2017) in their study pinpointed teachers' efficacy, study habits, distractive elements, and the students' family environment as significant predictors of academic performance. According to Kapur (2018), education is pivotal not only for individual progress but also for societal and national development. To instigate improvements across all spectrums and to harness modern, innovative techniques and methods, it is essential to elevate educational awareness and skills.

A multitude of factors affect students' academic performance, including the school environment, learning facilities, teacher attributes, and the student's intellectual quotient (Ekpe et al., 2014). This study identified consistent teacher attendance, regular study routines, sustained efforts, and tutorial sessions as the most influential components impacting academic performance (Sibanda et al., 2015). Additionally, Kulpin (2020) suggests that socio-economic conditions might influence student success. One such condition is the socio-economic environment wherein student's dwell. Socio-economic hardships may place children in an unfavorable position (Banerjee, 2016). This assertion aligns with the findings of Abdu-Raheem (2015), which identified a strong correlation between parents' background and students' academic performance. Students hailing from lower socio-economic strata often feel less competent, which in turn impacts their academic achievements (Li et al., 2021; Rueda-Gómez et al., 2023).

A fair and comprehensive assessment of teachers' work for educational purposes presents a significant challenge for educational research. The primary objective of teacher assessments is not merely to critique teachers, but to refine the teaching process. Hence, the proposed initiative integrates facets of educational research that bolster students' learning, along with recommendations deduced from studying effective educational practices. It is largely aimed at educators across various educational levels who aspire to enhance their teaching methods, thus necessitating the design of suitable assessment programs. One critical element for students to understand the content taught is the teacher's aptitude in communicating ideas effectively and persuasively. Additionally, classroom management, defined as "the orchestration of roles and provisions to establish and maintain an orderly environment conducive to student learning," plays an essential part in the assessment of teachers' role in pupils' performance.

To achieve this, teachers should develop effective lessons, grade student work, provide feedback, manage classroom materials, efficiently navigate the curriculum, and collaborate with other staff members. To augment students' academic performance, teachers need to comprehend students' personality traits and individual learning characteristics (Thuy et al., 2022). However, it seems no studies have been conducted to explore the role of teachers in the academic performance of pupils in the National Primary School Examinations (NPSE), specifically in Yoni Mamaila Chiefdom, Tonkolili District. Consequently, this study aims to bridge this research gap. Following the description above, the objectives of the study are: 1) Evaluate the contribution made by teachers to the performance of pupils in the NPSE in select primary schools within the chiefdom; 2) Identify the factors leading to either the success or failure of pupils in the NPSE in the selected schools within the chiefdom; 3) Uncover the constraints limiting students' performance in the selected schools within the chiefdom.

METHOD

This research harnesses a mixed-methods approach, deemed beneficial for rendering a more comprehensive image compared to isolated quantitative or qualitative research. When qualitative and quantitative data converge, this fortifies the validity of the resultant conclusions, a process termed as 'triangulation'. The scope of this research is circumscribed to the Yoni Mamaila Chiefdom in the Tonkolili District. Here, four schools are randomly chosen as a lens to scrutinize the influence of teachers on children's success in the NPSE. These include 1) Ansarul Boys Islamic Primary Mile 91; 2) New Apostolic Primary School Mile 91; 3) Sierra Leone Muslim Congress (S.L.M.C) Primary School Mile 91; and 4) United Methodist Church (U.M.C) Primary School Maducia, all located within Yoni Mamaila Chiefdom, Tonkolili District. Additionally, the researcher seeks to inspect the

supervising bodies governing these selected schools, incorporating the District Education Office in the chiefdom.

This study encompasses all Head Teachers, Teachers, the School Inspector, and pupils from the four chosen schools within Yoni Mamaila Chiefdom in the Tonkolili District. The study population constitutes a total of two hundred (200) individuals, which includes Head Teachers, SMC Chairpersons, the Inspector of Schools, Teachers, and pupils from across the chiefdom. The study deploys a non-probability sampling technique (purposive sampling) to designate key informants. Respondents are selected predicated on academic performance, school enrolment, and the number of trained, qualified, and approved teachers per school. The researcher elected the majority of pupils and teachers from the most densely populated school and the fewest from the least populated school. From these schools, a total of 60 respondents were culled, consisting of twenty (20) students, four (4) school principals, four (4) SMC chairpersons (one from each school), one (1) school supervisor, and thirty-one (31) teachers who were randomly selected. The researcher maintains confidence that this approach will yield valid and reliable results.

This study employs a descriptive survey research approach complemented by cross-sectional design. Cross-sectional designs facilitate the collection of responses from a selected group of respondents at a single point in time. Both primary and secondary data were utilized to gather pertinent information. Primary data, considered as first-hand information, was directly gathered by the researchers from the field, while secondary data was sourced from pre-existing repositories, such as published writings. Data collection in this study was conducted through interviews, questionnaires, and documentary notes administered to the respondents, making the chosen research design apt for the study. The questionnaire comprised four statements, each of which offered four response options: 1) Strongly agree; 2) Agree; 3) Disagree; and 4) Strongly Disagree.

The questionnaire underwent stages of validity and reliability testing. The drafted questionnaire was reviewed by the researcher's supervisor and an education specialist, a lecturer from one of the universities in the Northern Region. These two professionals reviewed and provided necessary corrections to the questionnaire before it was administered to the respondents. Once deemed valid, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on three respondents at two different times. The repeated tests with the same respondents yielded consistent results, thereby establishing the validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

Upon collection, the data was presented using a frequency distribution table. As per Manikandan (2021), frequency distribution visually demonstrates how individual observations are dispersed across the measurement scale. Accordingly, this study applied frequency distribution with tables and graphs (bar and pie charts). The data analysis technique deployed in this research is descriptive data analysis, which quantitatively delineates the primary characteristics of the data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers play an important role by preparing their pupils well to perform better in the NPSE. Examination, was given to 60 respondents from 4 selected schools. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Teacher Exam Results as Respondents from The Four Selected Schools

	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Valid	Strongly agree	25	41.7	41.7
	Agree	15	25.0	66.7
	Disagree	11	18.3	85.0
	Strongly Disagree	9	15.0	100.0
Total		60	100.0	100.0

Table 1 delineates that based on teachers' knowledge and professional experience, 25 respondents, representing a significant consensus, strongly agree that teachers diligently prepare their students for the NPSE examination through the application of diverse teaching methods. An

additional 15 respondents, or 25% of the total, concur that primary school educators support and consistently prepare their students for standardized exams by employing various teaching strategies, attributing this to the training and experience of these teachers. Conversely, there were 11 respondents, constituting 18.3% of the total, who disagreed with the proposition, attributing their disagreement to a perceived lack of training and experience among primary school teachers. Meanwhile, a further 9 respondents, or 15.0% of the total, expressed strong disagreement, suggesting that teachers do not adequately prepare or diversify their teaching methods for examinations.

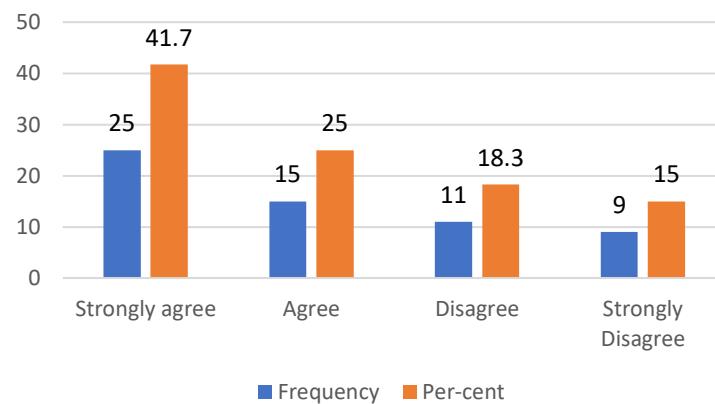


Figure 1. Teachers Preparation of Their Pupils for NPSE.

Reflecting on the responses from participants, forty (40) respondents, which equates to 66.7% of the total, credit the success in the NPSE exams to the qualifications, professionalism, methodologies, techniques, and skills of the primary school teachers. These respondents attribute the high performance of pupils in the NPSE exams, as seen in West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) results, to the effective support provided by the teachers in imparting the necessary knowledge and skills. They emphasize the significance of thorough lesson preparation, asserting that a well-prepared teacher will deliver a smooth and effective lesson since all required teaching materials are ready and accessible, as endorsed by Kauami (2017). Furthermore, Borti (2015) and Nchipandulwa et al. (2022) highlight that lesson planning guides teachers in achieving their objectives and meeting learners' expectations, in this context, readiness for the NPSE exam. The general consensus from this group of respondents is that teachers provide effective support and adequately prepare their students for the NPSE exams by employing a range of teaching strategies, stemming from their expertise and experience in the teaching profession.

In contrast, twenty (20) respondents, representing 33.3% of the total, fundamentally disagreed with this perspective. Despite the presence of trained and qualified teachers, these respondents argue that not all educators prepare their pupils adequately for these exams; some reportedly resort to helping students during the exams, an act deemed as examination malpractice by educationists. These dissenting respondents, including education stakeholders like School Management Committees (SMC), school principals, and some teachers, believe that pupils should reflect what they have learned over six years of primary education during the NPSE exams. Yet, they acknowledge that students often face distractions from social attractions and peer influence, which may impede their academic performance in public exams.

Furthermore, the assertion that "Supervisors, Teachers, Parents, and Pupils are the Factors Leading to the Academic Success and Failure of Pupils at the National Primary School Examination (NPSE)" was presented to 60 respondents from four selected schools. The results of this inquiry are documented in Table 2.

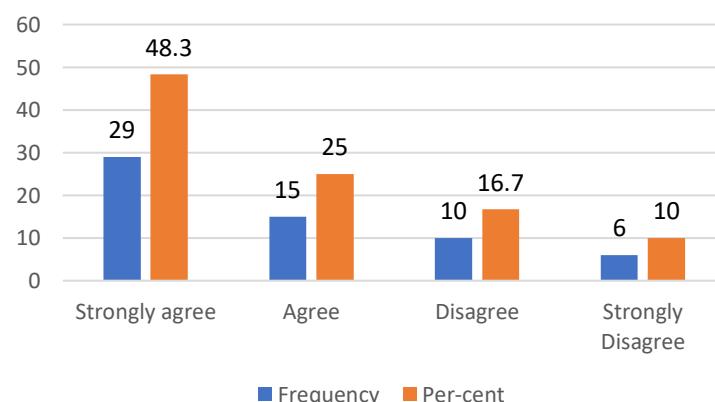
Table 2. Factors Causing Student Academic Success and Failure of Pupils at the National Primary School Examination (NPSE)

		Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Valid	Strongly agree	29	48.3	48.3	48.3
	Agree	15	25.0	25.0	73.3
	Disagree	10	16.7	16.7	90.0
	Strongly Disagree	6	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total		60	100.0	100.0	

Since the public discussion concerning the academic success and failure of primary students during the National Primary School Examination (NPSE), 29 respondents representing 48.3% fervently asserted that school supervisors, teachers, parents, and pupils themselves are the linchpins of academic achievement. These respondents opined that if school supervisors, tasked with monitoring, mentoring, and ensuring effective teaching and learning processes, are competent and diligent in executing their duties, students would undoubtedly exhibit improved academic performance, especially during the NPSE.

Conversely, 15 respondents or 25% of the total sample agreed that teachers, expected to embody all facets of teaching and learning – from content knowledge to pedagogical skill – who fall short in their performance or exhibit unprofessional conduct, can hamper students' academic success. Some teachers reportedly focused on commercial ventures like selling pamphlets or behaved unethically, such as awarding grades for non-academic reasons or exploiting students. Equally important are parents, who stand to benefit directly from their children's academic success. While some parents actively support their children's academic progress, others were less attentive to their children's academic needs and, in some cases, allegedly negotiated with teachers to facilitate examination malpractice to ensure their children's advancement to the next grade.

The students, at the crux of their academic trajectory, are expected to strive for a quality education that empowers them to make meaningful contributions to themselves, their families, their nation, and indeed the world. Regrettably, some pupils diverted much of their attention towards social activities, particularly social media. Interestingly, 26 respondents or 26.7% who disagreed with the former perspectives argued that the onus of academic success and failure rests squarely on the government and the various departments and agencies within the education ministry.

**Figure 2.** The Responses on The Factors Contributing to The Academic Success and Failure of Students in The NPSE.

Having gauged the responses on the factors contributing to the academic success and failure of students in the National Primary School Examination, we proceeded with the assertion, "There Are Constraints or Factors Leading to the Pupils' Low Performance During the NPSE". The findings from this line of inquiry are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Constraints or Factors Leading to the Low Performance of Pupils During NPSE Statement Results

	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Valid	Strongly agree	30	50	50
	Agree	12	20	70
	Disagree	6	10	80
	Strongly Disagree	12	20	100
	Total	60	100.0	100.0

Table 3 delineates the respondents' perspectives regarding the impact of various constraints or factors leading to subpar performance in the National Primary School Examination (NPSE). The table indicates that 42 respondents, which constitute 70%, emphatically agreed or simply agreed that certain factors or constraints indeed undermine students' performance during the NPSE. These factors encompass aspects such as family economic background, family's educational attainment, teachers' dedication to their role, the efficacy and accountability of educational partners, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of educational activities. Additionally, students' commitment to their education is considered a major determinant of their performance in the NPSE.

Conversely, 18 respondents accounting for 30%, expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with the aforementioned viewpoints. These respondents posit that irrespective of familial economic or educational backgrounds, students with a genuine thirst for knowledge can attain educational success. They argue that many of today's successful individuals emerged from underprivileged backgrounds, driven by their desire to shape a promising future. Despite the trials they faced in their educational journey, they now occupy prominent roles in their societies, nations, and indeed the world. While the responsibility of enriching the educational landscape lies largely with education planners and partners, these respondents believe that their actions or inactions should not entirely determine students' academic performance. They suggest that students should harness available resources within their schools to bolster their performance in public examinations. From this perspective, a student's motivation to pursue education seems to be the key element, irrespective of their family's economic or educational circumstances.

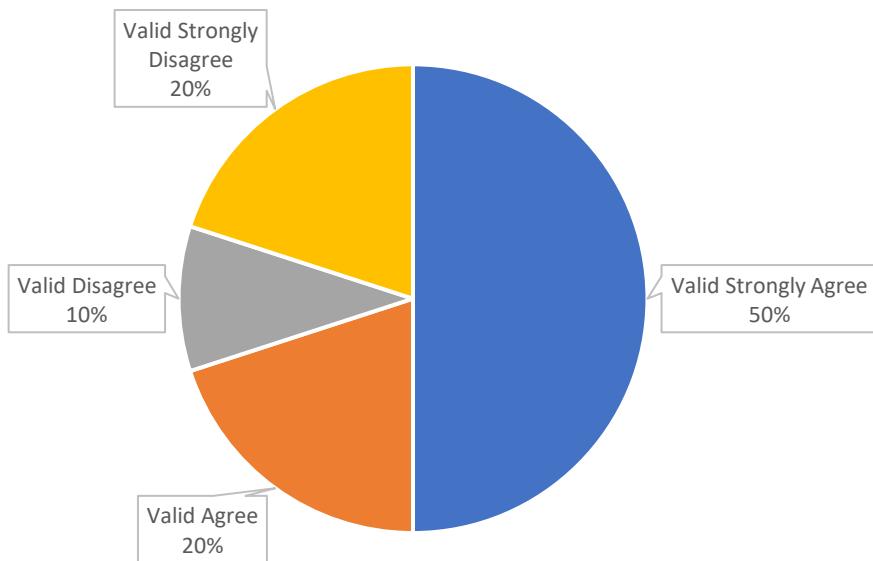


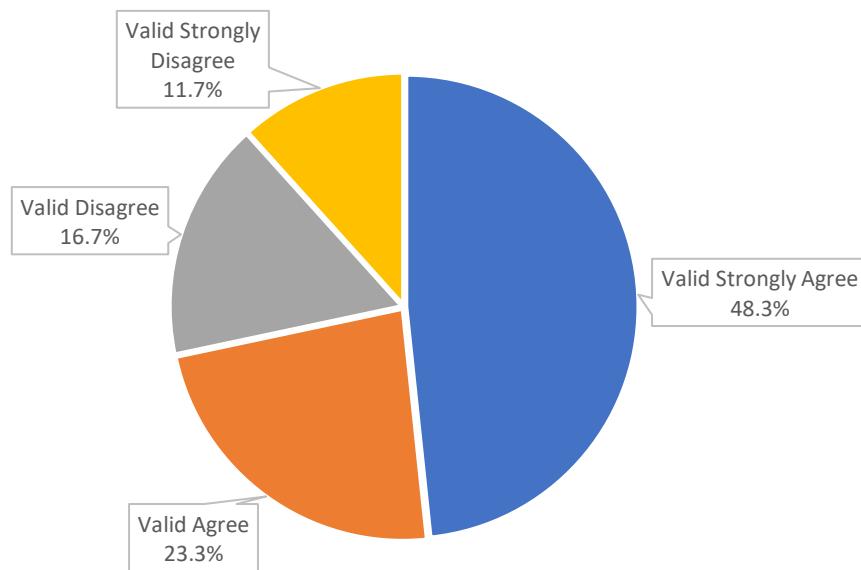
Figure 3. Responses on the Extent of Constraints or Factors Contributing to Pupils' Low Performance During the NPSE

The final part of our study focuses on the responses and reactions of stakeholders concerning the academic performance of pupils prior to the NPSE examinations. The outcomes of this section are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. Responses Regarding Stakeholders' Lack of Positive Engagement with Pupils' Academic Performance Prior to the NPSE Exam

	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Valid	Strongly agree	29	48.3	48.3
	Agree	14	23.3	71.7
	Disagree	10	16.7	88.3
	Strongly Disagree	7	11.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0

Table 4 illustrates the respondents' perspectives on the level of engagement and support provided by stakeholders prior to the National Primary School Examination (NPSE). The table reveals that a significant number of respondents, specifically 29 (or 48.0%), emphatically agree that stakeholders failed to adequately support or interact with students in preparation for the NPSE. Meanwhile, 14 respondents, constituting 23.3% of the sample, concurred, albeit less vehemently, expressing their belief that the stakeholders, who ought to motivate and guide students in their learning journey, have not fulfilled these responsibilities. Conversely, 10 respondents, which represent 16.7% of the sample, disagreed with these sentiments, suggesting that stakeholders had indeed provided some level of assistance. Furthermore, 7 respondents (or 11.7% of the sample) expressed strong disagreement with the aforementioned views, asserting that stakeholders made commendable efforts to equip pupils with the necessary knowledge, preparing them to become valuable contributors to society.

**Figure 4.** Responses Regarding Stakeholders' Engagement and Reactions to Pupils' Academic Performance Prior to the NPSE Exam

Despite the findings presented in the survey above, it is crucial to note that the educational outcomes cannot be exclusively attributed to the performance of the stakeholders - whether commendable or inadequate. These stakeholders, even if they possess appropriate academic qualifications, are confronted with a multitude of interconnected challenges, including deficits in innate leadership acumen, shortcomings in curriculum understanding and teaching skills, as well as inefficiencies in managing human, physical, and financial resources.

According to research by Mbaabu & Orodho (2014), the absence of a collegial interrelationship among different key education stakeholders has resulted in lower quality school outcomes, particularly in terms of student discipline and academic performance in both internal and national examinations. A comprehensive understanding of these challenges could serve as a reference for

classroom management and teachers, thereby enabling them to establish a platform for innovative, student-centred learning approaches suited to 21st-century learners (Haron et al., 2021).

Future considerations should include clear assessments of achievement and provision of feedback, implementation of effective teaching methods, promotion of student-centred learning, state-subsidized studies in accordance with quality criteria, and higher education funding (Degtjarjova et al., 2018). Among the numerous factors explained, the most pivotal is fostering close relationships between students and the stakeholders involved in the education process (Supasitthimethee et al., 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the data analysis that has been carried out, conclusions are obtained that answer the research objectives: 1) Teachers play a pivotal role in enhancing students' academic performance during the National Primary School Examination (NPSE), a statement validated by two-thirds of the respondents who indicated strong agreement or agreement; 2) Several barriers and constraints hinder student performance during the NPSE. These obstacles are multifaceted and can indirectly impact students, encompassing factors such as family economic conditions, parental education levels, teachers' commitment to their vocation, the effectiveness and accountability of educational partners, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of educational activities. The student's dedication to their education also plays a significant role; 3) The degree of support that stakeholders offer to equip students with necessary knowledge to evolve into responsible citizens is currently insufficient.

In light of these findings, we propose certain key recommendations. It is crucial that the government guarantees the provision of specialized resources and materials for learning in primary schools. Similarly, school administrators should prioritize the recruitment of skilled and highly qualified primary school teachers who have the potential to boost students' academic achievements. Ongoing monitoring and enhancement of teaching methodologies to ensure superior classroom performance are also critical. Moreover, government bodies should consider implementing a variety of strategies to motivate teachers, ensuring their continual engagement and input within the classroom environment.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

SK : Idea, desain, conceptualizone, analysis, and editing
EMZ : Drafting the manuscript, correction, editing, and final approval

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