



## **Analysis of Factors Influencing Ugandan Teachers' Expectations of Learners' Reading Habits**

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### **Abstract**

Teacher expectations can be understood as a teacher's belief in the ability of their learners to achieve. The importance lies in the fact that they can determine both the level of educational content and how it is delivered. Although teacher expectations have been studied for decades in the developed countries, little research has been done in developing countries like Uganda. Subsequently, the current study's goal is to examine how teachers form expectations about the reading habits of their learners in three schools in Uganda. The study was qualitative in nature and a case study design was followed. A purposively selected sample of 17 teachers was selected based on their expertise as teachers of English. An open-ended questionnaire was administered to the teachers to collect data and thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The results of the study revealed that teachers' expectations concerning their learners' reading habits were low and determined by several factors like learners' frequency of reading prescribed material, learners' frequency of reading material that is not prescribed, socioeconomic status of learners and lack of resources and influence of parents' level of education. The authors recommended that teachers' knowledge of the significance of their expectations in determining their learners' reading practices is significant. This is because teachers are more likely to adjust their expectations on their learners' prospective reading habits if they have this knowledge and awareness.

## **1. Introduction**

Recent developments in teacher expectation research include the impact of teacher expectations on learners, the formation of expectations, differential treatment of learners by teachers, and learner responses to teacher expectations (Johnson, Wildy & Shand, 2019). Based on these new developments in teacher expectation research, learners are likely to be affected by what teachers expect of them. According to Rubie-Davis et al. (2015), expectations can become powerful self-

fulfilling prophecies when teachers base their interactions with learners on those expectations. Rubie-Davies (2004) defines teacher expectations as derived judgments that teachers make, based on their knowledge of learners, about whether, when, and what learners can achieve in school. Friedrich et al. (2015) explain that teachers' expectations have been measured by teachers' predictions of learners' future performance in school or by teachers' beliefs about learners' current ability to succeed academically. They further argue that higher teacher expectations lead to higher learning outcomes. This view is supported by Weinstein (2008), who argues that when teachers set high expectations, their learners follow suit; unfortunately, when teachers set low expectations, learners can follow suit. Subsequently, many years of research on teacher expectation effects have provided strong evidence that expectations exist in normal situations and that they can positively and/or negatively affect student performance and success (Good & Brophy, 2003). Such expectations can be epitomized in the learning opportunities created by the sentimental atmosphere created by the interactive content and classroom context. Weinstein (2002) categorized teacher expectation effects as sustained expectation effects or self-fulfilling prophecy effects. He argues that sustained effects occur when teachers expect learners to continue acting or performing according to predetermined patterns and can ignore conflicting evidence of change. On the other hand, he argues that self-fulfilling prophecy effects occur when an originally false belief leads to its fulfillment. Furthermore, Good (1987) argues that self-fulfilling prophecies bring about change in learning performance, while sustained expectations defeat the hopes of the potential for change.

Studies show that the formation of teachers' expectations about their learners' academic performance is influenced by individual learner characteristics (Johnson, Wildy & Shand, 2019; Rubie-Davis et al., 2006; Keogh, 2000). For that reason, several individual learner characteristics have been identified as possibly influencing teacher expectations. These include prior academic achievement, effort, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, stereotypes, language style, physical attractiveness, age, personality and social skills, and learner background. For example, there is a strong perception among teachers that learners from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds do not learn well (Gupta & Sampat, 2021). Gupta and Sampat further note that these beliefs have a negative impact on what teachers do in the classroom and how much learners learn and grow. After defining the two categories of teacher expectation and examining the factors that play a role in the formation of teacher expectations, the current study attempted to examine teachers' expectations of their learners' reading practices and the formation of such expectations. This study was triggered by the poor performance in reading by Ugandan learners (Keweza & Welch, 2013), Ssentanda, 2014; Ssentanda, 2020). Recent research has found that teachers' awareness of student achievement and their individual learning resources is crucial to fostering student learning, particularly reading, as this knowledge is the basis for effective teaching decisions and enables teachers to provide enough support for individual learners (Clair-Thompson et al. 2017).

Although there is an overwhelming body of literature making connections between teacher expectations and learners, too little work has been done to reconcile teacher expectations with learners' reading practices, particularly in the Ugandan context. Knowing this, teachers are likely to recognize the impact of their expectations on learners' current reading habits. Therefore, this paper aims to help teachers adjust their expectations to create a space for learners' reading improvement. To achieve this important goal, the following research question is addressed: What factors determine teachers' expectations regarding learners' reading habits?

## 2. Literature Review

Many studies on teacher expectations have been published in countries such as the USA (Barbarin &

Aikens, 2015; Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2001) and New Zealand (Rubie-Davis, 2006), demonstrating the presence of this phenomenon in all developed countries. Camen, Barriga et al. (2019) argue that the above outcomes, even though they are important, have only been reported in highly developed and culturally similar countries.

In less developed countries with different cultures than those already studied, teacher expectations have received very little research. Geven et al. (2021) compared teachers' expectations in different countries. The aim of their study was to determine whether the institutional educational context plays an important role in formulating teachers' expectations of their learners. The context of their study was Netherlands, United States and Norway. Geven et al. (2021) observed that teachers in different contexts used the same student characteristics when forming expectations, but these characteristics were of different importance.

Papageorge et al. (2020) contend that teachers' expectations can have powerful effects on student academic attainment and their educational pathways. Research reveals that teacher expectations are determined by factors like socio-economic status (Camen et al. 2019; Geven et al. 2021) and students' background (Aydin & Ahmet, 2022). Camen et al. (2019) are of the view that it is well-known that teacher expectations tend to be biased by factors such as socio-economic status (SES) and gender. The results of their study showed that SES had an impact on teachers' expectations. In particular, there was a high probability that teachers at SES secondary schools would have positive expectations of their students. Their findings agree with Geven et al's (2021) study on how teachers shape educational expectations for students. The results of this study showed that teachers have lower expectations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In another similar study, Aydin and Ahmet (2022) conducted a study that aimed to examine how teachers' expectations are shaped and reflected in teachers' instructional behaviour. The results showed that teachers' expectations of students were influenced by students' willingness, skills and abilities, teacher and family-related factors, and school policies. Neuenschwander et al. (2021) argue that students' immigrant background and low socioeconomic status can influence teachers' expectations of student achievement. The goal of their study was to inform, raise awareness, and provide behavioural opportunities to change biased performance expectations of elementary school teachers. After the intervention, the expectations were independent of the students' migration background. The study provided evidence for strategies to change biased teacher expectations through teacher training elementary school teachers. After the intervention, the expectations were independent of the students' migration background. The study provided evidence for strategies to change biased teacher expectations through teacher training.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research approach and design**

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that qualitative research aims to study phenomena from a person's point of view, paying close attention to the context in which they occur. Because the focus of this study was on teachers' expectations of their learners' reading practices and the formation of such expectations, this approach was deemed appropriate. The study followed a case study design. Hammarberg et al. (2016) point out that qualitative techniques are used to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, mostly from the perspective of the participants. This research design allowed researchers to gain insights into teachers'

expectations of their learners' reading habits.

### 3.2 Research participants and sampling methods

Three high schools were involved in the study and all the schools are in Ntungamo District in south-western Uganda. Teachers in the chosen schools were purposively selected on the basis that all of them were teachers of English. Seventeen teachers were sampled: 7 males and 10 females. The ages of the teachers ranged between 23 and 38. There were 6 teachers selected for School A, 6 teachers selected for School B, and 5 teachers for School C. All the teachers were selected on voluntary basis and were Form 2 and 3 teachers. One of the researchers visited the schools to administer the open-ended questionnaires. The teachers were all holding either a Bachelor's degree or Diploma in Education. Although the age and qualification of teachers might have an impact on the perceptions of their learners' reading habits, this variable was not considered in the current study.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Suter (2012) states that thematic analysis, which employs a coding system to organize data so that researchers can draw meaningful and logical conclusions from the data, is a common method for analysing qualitative data. In order to analyse the data, we first looked over the unprocessed answers and started coding using the inductive codes the data produced. We discovered response categories, which are collections of responses that fit together neatly because they pertain to the same topic. Stated differently, related segments were combined. In order to accomplish this, categorical segments were made easy to identify by using keywords or phrases. We made a label after identifying the segments that contain significant units. As a result of clustering the initial codes, patterns in the data started to emerge and eventually became the themes.

## 4. Presentation of Findings

The results that emerged from the analysis of open-ended questionnaires are discussed below. Codes like T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5 were used to ensure the anonymity of the sampled respondents. The results of the study indicated that the 17 sampled teachers had low expectations of the reading practices of their learners. Factors such as learners' frequency of reading prescribed material; frequency of reading material that is not prescribed; low socioeconomic status; lack of resources and the influence of parents' level of education on learners' reading habits emerged.

### Theme 1: Learners' frequency of reading prescribed material

The respondents indicated that their learners read the prescribed material regularly. The key words teachers used to demonstrate the prescribed reading habit of the learners were: 'often read', 'read many times', 'very often', 'three times a week' and 'read regularly'. It is clear that teachers were happy with the frequency their learners read the prescribed material. In this regard, T9, T3, T7 and T13 said:

Learners read the prescribed material many times in a week. (T9)

Very often learners read their notes, novels and plays on the syllabus. (T3)

Three times a week. (T7)

They read the prescribed reading material regularly. (T13)

The above verbatim quotes reveal that learners' reading habit of their prescribed material was positive. One might argue that teachers had a high expectation of the reading frequency of learners regarding prescribed material because they were in control of the reading frequency through the school timetables. Hence some teachers could even tell the number of times learners learn per week.

### **Theme 2: The frequency of reading material that is not prescribed**

The second factor that teachers mentioned pertained to the frequency of reading material that is not prescribed. To this end, teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the way the learners demonstrated interest in reading the material that is not prescribed. This showed that the teachers had a low expectation of their learners' reading habits regarding material that is not prescribed. Their low expectation manifests itself in the following key words: 'few learners read material that is not prescribed', 'not so often', 'very few read', 'very rarely', 'do not always' and 'occasionally'. The following verbatim quotes testify to this claim:

A few of my learners read materials that are not prescribed.(T1)

My learners rarely read material that isn't prescribed except if it is within the context of their interest such as sports.(T8)Learners do not read material that is not prescribed at all.(T17)

Not so often since very few read material like newspapers, adverts, posters, constitution and rules and regulations.(T15)

They less often read material that is not prescribed. (T13)

This is because their presentations in class do not show any extra effort as far as research is concerned. (T5)

They rarely read materials that are not prescribed.(T3)

The above verbatim quotes confirm the assumption made by authors while interpreting theme one where they indicated that learners read the prescribed material because they have no option. The school timetable dictates that they read during reading periods. This is a situation they cannot escape. Regarding the current theme, teachers showed a low reading expectation of their learners.

### **Theme 3: The role played by socioeconomic status of learners' reading habits**

Regarding the above theme teachers unanimously agreed that the socioeconomic status of the learners contributes to the reading habits of learners. They based this claim on the fact that learners from low socioeconomic status do not afford to buy reading materials for their children. They also mentioned lack of access to reading material which needs parents to pay some fee. Therefore, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds might end up losing interest in reading because they are not exposed and do not practice reading. One of the respondents, T17, said:

"Lower socioeconomic status plays a big role in the reading behavior of the learners. Learners from this environment are unable to access the reading materials due to lack of funds. These learners may not have access to some reading materials that would have helped them improve their reading habits. People of low socioeconomic status have no extra motivation to read. Lack of financial resources limit the amount of content that learners from such families can access".

Commenting on the same issue, T 11 indicated:

"Yes, socioeconomic status plays a role in the reading behaviour of the learners because some parents lack reading materials like newspapers, magazines, novels, dictionaries, and bibles to give to their children since they lack funds. Learners from low socioeconomic status cannot access the technology devices like TVs, phones to give to learners to aid them in reading".

Adding her voice, T8 said:

“Yes, low socioeconomic status plays a big role in the reading of the children. This situation does not create a conducive atmosphere for the learners to read because they are always stressed and at times lack things to use like textbooks, school fees, etc.”

The above verbatim quotes show that teachers’ expectations were low regarding the role played by low socioeconomic status in learners’ reading habits. This expectation is based on the limited resources available. Parents with a low socioeconomic status do not afford to buy materials for their children due to lack of funds. This shows that lack of resources affects learners’ reading interest and motivation to read.

#### **Theme 4: Lack of resources and influence of parents’ level of education on learners’ reading habits.**

The teachers unanimously agreed that lack of resources and parents’ level of education had a bearing on the learners reading habits. They indicated that this is due to the fact that where resources are not available learners might be deprived of the opportunity to practice reading. Regarding the parents’ level of education, the teachers indicated that parents who are not educated cannot guide their children since the content of the books is beyond their level of education. Answering a question, T4 said:

“Yes, it does. In learning institutions where resources are enough, almost every learner has access and can have their hands on as they practice which with time helps them improve their reading habit unlike institutions that lack resources in which reading cannot effectively be done”.

Expressing a similar sentiment, T1 indicated:

“Yes, level of education of parents have any influence on the learners in a way that an educated parent guides a learner more on academic issues while a non-educated one gives no guide to his or he learner (child) since he/she has not enough knowledge about academic things”.

T16 also expressed a similar view:

“Yes, lack of resources plays a big role in the reading habit of the learners because if there are few or less reading materials, the learners find it hard to get the references for their work. The learners also depend on the teachers work without reading a head or making their own research”.

Similarly, T9 said:

“Yes, lack of resources plays a role in the reading habit of the learners. Lack of resources makes learners to become demotivated to read because from my observation, once children are exposed to reading materials, especially at a young age, their reading habit greatly improves. These reading materials include daily newspapers, children’s magazines and story books”.

Based on the above verbatim quotes, the lack of resources and parents’ level of education are one of the determinants of learners’ reading habits. Parents who are not educated might see no value in buying reading materials. Since literacy begins at home, it is clear that learners who come from homes where parents are not educated are likely to be deprived of the opportunity to learn reading at an early age. This might affect their reading proficiency at higher levels.

## **5. Discussion of findings**

The aim of the study was to analyse factors that affect Ugandan teachers of learners’ reading habits. The findings of the study revealed that several factors were involved in determining teachers’ expectations. Environmental factors like learners’ home environment were cited as one of the factors.

Specifically, the role of parents, especially those who are not educated was viewed as one of the factors that affected learners' reading habits negatively. Parents who are not educated have no capacity to assist their children with the reading activity, as they, themselves find the reading process challenging. This finding is in line with the findings of a study conducted by Ghanney (2018) in Ghana. The study sought to explore how parents' level of education and literacy skills affect their children's basic education. The results revealed that most parents were aware of the benefits of education but the reality of their lives including educational and literacy challenges affected involvement in their children's basic education. The results of the current study also support the findings of a study conducted by Otermans et al. (2022). The study qualitatively analysed the challenges of children with illiterate parents in private schools in India. The findings emphasized that the capacity of disadvantaged parents to provide a wholesome, nurturing, and conducive environment is highly challenging in a country like India.

The findings also revealed that poverty was linked to the learners' reading habits. It was established that learners from poor families were not likely to afford buying reading materials. Therefore, this finding is linked to another factor which is the lack of resources. This finding concurs with the findings of a study learners from poor families were not likely to afford buying reading materials. Therefore, this finding is linked to another factor which is the lack of resources. This finding concurs with the findings of a study conducted by Cekiso et al. (2022) whose focus was on the factors affecting Grade 6 learners' reading performance. The results of the study revealed that social standing or class of the parents is a barrier to the reading performance of the learners because the majority of parents had no income and were unemployed. According to Cekiso et al. (2022), this factor played a key role in the parents' ability to provide the necessary support to develop the reading habits of their children.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings indicated that teachers had low expectation of their learners' reading habits. These teachers' expectations were informed by the teachers' experiences with the learners and the teaching environment. Since the environment where the schools were located was poverty stricken, the teachers did not expect learners to have resources at home hence this was one of their expectations. The knowledge and experience of the teachers also assisted them arrive at the expectation that poverty played a key role in determining teachers' expectations of their learners' reading habits. Being aware of the status of many homes where learners come from, the teachers did not expect the learners to be exposed to reading or to be supported by parents at home. This was due to the teachers' awareness that parents in many homes were illiterate; therefore, they had no capacity to support their children with reading activities. The study's findings are significant because they will likely cause teachers to change how they anticipate their learners' future reading habits once they are aware of how important their expectations are in influencing their learners' reading practices. We advise teachers to aim towards creating high expectations for their learners since nobody raises to lower expectations. The key to ensuring that all learners succeed to the best of their abilities appears to be having high expectations for each and every learner and then giving them the support that they require to meet those standards.



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